

COUNTRY EDUCATION STRATEGY 2021 to 2028

Our Ambition for
World-Class Education



Government of South Australia
Department for Education



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 this strategy took 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 carers, teachers, leaders and support staff who have contributed their knowledge and experience to support the development of this strategy.



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MINISTER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE FOREWORD

South Australia is a place of varied landscapes, friendly and welcoming communities, stunning attractions and locals who are proud of their patch of our great state.

From major regional hubs like Mount Gambier and Whyalla to close-knit communities like Streaky Bay and Auburn, country towns in South Australia are home to hundreds of government schools and preschools that are woven into the fabric of each community.

The Government of South Australia is invested in improving opportunities for those who live and work in our regions. Through the Regional Development Strategy, the government has outlined our commitment to work with communities to spur regional development across the whole state, support communities to be resilient to challenges and drive improved prosperity into the future.

We have made a significant investment in our state's future through the education of children and young people. This is reflected in our record \$339.5M new build and capital works country infrastructure investment, delivery of world class internet connectivity to our schools and preschools, along with a suite of reforms aimed at achieving a world-class education for every child and student, in every preschool and school in the state.

This Country Education Strategy sets out our aspiration for government schools and preschools in our regions and the approach we will take, working with country communities, to realise that aspiration. The strategy's focus on collaboration and flexibility, equity and excellence will guide our reform agenda, with a focus on the needs of country schools and preschools.

We are confident that together we can support every child and young person in country South Australia to achieve their best.



Hon John Gardner MP
Minister for Education

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Gardner'.



Rick Persse
*Chief Executive,
Department for Education*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rick Persse'.

OUR COUNTRY IDENTITY

'Country' encompasses all schools and preschools outside of the Greater Adelaide Metropolitan Area.

Country South Australia encompasses a broad range of regional, rural and remote locations. Our state's geography and demographics are vastly different across our country regions, as are the needs of our children and young people and the schools and preschools they attend.

South Australia has great country schools and preschools. From small schools in remote Aboriginal communities to bustling high schools in major regional centres, every school and preschool is unique in the way they respond to the characteristics and needs of their students, parents and community.

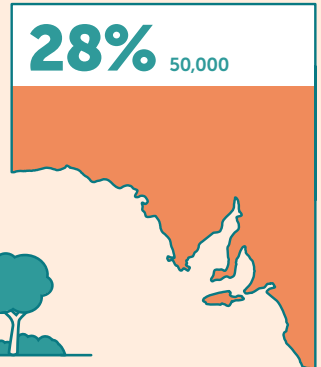
For isolated students in remote locations, the School of the Air has been delivering education services since 1958, and the Open Access College offers a range of online curriculum options for students in country areas. Advanced technology connects students and enables them to collaborate and receive immediate feedback from classmates and teachers in modern virtual classrooms.

Country schools and preschools are led by passionate teachers and leaders who care deeply about seeing every one of their children and young people succeed. Our country students are bright and resilient learners who care deeply about their peers and their communities.

Connections between teachers, leaders, students and parents are strong in country South Australia, with the local school a proud cornerstone of the community's identity. Relationships don't end at the school gate, they continue outside of the classroom through local sports, business and community events.

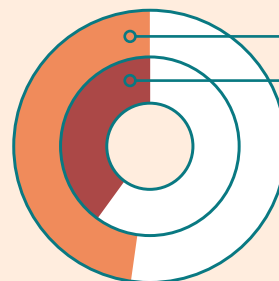
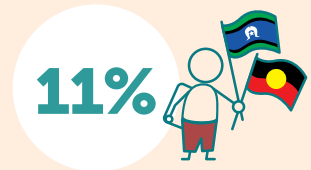
SOUTH AUSTRALIAN SNAPSHOT

Of the more than 180,000 students enrolled in our schools, around 50,000 are enrolled in country schools, representing 28% of all enrolments.

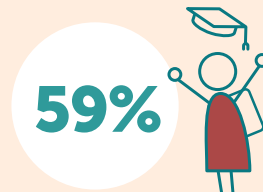


Of the more than 16,000 children enrolled in our preschools, around 5,000 are enrolled in country preschools, representing almost 30% of all enrolments.

5510 Aboriginal students make up 11% of enrolments in country schools, compared to 5% in metropolitan areas.



Almost half of South Australia's government schools (265) as well as more than 40% of government preschools (167) are located in country areas.



