6 September 2017

Secretariat
Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education
Australian Government
Department of Education and Training

Email: IRRRRESecretariat@education.gov.au

Dear Sir or Madam,

Re: AEU Submission to the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education.

Please find our submission attached.

Please contact me if you have any questions in relation to this submission.

Susan Hopgood
Federal Secretary

Australian Education Union

Submission to the independent review into regional, rural and remote education

September 2017

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The Australian Education Union (AEU) welcomes the opportunity to participate in the *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education* (The Review). The AEU represents more than 185,000 members including principals, teachers and allied educators in schools, TAFE institutes, Corrections Education, Adult Migrant Education Services, and early childhood education centres. Given that a far greater proportion of students from regional, remote and very remote regions attend government schools, the AEU is well placed to share the insights gained from our members on the issues that confront students in non-metropolitan areas.[1] As can be seen in Table 1, 31 per cent of government school students are in schools outside of major cities whilst this is true of just 25 per cent of non-government school students. Overall, more than 70 percent of students in regional and remote areas attend government schools.

	Government schools		Non-Government schools	
	Students	Percentage of govt. students	Students	Percentage of non-govt. students
Major City	1,696,408	69%	982,373	75%
Inner Regional	475,898	19%	233,331	18%
Outer Regional	238,157	10%	83,891	6%
Remote	36,628	1%	10,601	1%
Very Remote	25,577	1%	3,556	0%

Table 1. Numbers and proportions of students in ABS remoteness categories by school sector, 2016
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017

In view of the well-documented and persistent gaps between metropolitan and non-metropolitan students in a range of educational and other outcomes, this Review has the potential to help Australia reach the objectives of the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*. These goals are that Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence, and that all young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.[2] The *Review of Funding for Schooling* (Gonski Review) further articulated the concept of equity in school education as:

> The belief that the underlying talents and abilities of students that enable them to succeed in schooling are not distributed differently among children from different socioeconomic status, ethnic or language backgrounds, or according to where they live or go to school.[3]

Crucially, the Gonski Review also identified a greater role for the Commonwealth in addressing equity issues by calling for:

> A more balanced alignment of public funding responsibilities for government and non-government schools should be negotiated between the Australian Government and the states

[1] Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017). *Schools Australia*. (ABS Catalogue No. 4221.0).
[2] MCEETYA (2008). Retrieved from
http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf
[3] Gonski, D., Boston, K., Greiner, K., Lawrence, C., Scales, B. and Tannock, P. (2011), *Review of Funding for Schooling: Final Report.* Australian Government, p.105

and territories as part of the transition to a new funding model. The Australian Government should assume a greater role in the funding of government schools.[4]

Given that non-metropolitan students are even more likely to be in government schools than their metropolitan counterparts, an important first step in improving educational outcomes for students in regional, rural and remote communities is for the Commonwealth to increase its support for government schools. Commonwealth funding actually based on the level of need that exists in schools rather than an arbitrary division of funding drawn along school sector lines would go a long way to supporting regional, rural and remote schools in addressing the gap in educational outcomes described below.

Recommendations

School Funding

- The public school system at a national, state and local level must be resourced to 100% of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) in order to meet the teaching and learning needs of all students.
- In order for all public schools to reach 100% of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) there must be a more balanced alignment of state and federal responsibilities for public school funding which reflects the federal government's greater resource revenue raising capacity. These resources must be targeted to where they are needed most across the entire education sector.
- The Federal Government's cuts to disability funding in 2018 must be immediately reversed and the disability loading reviewed as a matter of urgency by the National School Resourcing Board. That review should look to determine the real costs of ensuring all students with disability can access a high quality education.

TAFE

- Reverse governments' funding cuts to TAFE and vocational education.
- A guaranteed minimum 70% share of all government's vocational education must be provided for TAFE Institutes.

Initial Teacher Education

- Minimum entry requirements should be adopted for selection into Initial Teacher Education (ITE) to recruit the top 30% of students into the profession, with equivalent measures for those seeking entrance to ITE from points/pathways other than completion of schooling.
- Comprehensive workforce planning should be undertaken across the states and territories, to provide more focussed and better resourced delivery of ITE and maximise the retention of high quality entrants and graduates in the teacher workforce.
- The practicum component should be strengthened with a focus on regional, rural and remote placements.
- Greater support should be provided for early career teachers in regional, rural and remote locations, with far greater resourcing of mentoring, induction and ongoing professional learning.
- All initial teacher education courses should include content that gives candidates an understanding of the importance of culturally appropriate curriculum and school culture when working in rural, regional and remote schools and in particular, Indigenous communities.

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[4] Gonski et al, op cit, p.xviii

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education

- Priority attention should be given to addressing the achievement gaps which confront Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children by adequately funding schools on the basis of need. It is critical that there is a tangible commitment to working with Indigenous communities to improve access to education services for Indigenous children and to lift school attendance, which is a vital step on the road to improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students and closing the gap between them and their non-Indigenous peers.

Strong systems

- Priority attention should be given to closing the achievement gaps experienced by students in regional, rural and remote communities.
- Governments should provide effective and strong systemic support for regional, rural and remote schools to ensure that they are supported with state wide systemic frameworks for leadership, staffing, curriculum development, student wellbeing and teaching and learning.

