



## Submission for the Australian Government's Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System.

Prepared by VicLLENs

### **Statement of Purpose**

This submission is presented to the Australian Government's Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System. VicLLENs is a consortium of 31 independent organisations, drawing on two decades of experience in working closely with schools across Victoria.

This submission advocates for the consideration of place-based expertise and grassroots knowledge within local communities to meet the diverse and complex needs of students in each region.

### **About the place-based approach**

A place-based approach tailors services, solutions and strategies to the unique cultural, economic, geographical, and social contexts of a specific locale. The approach encourages the active participation of community members in building local resilience and collaboratively addressing local challenges.

Place-based partnership brokerage can support highly effective collaboration between local schools, businesses, government, non-profits and community groups. This synergy facilitates a collective pool of resources and expertise, allowing these groups to effectively address complex and unique community challenges.

Place-based strategies identify and leverage local assets. These assets could include local skills, relationships, industries, networks and more (Chetty & Hendren, 2015). The approach values the strengths of those living and working within a community; their deep-seated understanding of their community's challenges, assets, and dynamics is instrumental in formulating effective strategies for meeting local needs. This approach is especially significant for providing meaningful support to address the diverse and multifaceted needs of young people in a given region.

The place-based approach is agile, adjusting strategies based on their efficacy and ensuring a responsive approach to evolving community needs and circumstances.

Major investments and social programs are often designed to be centrally implemented at the Commonwealth and state/territory levels, using a uniform approach (Victorian Government, 2020). However, the dynamics of locational disadvantage and the means to address them are often best understood at the community level. Centralised delivery of services, while necessary, is insufficient on its own for fostering genuine social change. Building relationships among community members, service providers, and local institutions is essential for solving problems and creating opportunities in a functional community ecosystem (Paul Ramsay Foundation, 2023).

## About Us

Victorian Local Learning and Employment Networks (VicLLENs) is the collaboration and collective voice of Victoria's 31 LLENs, which are independently governed, place-based organisations covering every corner of the state. Each LLEN is governed by a volunteer board comprised of community members and local representatives from industry, education and government.

LLENs are deeply embedded in their communities and have worked across the past 21 years to help intimately understand and address local needs, with a focus on creating place-based partnerships to improve outcomes for all young people. Sitting at the nexus of schools, communities, industries and government., LLENs have:

- collectively generated over 26,000 applied learning opportunities (since 2016)
- developed and scaled-up place-based programs and initiatives to meet the diverse needs of students and young people.
- shared local and statewide intelligence and research on young people, pathways and labour markets to inform strategic planning and decision-making by industries and governments
- developed strong relationships with 914 government, Catholic and independent schools

From 2010-2015, LLENs were funded by the Australian government to deliver the Partnership Broker Model, with a smaller contribution from the Victorian Government Department of Education and Training. The model had significant benefits for Victorian communities and young people as it allowed for flexibility and comprehensive relationship-building with parents, students, industry, and the community. This model's success was largely because it enabled genuine place-based work and offered a more holistic and coordinated approach to education, wellbeing, transitions, career pathways and general support for young people. The funding for the Partnership Broker Model was not renewed after 2015 following a change in government, however LLENs have since secured funding to continue their work in local communities at a scaled-down capacity through the ongoing support of the Department of Education in Victoria.

## **Equity and Excellence**

Understanding local contexts is crucial for achieving equity in education. A macro-level approach does not consider the nuanced nature of inequality within communities, as well as the way disadvantage manifests in different regions. Place-based approaches are essential for understanding and addressing a community's diverse locational disadvantages (Paul Ramsay Foundation, 2023).

The VET transport initiative in Victoria exemplifies how locally-tailored programs can ensure the equitable delivery of support services to the young people that need them the most.

Financed through the Labor Government's Transport Fund, the VET transport program has seen approximately \$1 million distributed across 18 LLENs to provide a combination of buses, taxis and carpooling options for students in regions where there are significant transport shortages and/or other geographical barriers to attending VET classes.

These local, collaborative efforts have resulted in the establishment of effective transport solutions for students that are region-specific and needs-driven.

## **Student Mental Health and Wellbeing**

Coordinated service delivery can significantly enhance student mental health and wellbeing. We must have a holistic view of students' needs and ensure those needs are met by coordinating an existing network of local community and youth-facing services.

