Submissions to the Review of Regional Schooling Resource Standard Loadings – organisation submission form
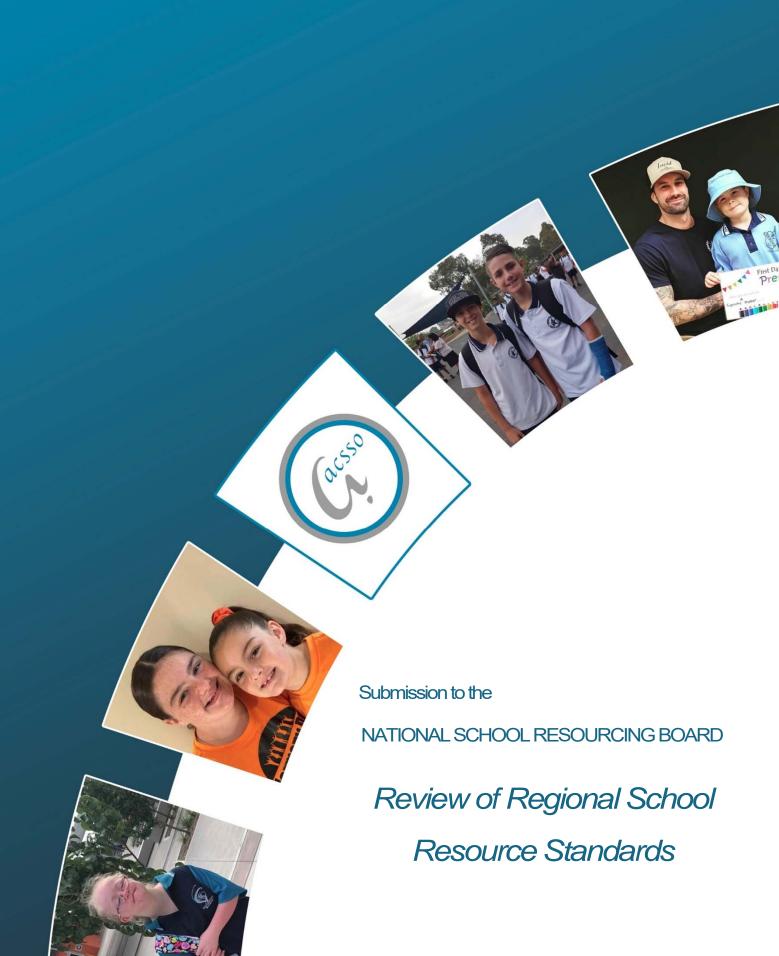
Note: Questions marked with an asterisk * are mandatory

Submission details

1. **I am making this submission as a:***

   ☐ Approved authority/school

   ☐ Government agency

   ☒ Peak body (including parent or community organisations)

   ☐ Research body

   ☐ Other

2. **Please specify the organisation on whose behalf you are submitting***

   Australian Council of State School Organisations Ltd

3. **I confirm that I have the organisation's agreement to make this submission*** ☐

4. **Your details***

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First name*	Dianne
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State/Territory*	NSW

5. **Please choose from the following options how you would like your submission to be treated***

   ☐ I would like my submission published online with my details

☒ I would like my submission published online with my organisation details

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☐ I don't want my submission published online

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF STATE SCHOOL ORGANISATIONS LTD

acsso

Submission to the

NATIONAL SCHOOL RESOURCING BOARD

Review of Regional School

Resource Standards

Submission: Review of Regional Schooling Resource Standard loadings

The Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) is the one voice for every child in public education in Australia. As an organisation, ACSSO welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the National School Resourcing Boards, Review of Regional School Resource Standard Loadings.

ACSSO is committed to access, equality, equity of outcomes, excellence, and participatory democracy.

It is ACSSO's position that:

- students in rural and remote areas of the nation have an absolute right to high quality public education, and governments have a responsibility to ensure this provision;
- the quality of education in rural and remote areas must not be affected by lack of resources, limited or costly access to services, climatic conditions, or professional, social and physical isolation; and
- funding decisions must reflect the priority of local provision to meet local need.

ACSSO acknowledges the essential need to ensure the direct experience of students and families informs the reform process and has utilised its networks in the development of this submission.