Attraction and retention of staff

- Professional and financial incentives should be improved in industrial agreements to attract and retain experienced teachers to rural, regional and remote schools and in particular, those serving Indigenous communities.
- Priority attention should be given to promote the contextual and professional advantages of working in regional, rural and remote locations, including initiatives which attract and retain school leadership, provide ongoing professional development and ensure access to a broad, engaging and inclusive curriculum for students.
- Governments should no longer provide funding for Teach for Australia. Every child has the right to be taught by a fully qualified and trained teacher. The program has been shown to be an expensive failure with low levels of teacher retention in disadvantaged schools.

The gap in educational achievement between regional, rural and remote students and metropolitan students

As reported in the Review's Discussion Paper, national and international large-scale tests consistently reveal sizeable average score differences between metropolitan and non-metropolitan students. It should be noted that this phenomenon is not exclusively Australian. According to Lamb et al, every country that participated in the 2009 round of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) reported an 'urban advantage in student performance' that 'translated to about 20 PISA score points or, the equivalent of half a year of schooling'.[5] PISA data from 2015 shows that for mean scientific literacy, Australian 15 year-old students from metropolitan schools were more than one and a half years ahead of students from remote schools, and more than one year ahead of students from provincial schools. A similar relationship between metropolitan and regional and remote students was found for reading literacy. For mathematical literacy there was a one and half year gap in mean scores between metropolitan and regional students and a gap of two years between metropolitan and remote students.[6]

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[5] Lamb, S., Glover, S., Walstab, A. (2014). "Educational disadvantage and regional and rural schools". *2009 - 2017 ACER Research Conferences.* Retrieved from http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1228&context=research_conference, p.66

[6] Halsey, J. (2017). Independent Review into Regional Rural and Remote Education-Discussion Paper. Retrieved from https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/independent_review_into_regional_rural_and_remote_education.pdf, pp.16-17

As well as scoring below metropolitan students (on average) in large-scale international tests, a large achievement gap is also found in National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results. Analysis of 2015 NAPLAN data conducted by the NSW Board of Studies, Teaching and Education Standards found that for Writing, Grammar, Punctuation, and Spelling, mean test scores for Year 9 students from rural and remote schools were lower than Year 7 students from major cities. Mean scores for Year 7 students from regional and remote areas were lower than Year 5 students from major cities in Writing, Grammar and Punctuation.[7]

Students from non-metropolitan schools are also less likely to complete senior secondary education or enrol in tertiary education. It should also be noted that low socioeconomic status (SES) students are overrepresented in non-metropolitan schools whilst high SES students are underrepresented.[8] Despite this imbalance, even when student SES is controlled for, achievement differences between metropolitan and non-metropolitan students measured by standardised tests remain.[9]

Differences between metropolitan and non-metropolitan students in child development measures are evident from the very beginning of school. Children from major cities entering their first year of school are less likely to be considered 'vulnerable' on one or more of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) domains (physical, social, emotional, language and cognitive, communication and general knowledge) than children from non-metropolitan areas (see Figure 1). The proportion of developmentally vulnerable children increases dramatically in remote and very remote areas.
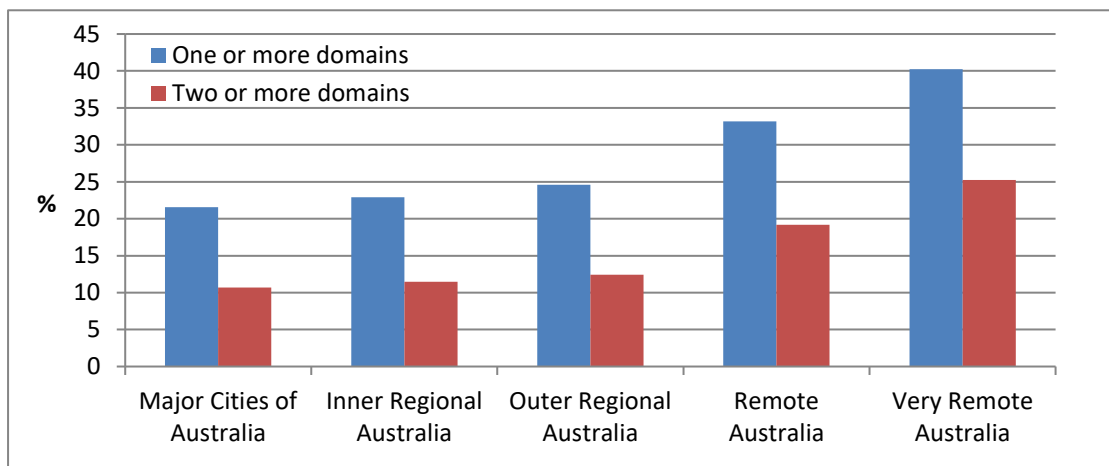

Figure 1. Proportion of first year students developmentally vulnerable on more than one or two domains. Source: 2015 AEDC data.[10]

There are also differences in how students experience school in metropolitan and non-metropolitan regions. For example, 2015 PISA data showed Australian 15 year-olds from rural areas or small regional centres were much more likely to report exposure to bullying than students from cities with populations of more than 100,000; the magnitude of this difference in Australia was nearly twice that of the OECD average.[11] Analysis of 2012 PISA data also found that non-metropolitan students spent

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[7] NSW Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards. (2016). *Rural and Regional Schools – Additional Analyses of BOSTES Data*.