Several of our LLENs lead, coordinate or support local youth service networks. For example, Murray Mallee LLEN coordinates the Swan Hill & District Youth Services Network, a network of youth workers who meet quarterly to strengthen the sector's capacity to respond to issues impacting local youth and improve outcomes for the region's young people. Similarly, North Central LLEN leads *Strong Youth Strong Communities*, a community-based initiative that connects community-based resources to develop and implement a model of wellbeing services in schools that is preventative and cost-effective. The initiative is a collaborative effort between local non-profits, government and community to improve the wellbeing, school attendance and engagement of young people. The Hume Whittlesea LLEN lead the Whittlesea Youth Commitment which is now in its 23rd year. This network has a focus on positive wellbeing, transition outcomes and support for young people in the local community and has been instrumental in attracting additional services to the region. These are just a few of a myriad of examples LLEN bring to their local communities.

## **Data and Testing Mechanisms**

Addressing gaps in macro-level data, LLENs have a track record of gathering reliable local data and insights. This data can support a comprehensive understanding of student needs and achievement within Australian schools. LLENs are able to quickly and efficiently gather local data using established relationships with community stakeholders.

An example of this is the *How Work Works* research, which was conducted by several LLENs. Leveraging local relationships, this youth-led research identified accessible employment opportunities for young people in each region.

This research also drew on the insights and experiences of young people to make a series of recommendations to schools and decision-makers about how their education could better support them to prepare for the world of work.

LLENs have also previously been funded to conduct regional Environmental Scans to develop a nuanced understanding of local industries and economies, ensuring that students can make informed decisions about their career pathways based on awareness of local labour demands.

### **Teacher Retention and Support**

VicLLENs has been a witness to the unprecedented workforce shortages and burn-out amongst our state's educators. We believe schools need community support and connection to industry to reduce strain on their limited resources. We are currently limited in our own resourcing to undertake this work, but we have enormous potential to support the individualised needs of schools in each of our respective regions. We aspire to obtain additional funding to provide more support to schools, expanding on our 21-year legacy of relationships with schools in the communities we serve.

VicLLENs believes in the transformative role of digital technology and EdTech in delivering information efficiently, engaging students in novel ways, and reducing demands on educators.

Our innovative virtual reality platform (VIC VICE) was created following COVID-19 lockdowns to ensure that students across Victoria could access workplace tours across different industries. As a network of 31 organisations, we were able to band together our resources and connections to develop a platform which would make career exploration significantly more accessible for students across the state. In Term 4, we'll deliver this as a resource to the majority of Victorian schools, leaning on our local relationships with educators to facilitate distribution and delivery.

In collaboration with local industries and other community providers, LLENs also produce locally tailored work-readiness resources which are distributed directly to schools in each respective region.

### **Summary**

This submission argued the importance of place-based knowledge and interventions to ensure that all students, regardless of their circumstances, are able to access equitable, high-quality education. Equity needs to be understood in local contexts to account for the complex and multi-faceted nature of disadvantage.

Place-based strategies are instrumental in delivering a better and fairer education system across Australia. The unique local contexts, complex needs of students, and the nature of educational inequality warrant approaches that are tailored to the specific circumstances of each community, rather than relying solely on a top-down, uniform approach. The VicLLENs

consortium, through its track record of fostering grassroots collaboration, generating localised data, and implementing effective community-specific initiatives, has highlighted the value of this approach.

Through this submission, VicLLENs seeks recognition for the vital role of place-based expertise and approaches in shaping an equitable and excellent education system. We aspire to scale our impact, utilising our place-based strategies to address diverse community needs, and in doing so, we call for renewed support and resources to continue this crucial work. We remain committed to our mission to create an inclusive, effective, and resilient education system that equips every young Victorian for success.

### **References:**

Chetty, R., Hendren, N. 2015. The Impacts of neighborhoods on intergenerational mobility opportunity insights. [Online]

Paul Ramsay Foundation. 2023. Report: Where are we? Place-based approaches to tackling community challenges in Australia [Online] <https://www.paulramsayfoundation.org.au/news-resources/where-are-we-place-based-approaches-to-tackling-community-challenges-in-australia>.

Victorian Government. 2020. A framework for place-based approaches: the start of a conversation about working differently for better outcomes. [Online]