Early career teachers are more likely to start in country schools, with 59% first employed in a country location, compared to 41% in the metropolitan area.

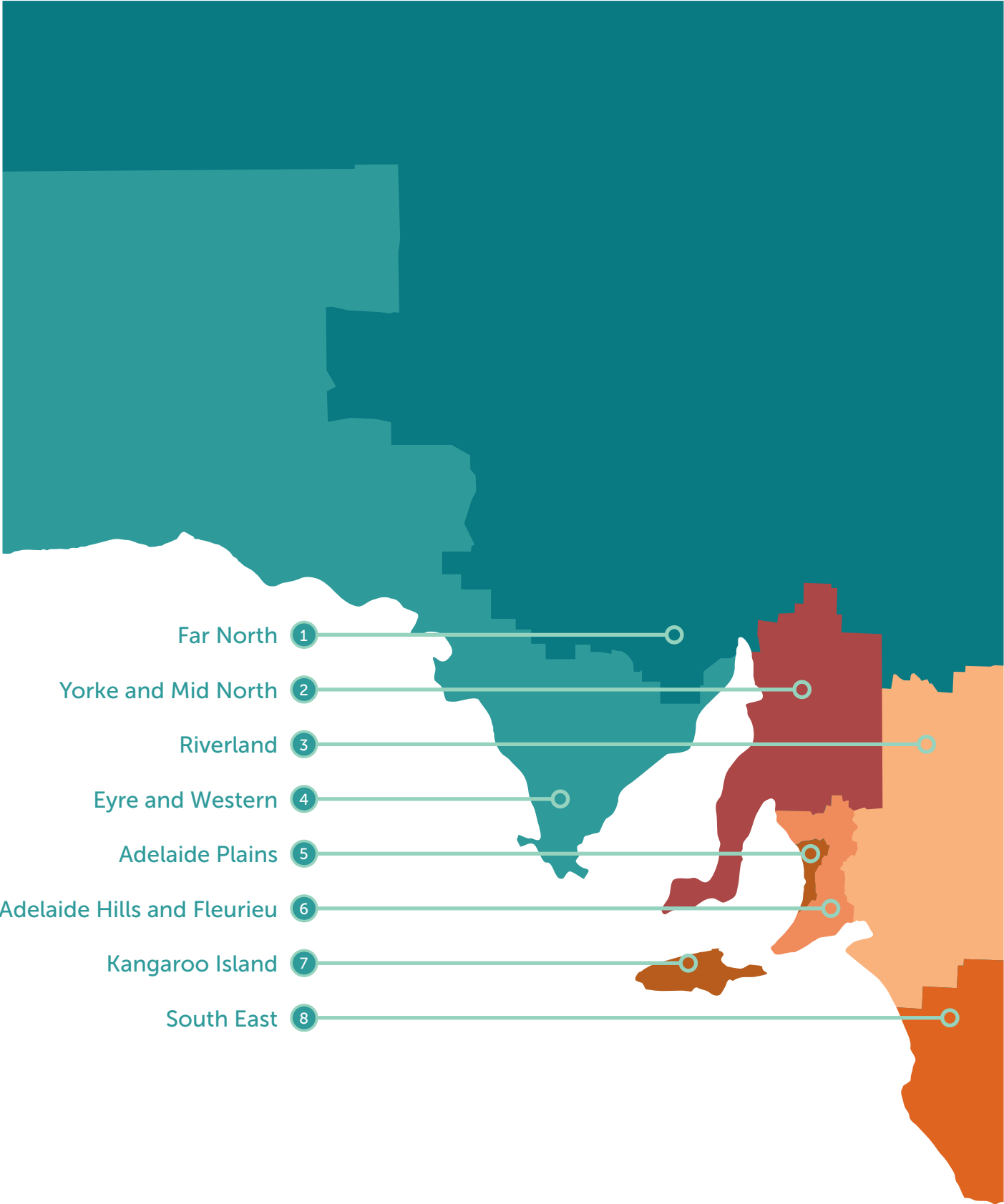


>5000 educators work in the country, representing 27% of our teaching workforce.



>600 staff work in government preschools and children's centres in the country, representing 30% of our preschool workforce.