[8] Thomson, S., De Bortoli, L., & Underwood, C. (2017). *PISA 2015: Reporting Australia's results*. Retrieved from http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1023&context=ozpisa

[9] Lamb et al, op cit

[10] AEDC (2015). *Public table by Statistical Local Area (SLA) 2009-2015*. Retrieved from https://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/public-table-by-statistical-local-area-(sla)-2009-2015

[11] OECD (2017), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume III): Students' Well-Being*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris. http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264273856-en

significantly less time on homework than their metropolitan counterparts even when other factors, including SES and prior achievement, were controlled for.[12] PISA data from 2015 also shows that in Australia, students from cities score more highly on measures of achievement motivation than those from smaller regional centres and that motivation declines with the population of school locations. Similarly, the 2015 PISA data also showed that Australian students from larger cities felt a greater sense of belonging to their school than students from schools in smaller population centres, although here the relationship was not linear as students from very small towns or rural centres felt more connected to their schools than those from small towns with a populations of between 3,000 and 15,000 (see Figure 2).[13]
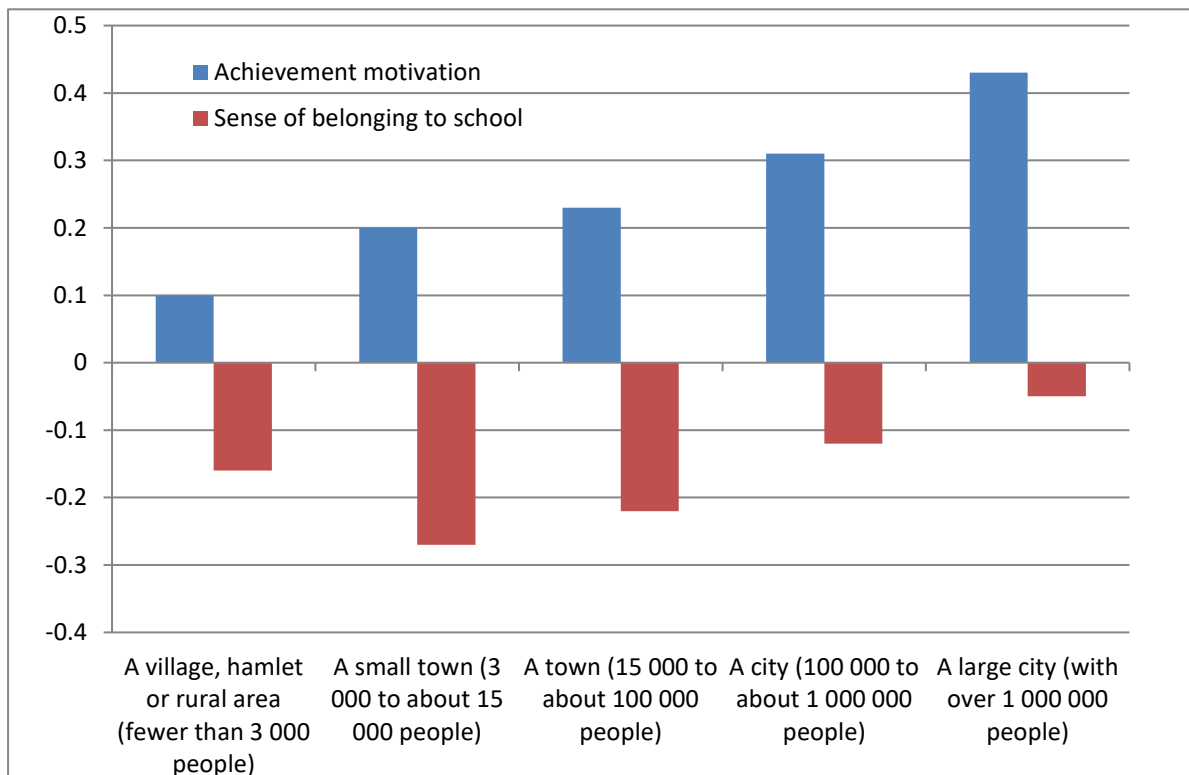

Figure 2. Achievement motivation and sense of belonging to school by school location type for Australian secondary students – PISA 2015.
Source: OECD, 2017. Note that each of these scales was standardised across participating countries with a mean of zero and standard deviation of one.

A range of interrelated economic, geographic and social factors account for most of the persistent differences in outcomes for metropolitan and non-metropolitan students; these will be discussed in the following section. What is clear is that the gap in outcomes presented here requires serious and sustained policy action if we are to achieve goals around equity in education.

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[12] Bowd, J., Bowles, T., Mckenzie, V. (2016). "An exploratory analysis of the personal, school and demographic variables affecting the homework effort of Australian secondary students". *AARE Conference 2016* Retrieved from https://www.aare.edu.au/data/2016_Conference/Full_papers/725_Justin_Bowd.pdf
[13] OECD (2017), "PISA: Programme for International Student Assessment", *OECD Education Statistics* (database). Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/data-00365-en

The key barriers and challenges that impact on the educational outcomes of regional, rural and remote students, including aspirations and access issues

Focusing mainly on Victoria, Lamb et al outline many of the factors contributing to the gap in educational outcomes between metropolitan and non-metropolitan students. As well as economic structures that see a greater return for education in urban centres and correspondingly higher levels of parental education on average, other factors include differences in school size, difficulties in attracting and retaining staff, curriculum breadth, and resource issues for non-metropolitan schools.[14]