The Australian economy will become more productive as the proportion of educated workers increases since they can more efficiently carry out tasks that require literacy, numeracy, teamwork, and critical thinking. In this sense, education should be seen as an investment in human capital, similar to an investment in infrastructure.

In 2017, the [Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education](#) highlighted the need for all children to access a high-quality education regardless of where they live or their circumstances; especially in a context where young Australians must prepare themselves for competitive domestic and global labour markets, recognising the impacts of globalisation, digitisation and automation.

ACSSO acknowledges that the planning, funding, and delivery of a high-quality education system is a complex and challenging task. This is irrespective of setting, community and population characteristics or economic circumstances.

Geographic separation, however, will always create price differentials across regions because of transport costs, even in the absence of institutional differences such as tariffs, taxes, and state and territory borders.

In rural and remote areas of Australia, partnerships with other sectors (such as Health), will help address some of the economic and social determinants of education that are essential to meeting the needs of these communities, however, in addition to needing to travel further to access education, people living in rural and remote areas generally receive a smaller share of overall education budget.

With entrenched inequities and complex challenges, achieving better education services and, consequently, improving educational outcomes for rural and remote children and young people is not an easy task. It will require a significant and long-term commitment, with a consistent and cooperative effort across all Australian governments, and the education, health, and community sectors.

> *"If the human capital gap between urban and non-urban Australia was closed, Australia's GDP could be increased by 3.3%, or $56 billion."*[1]

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[1] The Economic Impact of Improving Regional, Rural & Remote Education in Australia – Gonski Institute

Focus question 1

- What are the elements specific to school location (i.e. not related to student characteristics such as socio-educational disadvantage, students with disability, low English language proficiency, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students) that increase the cost of delivering education in these settings?

Rural and remote schools face barriers to implementing a standard selection of curriculum opportunities for their students due to accessibility challenges, low enrolments, small class sizes, and shortages of experienced teachers—particularly for multi-age classrooms and specialist subjects in secondary school. Equally, smaller schools in rural and remote areas are impacted by the administrative overload with respect to the breadth and depth of the curriculum and operational requirements.

As identified in ACSSO's national survey looking into the impact COVID-19 had on families, location is a vital factor that can determine access to high speed, cost-effective and reliable Information and Communications Technology (ICT). ICT access in rural and remote locations is not only an issue for homes with school aged children, but also for schools and for those who are studying through distance education. Even taking into consideration the National Broadband Network (NBN), ICT access is more difficult to get and sustain in rural and remote areas compared to urban zones. The availability, accessibility, and affordability of connectivity in these areas is essential to promoting access to education.

Teacher attrition is costly to the nation, but more so in rural and remote locations, not only for the impact it has on the "education budget" but more importantly for the adverse social and academic outcomes related to "teacher churn". Improving principal and teacher quality has become a common focus of school reform efforts, however, in rural and remote locations it is not just the quality and experience of the teacher it is the environment in which they work and live.

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) state that *"Attaining Highly Accomplished or Lead certification opens up a wealth of career possibilities, without having to leave the classroom. Advocate for quality teaching, get recognition for your achievements and lead the profession towards better outcomes for teachers and learners everywhere."* There needs to be incentives developed and the funding made available to encourage Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers to explore the *wealth of career possibilities* by moving to and remaining in rural and remote locations.

Attracting skilled and professional staff to rural and remote locations has not been made easier by Australian government policies that cause services and infrastructure to be rationalised, based on efficiency rather than equity.

Providing quality teacher housing in rural and remote areas is a key element in attracting and retaining teachers and school leaders. In remote communities there are increased costs in relation to both the building of the housing and the ongoing maintenance.

A wage that addresses the price differentials of rural and remote locations is essential. The salary and benefits must be more than competitive to attract quality staff to rural and remote locations. This would also include the ongoing provision of funded professional development, where rural and remote locations are provided with relief staff to cover those attending professional development.

ASSCO is aware of significant funding provided by the Queensland State Government to establish Centres for Learning and Wellbeing to provide enhanced professional learning opportunities and wellbeing support to staff in rural and remote areas. These Centres are located in the rural and remote communities of Atherton, Mount Isa, Emerald and Roma, therefore providing opportunities for face-to-face professional learning

through engagement at the centres or through outreach services for rural and remote school leaders and teachers. Through this model of locating key services in rural and remote communities, access to quality professional learning and wellbeing has significantly improved. This initiative would be worthy of further investigation.