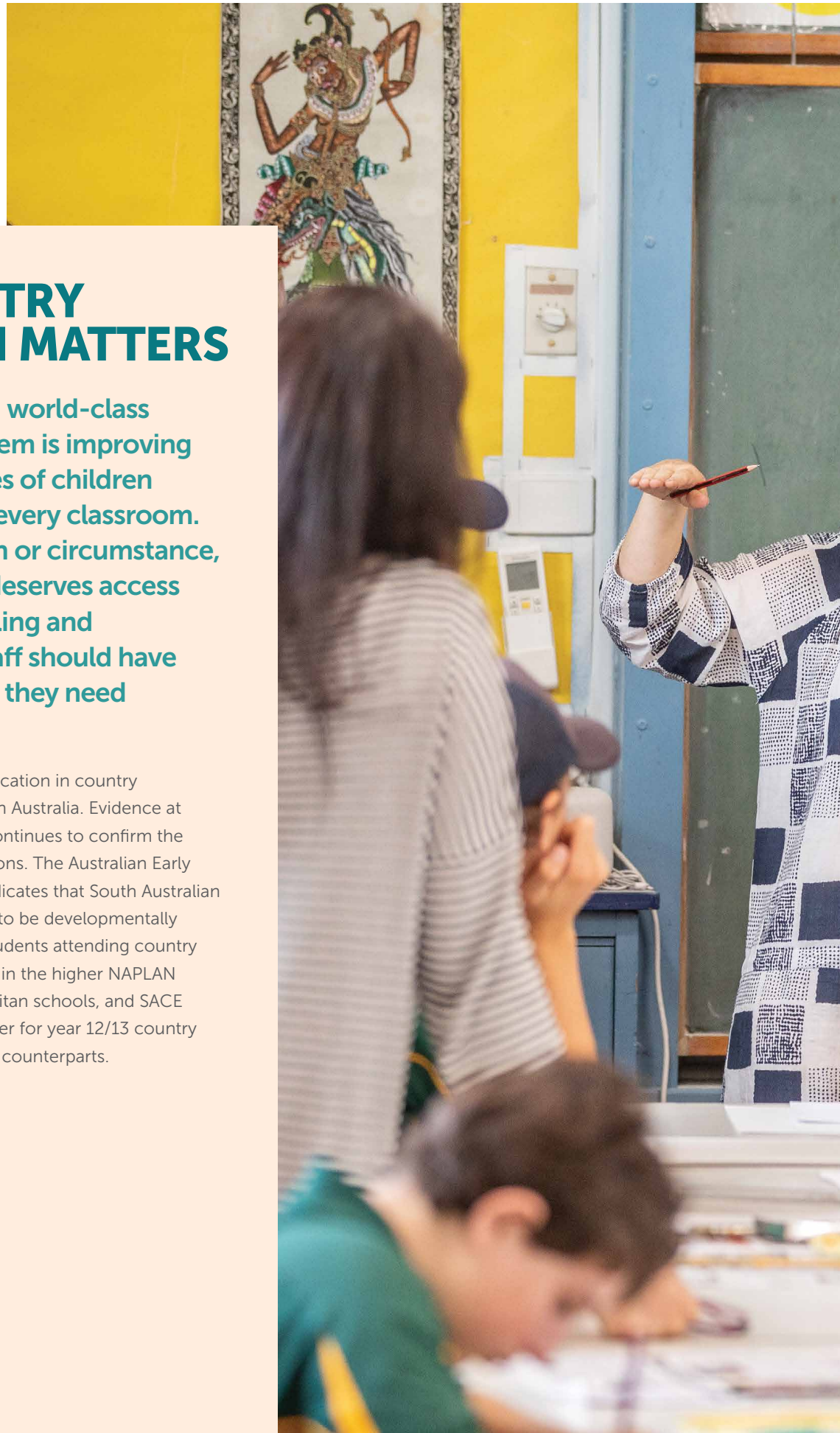
OUR REGIONS



WHY COUNTRY EDUCATION MATTERS

Critical to achieving a world-class public education system is improving the learning outcomes of children and young people in every classroom. Regardless of location or circumstance, every young person deserves access to high quality schooling and opportunities, and staff should have access to the support they need to be effective.

