



NSW Secondary Principals' Council

RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION POSITION PAPER

Ratified: Term 4 State Assembly, November 2023

1.0 Purpose:

To promote improved outcomes for students in rural public schools by identifying actions and initiatives that can be implemented within the framework of public education in NSW.

2.0 Rationale:

All students, regardless of their geographic location, are entitled to equitable educational opportunities relevant to their context.

3.0 Preamble:

The complexity and uniqueness of rural educational settings is best served by bespoke contextual solutions/programs as opposed to centralized 'one size fits all' programs. Narrow measures of success need to be nuanced and reflective of context.

Statistics from the recent Auditor General report 2023, stated the following:

- 44% government schools located in regional and remote NSW
- 922 permanent teacher vacancies in regional and remote schools (January 2023)
- 52% Regional and remote students on track for all five Australian Early Development census domains in 2021
- 54% remote and very remote students above national minimum standards for reading in 2022
- 52% Remote and very remote students above national minimum standards for numeracy in 2022
- 73% remote and very remote school leavers in further education, training, or employment in 2022

Staffing

Teacher vacancies in rural and remote areas affects the ability of the department to provide quality education. Schools in regional, rural and remote communities do not always have a full complement of staff with the right skills to deliver all areas of the school curriculum. The department is responsible for ensuring that every child receives a high-quality education under the Education Act 1990.

School Curriculum

Students in regional, rural and remote schools do not always have access to face-to-face schooling or the same range of curriculum choices as students in metropolitan schools. Children and young people in rural and remote areas can sometimes find it difficult to get to a local school. Also, senior secondary students in regional, rural and remote areas may not be able to access some subjects at their local school due to smaller cohorts or access to subject specialist teachers.



Wellbeing Support

The physical health and wellbeing of a child has important long-term educational, health, and social outcomes. Health services are critical to ensuring that families and children stay healthy. Communities in regional, rural and remote areas, however, tend to have fewer or no local health services and a higher number of people from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Children from low socio-economic backgrounds tend to be less 'on track' in terms of their physical and mental wellbeing by the time they start school.

Facilities and Assets

Regional, rural and remote schools face longer wait times and higher costs to purchase, maintain, and repair some assets. The Department describes school infrastructure as a key enabler for 'building the foundations for learning in early childhood, through teaching and learning in schools and into lifelong learning for a highly skilled and adaptive workforce'. This includes satisfaction and suitability, disability access, and maintenance of school infrastructure.

Skills Pathways

Students in regional, rural and remote areas do not have access to a breadth of training opportunities at training providers aligned with their aspirations.

Rural and remote students face additional barriers when accessing educational pathways compared to metropolitan students. These barriers included the availability of public transport and local business or industry partners in regional, rural and remote areas. This can mean that students may turn down vocational training or employment opportunities due to a lack of suitable transport options, or students may not have access to opportunities.

Acknowledgement

(Performance Audit-Regional, Rural and Remote Education, NSW Auditor General's Report, Audit Office of NSW, 10th August 2023)

Recommendations

Staffing

- Procedures must be implemented, and resources provided to ensure that we attract, and retain, the highest quality teachers and educational leaders in rural schools.

Access/Skills Pathways

- That all DoE initiatives include funding to allow equal access for Regional, Rural and Remote students and staff
- That the DoE ensure that all students in rural settings have early/timely access to the full suite of educational and wellbeing support to meet their educational needs. That the DoE liaise with other government agencies to facilitate this equitable delivery
- That in reference to the Auditor General's report (August 2023) the Department provides additional 'location' funding to schools in outer regional, remote, and very remote areas based on their distance from population centres and other schools. This funding should aim to recognise the additional costs of goods and services outside of metropolitan areas."

Curriculum

In ensuring the delivery of the full curriculum (curriculum guarantee (CG)) rural schools need to be:

- Supported in accessing online/Distance Education services without incurring staffing reductions or unreasonable curriculum/operational restrictions
- Supported in developing localised solutions to maintain broad curriculum delivery (CG)
- Fully and appropriately staffed to deliver the CG

Aboriginal Education

- The SPC has a position paper on Aboriginal Education. Please refer to this.

Facilities and assets

- That the DoE regularly audit and review learning infrastructure to ensure regional, rural and remote students have equitable access to up-to-date learning resources.

Other Recommendations

- Enhancement of the Regional, Rural and Remote Policy Directorate to allow for governance of, accountability for and ownership of Regional, Rural and Remote Education Outcomes.

The position paper is to be reviewed again by 4/9/2025