The resource differential is also exposed in PISA data. Australian principals in schools in major cities scored lower on a scale measuring perceptions of deficits in the quality and quantity of resources affecting educational outcomes than their colleagues in non-metropolitan schools. Principals in major cities also scored lower on a scale measuring perceptions that a lack of staff affected educational outcomes in their schools than principals from non-metropolitan schools (see Figure 3). For the latter measure, principals from areas with populations less than 15,000 scored higher than the OECD average on this scale.[15] On this measure Australia has the largest gap between town and city schools in the OECD, whilst the gap between rural and city schools is the fifth largest.[16]
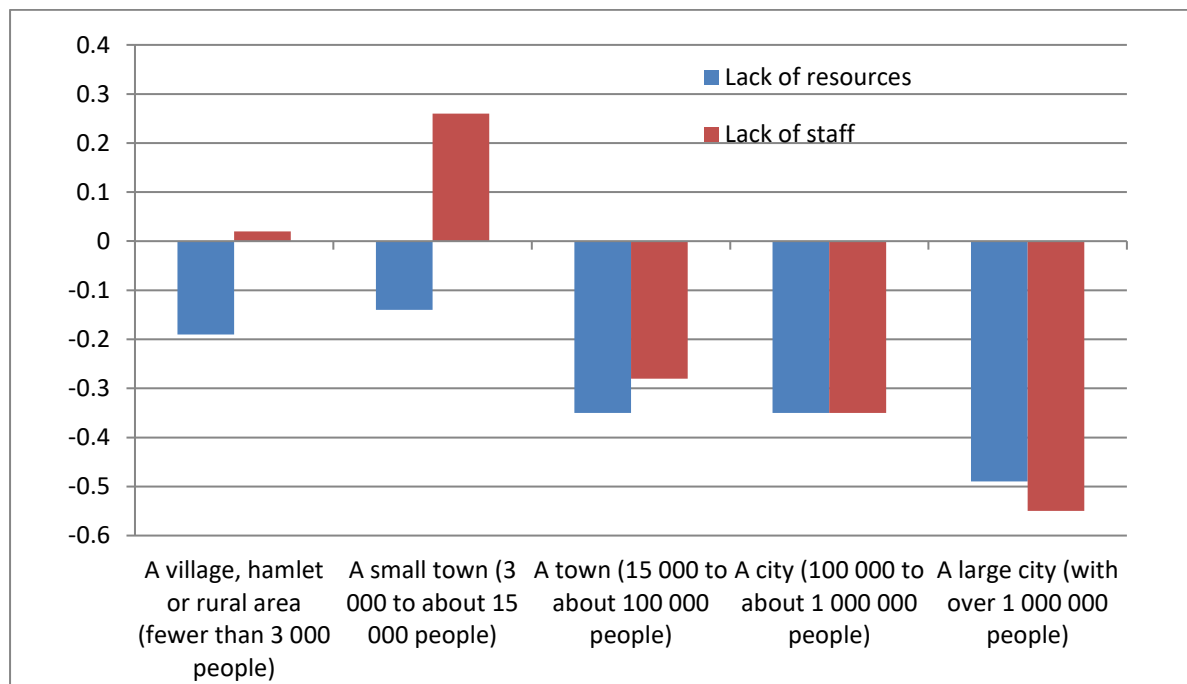

Figure 3. Principals' ratings of the effects of resource and staff shortages on educational outcomes at their schools. Higher scores indicate that shortages have a greater negative impact than lower scores. Source: OECD, 2017

In geographically large countries like Australia, differentials on these measures are likely to be exacerbated by the sheer distance involved in the centre/periphery dynamics that influence a range of factors affecting educational outcomes. Unfortunately, Commonwealth funding changes introduced via the Australian Education Amendment Act (the Act) do little to address this situation. As noted in

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[14] Lamb et al, op cit.
[15] OECD (2017), op cit.
[16] Cobbold, T. (2017). Resource Gaps Between Advantaged & Disadvantaged Schools Among the Largest in the World. Retrieved from http://www.saveourschools.com.au/equity-in-education/resource-gaps-between-advantaged-disadvantaged-schools-among-the-largest-in-the-world

the discussion paper, the annual funding growth differential between metropolitan and regional and remote schools is only one percentage point, with funding growth projected to grow by 4.9 per cent annually to 2027.

Although all schools are negatively affected by the delay in reaching full Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) funding instituted by the Act, the impacts will be most severe for regional and remote schools. As mentioned above, these schools are overwhelmingly in the government sector, and the Turnbull Government's arbitrary capping of Commonwealth funding to 20 per cent of the SRS will have a disproportionate effect on them. A few specific examples from NSW help to illustrate how non-metropolitan schools have been penalised by changes to Commonwealth funding introduced by the Act. Under the original version of the Australian Education Amendment Bill (the Bill) Kempsey West Public School stood to be $1.31 million worse off over 2018 and 2019, Wilcannia Central School would have been $595,681 worse off over this period whilst Hillvue Public School would have been $1.47 million worse off.[17] Amendments to the Bill are likely to narrow the differences between what was promised under the National Education Reform Agreement (NERA) and the Act slightly although states and territories containing 87 per cent of Australian government schools students will still be funded below the SRS in 2023 under the Act.