Challenges in the delivery of education in country locations are not unique to South Australia. Evidence at both a state and national level continues to confirm the challenges faced in country regions. The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) indicates that South Australian country children are more likely to be developmentally vulnerable on starting school, students attending country schools are less likely to achieve in the higher NAPLAN bands than students at metropolitan schools, and SACE completion rates are slightly lower for year 12/13 country students than their metropolitan counterparts.





South East

It is important to get the right people in the right role – it's about getting someone who is passionate about Aboriginal kids and their education.

Aboriginal Community Education
Team Leader, South East

WHAT WE HEARD

Extensive consultation with country education stakeholders informed this strategy.

Our staff in country South Australia helped shape the scope of the strategy, informed our consideration of the issues, and helped to ensure that the strategy was built around the real voice and needs of country schools and preschools.

We also worked closely with South Australia's Rural Youth Ambassadors to understand their priorities and aspirations for country education. These inspiring student leaders emphasised the need for schools to work together to connect students and share resources, for greater awareness of pathways beyond school, and the importance of wellbeing and preventative mental health support.

Twenty-nine schools and preschools across the state, from Koonibba on the Far West Coast to Mount Gambier in the South East, provided in-depth information. We heard from students, parents, teachers, leaders, Aboriginal education and support staff about the value of a country education, as well as the specific opportunities and challenges that arise when delivering education in country locations.

All country schools are unique. There's a lot more opportunity out here than people perceive.

Principal, Riverland

If people come to a country town and they have a little bit of motivation to stay, we need to support them to do so, through incentives and by helping them to settle into our community.

Preschool Director, South East

Country schools and preschools need the flexibility to be creative. They know their sites, they know their staff, they need to be empowered to make decisions that best serve their communities.

Parent, Far West

It is really important to hear about the pathways and stories of young people from the country. We only get told about the jobs and courses available in our town, which makes it feel like those are the only jobs out there.

Student, South East

While the experiences in each location were different, some common priorities arose, including:



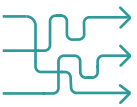
attraction and retention of quality teachers, leaders and support staff



transition and induction support for new staff to facilitate connection to the community



timely access to quality student support services for children who need them



visibility of career pathways and opportunities for students



access to a broad range of curriculum, including specialist subjects for students

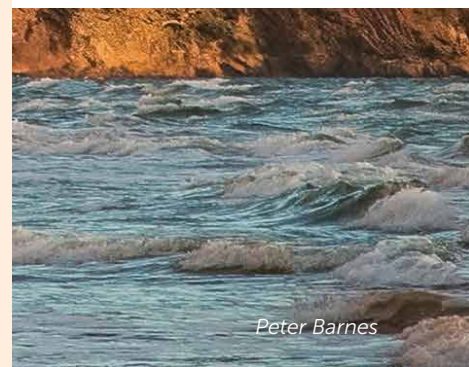


access to ICT infrastructure, capability and support



Early career teachers need a supportive network, as well as a strong mentor relationship. This supports fitting in, maintaining wellbeing, and growing their teaching practice, making such a difference for them and their students.

Teachers, Yorke Peninsula



Peter Barnes



VISION AND GOALS

Vision

For all country schools and preschools to reach our world-class ambition

Goal 1:

Quality leadership and expert teaching in every preschool and every school

Goal 2:

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

Goal 3:

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

These goals align with our priority levers for achieving our world-class public education system:



Expert teaching



Quality leadership



Stronger services



Engaged parents and communities



Resourcing and investment



Accountability and support

STRATEGY PRINCIPLES

Our approach to country education will be guided by 4 principles, which underpin this strategy.



Voice

As we work towards our world-class ambition, bringing the voices, knowledge and insights of country educators, students, parents and communities is key to ensuring efficacy and success.

Listening to and amplifying the voices of our country education community is crucial to ensuring that the education system reflects and responds to the real experiences of schools and preschools across our diverse state.



Access and opportunity

Every child and young person should have equitable access to learning opportunities, digital technologies, quality learning environments, wellbeing support and career pathways, wherever they live and go to school.

We are committed to ensuring children and young people in the country have access to a world-class education, in every learning environment and classroom in South Australia.



Local innovation and partnerships

Strength is in the people that make up our country communities, with local innovation and working in partnership with community at the heart of our regions' vibrancy and success.