The Australian Government Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) state *on average, Australians living in rural and remote areas have shorter lives, higher levels of disease and injury and poorer access to and use of health services, compared with people living in metropolitan areas. Poorer health outcomes in rural and remote areas may be due to multiple factors including lifestyle differences and a level of disadvantage related to education and employment opportunities, as well as access to health services.* Improving access to specialists – speech therapists; counsellors; guidance officers so they can visit schools more than once or twice a year is critical to supporting rural and remote schools and communities.

Australia may be a sports-loving nation but AIHW figures indicate that, compared with people in metropolitan areas, those living in rural and remote areas were 1.16 times more likely to be sedentary[2] the ability for students to access sporting and cultural activities external to their community in most cases is financially limited to their ability to pay.

Poor school infrastructure in rural and remote locations is a contributing factor (particularly for years 11 and 12) impacting academic performance. ACSSO's anecdotal evidence indicates that high-quality infrastructure provides superior instruction capabilities and improves learners' academic performance and reduces dropout rates.

Focus question 2

- Are there additional elements associated with school size for smaller schools in regional and remote settings that increase the cost of delivering education over the costs for small schools in city areas (not related to student characteristics such as socio-educational disadvantage, students with disability, low English language proficiency, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students)?

As previously stated, the planning, funding, and delivery of a high-quality education system is a complex and challenging task. However, economies of scale for rural and remote communities are such that they will rarely be able to achieve cost reductions.

The Australian Government Institute of Family Studies state that *ongoing difficulties associated with access to transport are commonly referred to as "transport disadvantage".* It goes on to state that *Rural and remote areas of Australia have low levels of public transport access. Some remote areas have relatively low levels of vehicle ownership.* The cost of transport and its availability is a key issue for rural and remote communities and needs to be a key consideration when addressing rural and remote funding.

Both socially advantaged and socially disadvantaged people can experience transport disadvantage, however the nature of this disadvantage differs. For socially disadvantaged groups transport difficulties tend to relate to the ability to access transport and the costs of travel. For socially advantaged groups, transport difficulties tend to relate to traffic congestion and time availability. For low-income families living in rural and remote communities in Australia, transport difficulties can be especially problematic given that road conditions are often impacted by severe weather events.

While it may seem strange to prioritise spending money on ICTs when people are struggling to access their basic needs, information can enable people to become active participants in the development of their

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[2] https://www.ruralhealth.org.au/sites/default/files/fact-sheets/Fact-Sheet-26-physical%20activity%20in%20rural%20australia_0.pdf

communities. However, modern ICTs generally follow a logic which is intuitive to the western culture for which they were developed. For Australia's Indigenous people, these technologies will compete with, and may erode, traditional methods of storing and sharing information. In providing an ICT resource this needs to be considered.

Australian, State and Territory governments and communities have committed major resources to ICT projects and programs to assist with networking across groups. However, there would appear to have been little research in Australia of the actual and potential use of ICT as an enabler of community and social capability. ICT is changing the ways that individuals within communities interact and expand the concept of community to those groups that are not bound by geography, the so-called virtual communities. However, for rural and remote communities to expand their horizons they need to be able to access ICT at a cost comparable to urban communities.

Focus question 3

- Is the dollar value of the current school location and school size loadings appropriate to meet the additional costs specific to school location and school size? (noting there are separate student-based loadings for socio-educational disadvantage, students with disability, low English language proficiency, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students).

Education is the single most important factor in preparing young Australians for the future. It is the key determinant of future job and life prospects for each young person. It provides the foundation for prosperous and healthy living, for raising families and engaging with the community, and for lifting living standards across Australia.

It is ACSSO's belief that inconsistent funding allocation to rural and remote communities, first by government then by schools, coupled with capability gaps and ineffective accountability, prevent current school funding from meeting educational need as effectively as it should. More effective and efficient allocation of funding, improved use of resources, and better alignment of interests across the education system would enable faster transfer of evidence and successful practices, better matching of teaching and learning to student need, and a stronger focus on productivity and accountability across all schools and communities. It could also help to ensure that no child is excluded from any school or from the education system, and to confront the imbalance between government and non-government schools, which is feeding the concentrations of disadvantage in the government school sector.