The accessibility and resourcing of regional support structures are crucial to ensure that the differences discussed above are minimised. Distance and isolation mean that it can be difficult for many non-metropolitan schools, particularly remote schools to access services like disability support and assessment. Seventy nine percent of principals surveyed for the 2017 AEU national *State of Our Schools* survey in very remote areas reported that they did not have sufficient resources to appropriately meet the needs of students with disability at their school. Cuts in Commonwealth funding for students with disability in government schools in five states for 2018 will only exacerbate this situation. The funding cuts in Tasmania and the Northern Territory are particularly severe amounting to reductions of 46 and 35 per cent respectively.[18]

As Lamb et al note:

> smaller schools tend to have fewer resources, are often less able to employ specialist staff or offer specialist subjects or programs, have to use composite multigrade classes, provide fewer opportunities for professional development, have more difficulty recruiting and retaining teachers, provide less support for special needs students and offer fewer options for courses.[19]

Accessible regional support resources are essential to minimise the isolation and diseconomies of scale experienced by many rural schools. When resources are cut from education budgets it is often felt most acutely by non-metropolitan schools affected by a reduction of services available from regional support structures. School systems need to be funded at levels that allow them to ensure that no schools are forced to struggle without the resources available in metropolitan areas. For example, one principal from a rural Victorian primary school observed that:

> Small communities will never be financially efficient – neither should they be. There are not the same economies of scale that you get with schools in larger communities. One example is

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[17] NSW Department of Education (2017). "Hypothetical data set showing the estimated financial impact for each public school in NSW if the Commonwealth honours the final two years of the National Education Reform Agreement (NERA) funding." Retrieved from https://www.nswtf.org.au/files/media-briefing-nsw-data.pdf

[18] Department of Education and Training (2017). Commonwealth funding for students with disability loading by state and sector, 2017-2027.

[19] Lamb et al, p.68

ICT support. You may only see the ICT support person on campus once every few weeks, so technology issues can't be solved with the same efficiency.

This is an example of why extra resources are needed to ensure that all schools have access to uniformly high levels of support reflective of their educational needs.

Resources are also a crucial component for closing the gap in educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islanders, particularly in regional, rural and remote communities. As noted by Riddle and Fogarty:

> Closing the gap in education is intrinsically linked to multiple aspects of socioeconomic disadvantage, including access to quality health, employment, incarceration rates and housing. These combine to form the social determinants of educational success.[20]

And as the AEU pointed out in our Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs Inquiry into Educational Opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students:

> This is resource-intensive, and cannot be achieved in a political environment where actions by Federal, State and Territory governments undermine and diminish their responsibility for the provision of long-term sustainable public services. Equity for disadvantaged students cannot be achieved unless a high priority is given to addressing the achievement gaps which confront ATSI children.[21]

This submission outlined a range of initiatives and programs that have shown real results for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. For example, Northern Territory schools funded under the National Partnership Program for low-SES schools saw funded primary schools make greater literacy and numeracy gains than unfunded schools.[22]

The submission also contains accounts of schools who have successfully invested extra funding gained under NERA to make tangible improvements to outcomes for their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.[23]

Unfortunately a withdrawal of Commonwealth Schools funding for the Northern Territory over the next 10 years under the Australian Education Amendment Act will make it much more difficult to capitalise on gains already made and jeopardise progress in remote and very remote schools in the Northern Territory — especially given the limited capacity to raise funds locally at a school or Territory level.

Difficulties around the attraction and retention of staff in non-metropolitan schools are also issues that reflect broader structural, economic inequalities between the metropolitan centre and rural periphery. As shown in Figure 4, principals from major cities are less likely to report teacher shortages and were less likely to have maths and science subjects taught by teachers not fully qualified in those areas.

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[20] Stewart Riddle and Bill Fogarty (2015). 'Closing the Gap in education report card: needs improvement', *The Conversation*, 11 February 2015
[21] Australian Education Union (2015), our Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs Inquiry into Educational Opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students, pp.4-5.
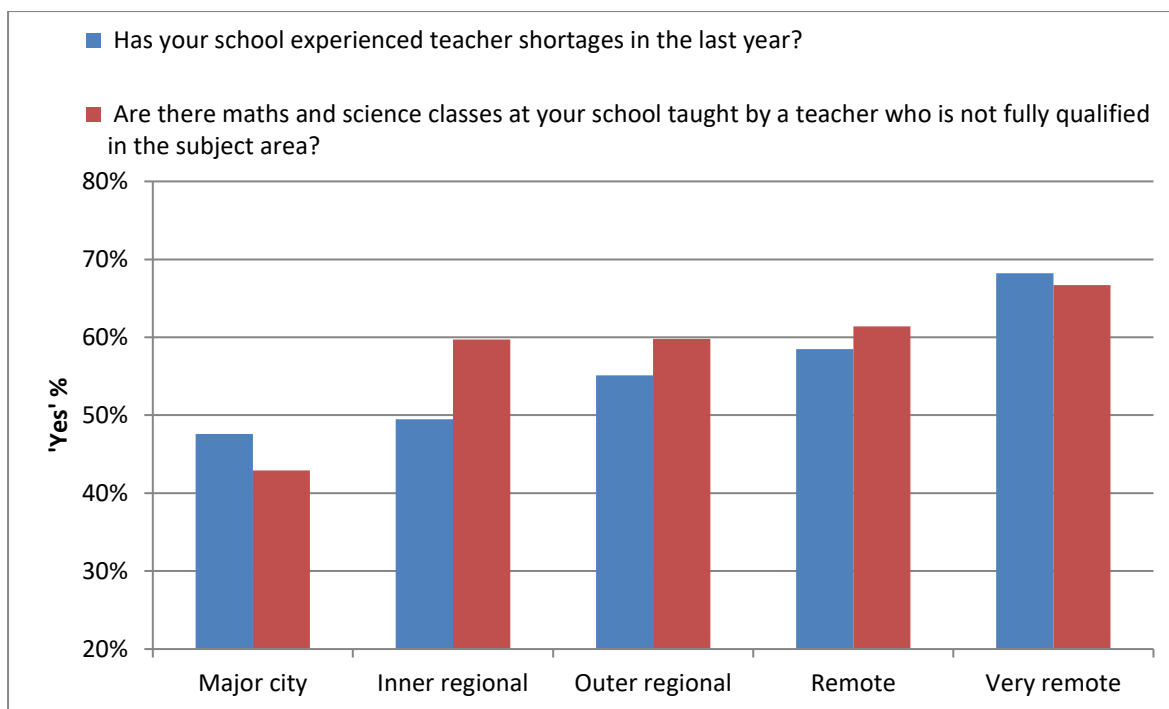[22] Ibid, p.10
[23] Ibid, p.11