We will harness this to deliver outcomes for country schools and preschools, building on the foundation of local success stories, solutions and partnerships. We will support our schools and preschools to partner with local businesses, regional leaders, volunteers and service providers to shape their vision for their community.



Tailored and flexible approaches

Each country school and preschool in South Australia is unique, shaped by their communities and built to respond to the needs of their people.

We understand that a one-size-fits-all approach will not always respond to the circumstances of each school, preschool and region. We will work together to identify when reforms are suited to tailored and flexible approaches that can better support the delivery of world-class education outcomes.

STRATEGY FOCUS: COUNTRY WORKFORCE



Adelaide Hills and Fleurieu

Goal 1:

Quality leadership and expert teaching in every preschool and every school



Quality leadership and expert teaching are vital to achieving our world-class aspiration. Attracting people to the profession, selecting the best and investing in their development is critical to achieving our goal. It's also vital that we have a quality supply of teachers and leaders ready to take up roles within the public education system. This is consistent with research across jurisdictions and these themes were highlighted repeatedly throughout our consultation.

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, South East

Our work so far

A variety of initiatives are already in place to support country schools and preschools.

These include advertising country vacancies prior to metropolitan positions, the Pathways into Teaching Program and the Country Portfolio Relief Teaching initiative. The department also offers attraction incentives to encourage and support employees to relocate to regional, rural and remote areas, such as the country incentives zone allowance, government employee housing payment and a removals and locality allowance.

We are strengthening the supply and attraction of the workforce to country locations, and working with leaders and teachers to ensure they have the knowledge, skills and capabilities they need to accelerate learning for every student.

Capability building starts with pre-service teachers through the provision of quality professional experience placements.

The Early Career Teacher Development Program supports graduate teachers as they transition into the profession, including workshops delivered in regional areas and online.

We are piloting the Teach for Australia program, where high-performing experts in specialist subject areas undertake a Masters qualification to take up teaching positions in hard-to-staff country areas.

We support aspiring and new leaders. The Talent Management Framework, implemented locally, helps schools and preschools to identify aspiring leaders and support their leadership capabilities. The Future Leaders Initiative provides support through individual development plans for nominated aspiring leaders.

Once appointed, new school and preschool leaders have access to 12 months of mentoring and coaching support from an experienced leader.

Going forward

We will strengthen the pipeline of educators to the country, by working in partnership with initial teacher education providers to support pre-service teachers to undertake professional experience placements in the country and to develop a pre-service teacher employment program, building on the Early Career Teacher Program already available for teachers in country locations.

We will

- work with South Australian universities to support and invest in pre-service teachers to undertake teaching placements in the country, including the provision of support packages
- design a graduate program that selects pre-service teachers in their second to last year of study and provides part-time employment in a non-teaching role, as well as professional placements to support their teaching practice ahead of graduation
- review existing country incentives and recommend approaches that are flexible to respond to individual needs and motivators to incentivise people to move and work in country locations
- pilot improvements that ensure the availability of quality relief teaching capability in the country
- pursue options and investment for improved housing and induction support for country teachers.
- work with country staff to develop our workforce strategy.

STRATEGY FOCUS: SITE SUPPORT



Riverland

Goal 2:

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



Country schools and preschools manage diverse responsibilities and challenges. As every school and preschool is unique, systemic support should be tailored and responsive to local experiences, and enable teachers and leaders to focus on what matters – learning growth and achievement for every child.

Our work so far

We are upgrading our country schools and preschools with world-class technology, including high-speed internet at all of our sites through our SWiFT program, modern network capability and devices at preschools through our Preschool Upgrade Program, advanced digital infrastructure in schools and preschools, and a regional ICT support program. These will enable our country students to improve academic outcomes, increase curriculum choice, and help our staff to access the tools they need to deliver world-class education.

The learning environments of country schools and preschools are being modernised through record investment in facilities across the state. This includes 2 new high schools opening in 2022, 2 new schools that will serve communities in regions adjacent to the north and south of Adelaide, major capital works upgrades at 33 country locations, and every school and preschool receiving a maintenance grant allowing them to hire local tradespeople to deliver priority maintenance works.

Children and their families can access services to support behavioural and educational needs. Country regions without filled student support positions are supported through outreach services from metropolitan locations and by commissioning private providers.