"Funding for schooling must not be seen simply as a financial matter. Rather, it is about investing to strengthen and secure Australia's future. Investment and high expectations must go hand in hand. Every school must be appropriately resourced to support every child and every teacher must expect the most from every child."[3]

ACSSO is of the strong belief that the dollar value of the current school location and school size loadings is NOT appropriate to meet the additional costs specific to school location and school size?

Focus question 4

- Are there elements specific to school location which have particular resourcing implications for certain types of schools in regional and remote areas, such as boarding schools and small non systemic schools (as opposed to small systemic schools)? What are the elements?

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[3] Review of Funding for Schooling 2011

ACSSO believes that the geographical location of a school contributes to a number of challenges including poor attendance, resulting in low achievement, increases in dis-engagement, and amplifies a myriad of social problems.

Australia's government education systems have very few boarding schools, which then forces parents to expend further resources in the non-government school system. Boarding fees then become an additional cost on top of tuition fees. Given that fees for full-time boarding can amount to more than $20,000 per annum they are, for many parents, a major factor in deciding whether or not to send their child to a boarding school or attempt to locate a school within limited traveling time, however this could be over one hour travel each way. Parents have reported that children, particularly those in the early years undertaking this travel can suffer from a range of serious health and wellbeing issues including exhaustion, headaches and difficulties in concentration.

While not limited to rural and remote locations, in these locations having to use a bus for access to schooling is, in many cases mandatory. Many parents have experienced the occurrence of waiting to pick up their child from the bus stop and him or her not being there. They may have missed a stop, fallen asleep on the bus or when dealing with younger children they may have simply forgotten their address. If a child is dropped in the wrong place, he or she may even go missing. A major concern for parents of young children who are required to place their child on a "school bus" is that their child could be forgotten and left on the bus. Many instances of children being left on buses have been reported in the media. Unfortunately, a number of these reports did not have a happy ending. What price do we place on a life?

ACCSO is aware of families from rural and remote communities being forced to split up to offer their children a better education, often with the mother moving to a regional centre with the children and the father remaining in their community to continue working. For the children in these situations, emotionally it is like their parents are being divorced. Family dynamics significantly impact education in both positive and negative ways. Having a close-knit and supportive family provides emotional support, economic well-being, and increases overall health. However, the opposite is also true and the additional emotional and financial costs of running two households has enormous impact on families.

Focus question 5

- Is ARIA+ the most appropriate basis for classifying locations and applying to the school location loading? Should another measure be considered?

The Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA+) is the current methodology used to apply school loadings.

ACSSO is not aware of any other and therefore it is difficult to make a considered statement as to its appropriateness. However ACSSO understands that the ARIA+ is reviewed every five years and as such there may be some situations where a centre's population size changes which moves it to a different ARIA category. For rural and remote communities this could be due to a natural disaster such as bushfires and drought or due to economic issues such as the opening or closing of a mine. In these circumstances, impacted schools should be provided with an appropriate period to transition to any subsequent change in funding. ACSSO is happy to participate in any proposed review of the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia to identify if it is the most appropriate basis for classifying locations and applying to the school location loading.

Focus question 6

- Are there new or emerging factors that should be taken into consideration when looking at the cost of education in regional and remote areas and/or small schools?

The tendency for schools in rural and remote areas to be smaller in size exerts increased resource pressures on these schools in their pursuit of the same educational goals as schools in city areas. From a simple fiscal viewpoint, smaller schools are less efficient because they have higher per capita funding needs to provide the same level of services provided in larger schools.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in schools shut across the world. As a result, education has changed dramatically, with the distinctive rise of e-learning, whereby teaching is undertaken remotely and on digital platforms. It has been suggested that online learning has been shown to increase retention of information and take less time. Should this prove to be the case access to high speed, cost-effective and reliable Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is essential.

Over recent times, rural and remote communities across Australia have continued to endure the negative impacts of natural disasters such as bushfires, drought and cyclones. These impacts are often ongoing including the need to rebuild schools and bring current schools up to new fire safety and cyclone standards and addressing water supply issues in drought communities.

There is no magic wand in education, no way to suddenly change educational outcomes built up over years of practice. This lack of immediate solutions is not an excuse for inaction.

"If we want a fairer Australia, a more inclusive and successful economy, there are few places more important to start than in addressing the educational bias that limits opportunities for people living in rural and regional *(and remote) Australia"*.[4]

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[4] David Crosbie - CEO of the Community Council for Australia