Figure 4. Principals reporting staff shortages and out-of-field teachers by location.
Source: AEU State of Our Schools survey data, 2017

The attraction and retention of staff in non-metropolitan schools was addressed by the MCEETYA Taskforce on Rural and Remote Education, Training, Employment and Children's Services and the goals it promoted to address this issue are still sound. These include:

> • continuing to promote the contextual and professional advantages of working in remote, isolated and rural areas in addition to offering financial and industrial conditions packages
> • raising the profile of the profession by acknowledgment of the professional qualities of country teachers, leaders and support staff
> • expanding scholarships and funded programs targeted at increasing the teacher and education support for personnel trained and prepared to serve for extended periods in rural, regional and remote locations
> • the establishment of a national centre for rural education research and training and development which incorporates current initiatives and programs, and which focuses on partnerships and inter-agency strategies to drive local capacity building
> • implementing programs and initiatives that recognise and enhance access to local community leadership and expertise[24]

The supply of highly qualified teachers for all schools is underpinned by high standards in pre-service training. It is concerning that Australian Tertiary Admission Rankings (ATAR) for teaching courses are often low, particularly in regional universities. Improving minimum entry standards for teaching courses would go some way to safeguard the quality of teaching in all schools. In Victoria, for example, the requirement will be for an ATAR of 65 for Year 12 entry into teacher education courses in 2018, increasing to 70 in 2019. As the Dean of The Melbourne Graduate School of Education told the ABC, this policy 'will only increase the demand [for teaching places], because this is about lifting

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[24] MCEETYA (2000). *National Framework for Rural and Remote Education*. Retrieved from http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/rural_file.pdf

the status of the whole profession'.[25] Novel, fast-tracked pathways into teaching such as the Teach for Australia (TFA) program have the opposite effect on the status of the profession. This expensive program, saddled with high attrition rates, is counter-productive to ensuring the delivery of quality teaching.[26] The most recent evaluation of the program found that less than half of the TFA associates remained in teaching after three years post their initial two-year placement and only 30 per cent were teaching in disadvantaged schools.[27]

Also essential to ensuring the supply of teachers to regional, rural and remote schools is a standards-based promotion and transfer system that equitably ensures that these schools can access the staff they need. Regional support structures need to ensure that non-metropolitan school staff can access quality professional development either locally or in major centres and ensure that staff levels and relief teacher availability are sufficient to support this access.

Support for school leadership staff is also essential to improve the effectiveness and attractiveness of non-metropolitan schools. As noted in the Discussion Paper, leaders in small schools are often less experienced than their counterparts in larger schools and are also frequently saddled with a greater teaching and administrative workload. Funding to provide extra staff support for these schools would be a useful way of ensuring that school leaders are able to focus more of their attention on educational leadership.

The appropriateness and effectiveness of current modes of education delivered to these students, including the use of information and communications technology and the importance of face to face regional, rural and remote education provision

Access to face-to-face teaching is crucial to ensure that all students can access a rich educational experience, although there is a role for technology to potentially increase the curriculum breadth in small and remote secondary schools. Such a role is performed by Virtual Secondary Schools in NSW. However, such strategies need to be supported by the appropriate professional development for staff delivering/developing content and for staff supporting students engaged in online programs. There is a need for a set of guidelines to ensure content is appropriate. Crucially there also needs to be the appropriate levels of infrastructure and support services that are frequently lacking in non-metropolitan schools as was mentioned above. As a teacher from a regional primary school in Victoria told the AEU:

> Access to information technologies remains an issue in rural/regional areas. Internet access can be patchy and the National Broadband Network has given no extra assistance in this area. Many families use only mobile phone devices and students have little or no opportunity to practice skills or complete projects/requirements on desktop devices, laptops or tablets. With the increase in required online testing, this lack of home access is becoming more evident with students who have the academic skills being hindered by a lack of technology skill.