Going forward

We will work in partnership with country schools and preschools to identify where systems and support could better meet local needs. This includes improving access and timeliness of student support services, long-term planning for infrastructure improvements and enabling our students and teachers to learn and teach at their best through the development of a Digital Strategy.

We will

- accelerate country school ICT infrastructure health checks and provide associated funding to support infrastructure upgrades
- introduce targeted business improvement support in country schools and preschools to alleviate administrative burden
- improve access to student support services by expanding tele practice models for psychology and speech pathology and broadening speech pathology services in country locations
- strengthen infrastructure improvement planning, decision making and investment for all country schools and preschools
- improve the adoption, integration and innovation of digital technology in country schools and preschools through the development of the department's Digital Strategy
- use a new Country Education website to showcase country innovation and explain central support available for country schools and preschools.

STRATEGY FOCUS: LEARNING AND PATHWAYS



Goal 3:

Country children and young people have access to quality learning and pathways opportunities.



Through our universal school and preschool improvement model, every school and preschool in the state has a plan for improvement. We want children and young people in the country to have access to quality learning opportunities from preschool to year 12, quality career education, and meaningful education pathways to further study or work.

South East

Our work so far

We support country communities that have low or fluctuating enrolment numbers with alternative options to provide children with a preschool service.

We have developed curriculum resources, programs and other initiatives to support country teachers and allow them to focus on what they do best – working with each student.

We are supporting senior secondary students with the opportunity to undertake a school-based traineeship, gaining a Certificate III level qualification and on-the-job training as part of the Skilling South Australia initiative.

Through the VET for School Students policy we are working with industry to enhance career education, give students more opportunities to learn direct from employers about the world of work and clearly articulate Flexible Industry Pathways in key growth industries in South Australia.

Going forward

We will create greater flexibility in our approaches to early learning to improve access for our learners as they approach preschool.

By strengthening our country workforce and supporting schools to work collaboratively to provide a broader range of curriculum offerings, schools will be better positioned to offer students the subjects that are important to them.

We will create opportunities for country students to explore the world of work and understand the broad range of possibilities for their future careers. We will also support schools to develop stronger connections to local industry and opportunities within their local area.

We will

- invest in local partnerships between schools to broaden curriculum options for country students
- deliver a range of improvements to early learning, including a review of policy settings for access to preschool programs and expand the child development screening system in country areas, as part of the department's Early Learning Strategy
- engage with local Regional Development Australia representatives through the Regional Development Strategy to support local industry opportunities for students
- explore best practice delivery of online learning across primary and secondary school settings
- explore expanding and promoting online and in-person careers expos and opportunities.

EMBEDDING A COUNTRY FOCUS



The goals of this strategy will be delivered through a number of reforms. The department has a broad reform agenda, including but not limited to workforce, Aboriginal education, early learning and digital.

This strategy reflects the voices of country students, parents, support workers, teachers and leaders. The success of our ambition for country education will be enabled by continuing to listen to the experiences of country students, teachers and leaders and the parents and communities that support them. This will support successful implementation of planned reforms and design of future reforms.

We will

- invest further in the Rural Youth Ambassadors program and amplify country youth voice into the education reform agenda
- establish a Country Education Reference Group to connect country voice to the world-class aspiration and ensure a country lens across system reforms
- make the consideration of country impact an essential component in departmental processes for developing new policies and reforms.





Tourism Australia - Greg Snell

MEASURING SUCCESS

This strategy establishes our 7-year aspiration for education in South Australian country schools and preschools, aligned with the department's strategy for a world-class public education system by 2028.

The initiatives in this strategy will be progressively implemented over the next 3 years, while further work is undertaken to explore future priorities and refine, expand and develop new initiatives.

A reference group comprising country teachers and leaders will be established to provide guidance for the life of the strategy.

We will monitor early childhood development and academic achievement in country schools, including AEDC, NAPLAN and SACE, to determine whether the collective efforts to improve country education are improving education outcomes for our children and students.

We will develop key measures to ensure that new programs and initiatives are having their intended effect.

THANK YOU

For their contribution to the development of this strategy, we acknowledge:

SA Area School Leaders Association

Small Schools Association of SA

Rural Youth Ambassadors

South Australian Primary Principals Association

South Australian Secondary Principals Association

Isolated Children's Parents Association

SA School Business Association

Educators SA

Preschool Directors Association

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