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[25] Anderson, S.(2016). Entry scores for teaching courses in Victoria increased to ATAR of 70 by Andrews Government, *ABC News*. Retrieved from http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-11-23/entry-scores-for-teaching-courses-in-victoria-increased/8049360

[26] Australian Education Union (2017a), "Teach for Australia is a failing, expensive program". Media Release. Retrieved from https://aeunt.org.au/news/teach-for-australia-expensive-program/

[27] Dandolopartners (2017). *Teach for Australia Program Evaluation Report*. Retrieved from https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/final_tfa_public_report.pdf, p.16

The existence of this pervasive digital divide is one of the reasons why the AEU opposes online NAPLAN assessment.

The effectiveness of public policies and programs that have been implemented to bridge the divide

There are many examples of effective policies and programs that have improved a range of outcomes for non-metropolitan students. These policies are often implemented at a system level to provide funding that allows schools to pursue options that best suit their local circumstances. One non-metropolitan principal from NSW outlined how extra funding under NERA had positively impacted non-metropolitan schools via Quality Teachers Successful Students funding in that state:

> There have been a number of changes that have had real and significant success. The funding available through Gonski has enabled schools to target low Socio Economic Students and Aboriginal students like never before. Now all schools have access to some degree of funding for these areas and for many it has provided them with the means to employ additional support staff or run programs for students in a meaningful way for the first time ever. Equity funding has been a success. It has proved timely and targeted. It has gone to the students it was designed to reach and many schools have been very grateful for the opportunity to make a difference to the education of more children.

> Quality Teachers Successful Students (QTSS) funding has been beneficial in many schools, and has allowed schools to focus on developing their teaching staff. Of course a road block for some rural schools is the inability to access casual staff to allow teachers to work with each other, but that does not mean the funding is not valuable.

Colac Primary School in regional Victoria used extra funding made available under the NERA to hire a speech pathologist and extra specialist staff 'to provide targeted literacy and numeracy intervention and support for students six or more months behind.'[28] According to the school principal,

> We're coming from a position of never having had the financial ability to provide the level of support our students require. It would be heartbreaking if, having had a sense of what can be achieved through our 2016 Gonski funding, we lost not only the capacity to maintain what has been achieved but also the possibility of being able to make that same difference for all our students.[29]

At a system the level, the Victorian State Government used additional funding from the Commonwealth under NERA to extend the needs-based component of funding package for schools. This funding, in turn, has enabled schools like Colac Primary to implement reforms that are making a real difference for their students.

Berserker Street State School in Rockhampton has many highly disadvantaged students who often have complex needs. Thanks to additional needs-based Commonwealth funding funnelled through Queensland's Investing for Success Funding package, Berserker Street has been able to implement a range of initiatives to improve outcomes for their students. Needs-based funding will deliver an additional $308,525 in 2017 to allow it to continue maintain and extend these initiatives which include the investment in quality professional development for staff including a six-month intensive

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[28] Australian Education Union, (2017). *Getting Results Volume 2*, p.18
[29] Ibid, p.5

training program for any teachers new to the school. Berserker Street has also been able to employ a speech pathologist, guidance officer, youth worker and 'extra teaching and support staff to work with very complex case-managed children and investing in specialist literacy/numeracy teachers and teacher aides in all classrooms.'[30]

Forbes High School used additional needs-based funding to establish a Wellness Hub to facilitate connections with services and professional support programs provided by local community services as well as the school's 'youth worker, counsellor, Aboriginal Education Officers and chaplain'. [31] As a student from the school told the Forbes Advocate:

> It really helps everyone here ... anyone who has problems at home. It's about venting, getting things off their chest and provides a clearer perspective on things so students are not so hung up on things.[32]

Spinifex State College in Mount Isa has a high proportion of students from low SES backgrounds, Indigenous students and students from non-English Speaking background. From 2015 to 2016 the school received an additional $753,000 funnelled through Queensland's Greater Results Guarantee and Investing for Success funding.[33] This funding allowed the school to 'invest in additional qualified support staff, provide targeted professional learning, improve student outcomes by the strategic use of data, and to focus on students at risk.'[34] The school was able to establish an Achievement Centre for students requiring small group attention to improve their maths and English. As a result of these initiatives the school has been able to show improvement in NAPLAN data and Year 12 certificate rates. As noted by the school's principal:

> The regular funding that schools receive does not sufficiently address the significant difficulties facing our teachers. Many of our students come to us having missed significant periods of schooling – for a variety of reasons – so their literacy levels are very low. This has the obvious impact of restricting their capacity to engage in the programs that we offer. Without additional needs-based funding we could not provide the extra support for students to begin to close the gaps in their learning.[35]

Effective policies to improve outcomes for regional, rural and remote students can also be implemented at the system level. For example, in NSW the establishment of specialist centres in rural and remote areas have improved the access of NSW schools to specialist support staff and services for the benefits of their students and their families/carers.[36]

In 2013 the Victorian State Government restructured the DEECD regions by reducing the number of offices from nine to four. At the same time, the Napthine Government dramatically reduced the number of support staff from the Department, including Regional Network Leaders in the previous year. This policy had direct adverse effects on schools. More than 94 per cent of principals surveyed

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[30] Ibid, p.6

[31] Grace-Curran, O (2018), 'MP taking country high school's initiative to Parliament', *Forbes Advocate*, 18/8/17. Retrieved from http://www.forbesadvocate.com.au/story/4856800/facility-impresses-donato/

[32] Ibid

[33] Australian Education Union (2017), op cit, p.76

[34] Ibid, p.77

[35] Ibid

[36] NSW Department of Education (2017). Networked Specialist Centres. Retrieved from https://education.nsw.gov.au/wellbeing-and-learning/whole-school-approach/networked-specialist-centres

in the AEU Victorian Branches 2013 State of Our School survey said that the level of support from the Regional Office had declined over previous year. One rural primary school principal noted:

> The new regional structure has virtually placed schools on their own with no effective back-up and support. Curriculum services which we use to be able to access to continue the development of our schools and curriculum leaders is non-existent, but there has been no corresponding budget increase to outsource this development through commercial PD (professional development) providers. I feel totally and utterly disenfranchised by the new structure. The region and the regional office may as well be on the moon.[37]

A regional secondary principal also commented on the changes to regional office structures and the removal of support staff:

> Rural schools rely heavily on the Region for a wide range of services and support. The amalgamation of two regions and reduction in support staff has impacted negatively on the support that we can access.[38]

Fortunately, the current Victorian State Government has reversed some of these changes and have improved accessibility to regional support, including 'the establishment of 17 new local area-based teams, employing over 150 staff across the current four regions' with funding to become ongoing from 2019-20.[39] Such ongoing system-level policies are essential to ensure that non-metropolitan schools are able to access the same level of support as metropolitan schools. As was noted by Associate Professor Laura Perry from Murdoch University, 'School-based reforms can help, but systemic and structural change is much more effective. We need to change our system of schooling. In particular, we need to reduce differences between schools'.[40]

The gaps and opportunities to help students successfully transition from school to further study, training and employment

The Discussion Paper outlines differential outcomes for post-compulsory students in metropolitan and non-metropolitan schools including a lower rate of Year 12 completion, and lower levels of participation in higher education for non-metropolitan students. The Discussion paper also notes that for 'vocational educational and training (VET), non-metropolitan participations rates are comparable with urban rates' although completion rates at the Diploma level are lower for non-metropolitan students.[41] The Discussions Paper's suggestion that 'Raising the status of VET and promoting greater awareness and recognition of VET pathways to both higher education and careers could increase student aspirations to pursue VET studies as a rewarding post-school option' has merit but much needs to be done to raise the status of VET given the scandalous outcomes associated with contestable VET funding being made available to private providers.[42]

Not only have the scandals and rorts diminished the reputation of VET, marketised funding systems also tend to cause resources to be disproportionately allocated to areas with substantial markets.

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[37] AEU Victorian Branch (2013). State of Our Schools Survey, AEU Victoria, p.13
[38] Ibid, p.14
[39] Andrews, D.(2015). "Giving Our Regional Schools And Kids The Support They Deserve", Media Release. Retrieved from http://www.premier.vic.gov.au/giving-our-regional-schools-and-kids-the-support-they-deserve/
[40] Perry, L. (2017). "Australian PISA results indicative of education inequity", *Schools News*. Retrieved from http://www.school-news.com.au/education/australian-pisa-results-indicative-of-educational-equity/
[41] Halsey, J. (2017). p.18
[42] Ibid, p.46

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Where markets are thin, private providers must either reduce services or increase costs to compensate for lower levels of demand and other costs associated with operating away from metropolitan areas. Contestable funding in NSW through the Smart and Skilled policy has seen the number of regional and remote enrolments in TAFE drop from 236,000 in 2012 to 161,000 in 2016, a decline of over 30 per cent. [43]

The only way to ensure that VET can regain its reputation in Australia is for the role of public TAFE to be protected and enhanced. Ensuring that at least 70 per cent of public funding is available to public TAFE providers is an important first step; adequately funding TAFEs to operate in areas with diseconomies of scales and geographic isolation is equally important in promoting TAFE to non-metropolitan students as a pathway to employment or further education.

Innovative approaches that support regional, rural and remote students to succeed in school and in their transition to further study, training and employment

Too often regional, rural and remote schools are forced to be innovative as a matter of necessity rather than from a position of strength. In small schools, teachers being forced to teach out-of-field and the multitude of non-educational tasks frequently performed by principals are examples of this type of innovation. Schools and systems that have the right levels of resources and support from central and regional offices are in a better position to strategically manage their futures rather than be managed by the often overwhelming contingencies of the everyday. Properly funded and supported schools are able to be proactively innovative rather reactively innovative.

Often, effective innovation is best conducted at a system or regional level. For example, outreach programs like the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme (HEPPP) described in the Discussion Paper benefits from high levels of coordination between schools and universities as well as support from participating schools. Another example is the Supported Students Successful Students initiative in NSW. This policy, as well as creating 236 new school counselling service positions across the system, also provides 500 graduate scholarships to ensure that the supply of qualified staff meets demand.[44] A similar scheme involving careers teachers/advisors could be targeted at non-metropolitan schools to raise awareness and support access to a range of further education and employment opportunities.

An approach to supporting transitions of students into training or further education described in the Discussion Paper involves integrating the school and its programs with local industries. Schools must be able to comply with national and state-level curriculum requirements for a good reason: these ensure that students have the transferable skills, aptitudes, and capabilities needed for rapidly changing economies, ecosystems and communities.

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[43] TAFE NSW (2017). *Annual Report* 2015-2016. Retrieved from
https://www.tafensw.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/25069/TAFE-NSW-2015-16-Annual-Report.pdf
[44] NSW Department of Education (Nd). "Supported students, successful students". Retrieved from
https://education.nsw.gov.au/wellbeing-and-learning/whole-school-approach/wellbeing-support/supported-students