

Recipient Details

Name of organisation or individual: [O] Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia

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Responses

Curriculum and assessment

It is well understood that a relevant, rigorous and real-life curriculum is one of the most important factors in increasing student engagement and therefore improved student learning outcomes. The context of food and fibre education has immediate relevance for all school students as they eat, are clothed and are housed each day in the products produced by our primary producers. In rural, regional and remote areas this is much more relevant as it is likely that a student's family, friends or neighbours are directly employed by the sector.

Having a school curriculum supported and valued by family and the community is another key factor for success in improved learning outcomes (G.Masters 2012).

With 168 references to food and fibre production in the Australian curriculum there is certainly enough scope for schools to include this within their local curriculum and meet their accountabilities, but sadly many schools and teachers are unaware of this fact.

Promotion and support of food and fibre education by federal and state based departments of education would be one way to address this issue and make the curriculum more relevant for regional, rural and remote students.

Rating: 5

Teachers and teaching

The quality of the teacher is universally accepted as the single biggest influence outside of the student in relation to student performance. John Hattie (2003) through a meta analysis has determined that the effect size of teacher quality is 30%.

Regional, Rural and Remote schools are generally staffed by either young graduate teachers in the early stages of their careers or staff that have been located in these schools, having married into local families or having come from these areas originally, for a number of years. The latter group often having limited access to on-going teacher training and peer reflection due to distance and cost.

These schools are often smaller schools with less chance of peer interaction or collegial support.

PIEFA suggests the following strategies; The inclusion of food and fibre content and resources in to the curriculum of pre-service teaching degrees to ensure that those placed in RRR areas can provide a teaching and learning program relevant to the location.

Federal and State departments fund RRR teachers to gain access to on-going professional learning, with a food and fibre focus, through subsidised travel and access to online learning platforms.

Rating: 7

Leaders and leadership

Whilst Hattie (2003) does not claim a direct effect between the principalship and improved student learning outcomes there is a strong indirect effect. Principals impact the variance attributed to schools mainly because of their influence on the climate of the school. Principals who create a school with high student responsiveness rather than bureaucratic control, who create a climate of psychological safety to learn, who create a focus of discussion on student learning have the influence. The effect on learning is trickled through these attributes rather than directly on learning.

PIEFA seeks engagement with key principal associations, with the support of education departments, to raise the importance and relevance of food and fibre education.

Rating: 4

School and Community

Schools account for about 5-10% of the variance in student achievement (Hattie 2003). Schools barely make a difference to achievement. The discussion on the attributes of schools – the finances, the school size, the class size, the buildings are important as they must be there in some form for a school to exist, but that is about it. Buildings in RRR areas often have poorly maintained facilities and this can contribute towards poor perception towards the school by student and community, thereby having an indirect negative influence on student outcomes.

There may also be basic issues of safety through poorly maintained facilities that could contribute towards a negative culture.

There are a higher proportion of schools in RRR areas that offer the subject of agriculture. To be truly effective this subject needs to be paired with a school farm to provide practical skills.

PIEFA proposes that RRR schools receive additional facilities funding to maintain school farms, that school farms are promoted (using resources found on www.primezone.edu.au) as whole school/cross-curricula learning tools and that each high school which offers the subject of agriculture receives an additional full-time school attendant to assist with the running of the farm. A task often left to teachers, including in school holidays, often leading to teacher burn-out.

Rating: 5

Information and Communication Technology

ICT has the capacity to improve student learning as a tool, but is only as effective as the teaching pedagogy behind it.

However, access to ICT must be a priority for all schools especially fast internet.

PIEFA offers a range of free resources, including videos, that sometime cannot be accessed by schools in RRR areas.

PIEFA has sought to get around this by providing these schools with our resources for free via USBs or external hard drives for downloading onto school servers.

The expansion of NBN speeds to RRR must be a priority, including an assessment of the effectiveness of the Sky Muster system as it relates to schools.

Rating: 4

Entrepreneurship and schools

Making a direct link between local industry and schools would encourage improved student learning, greater career preparedness and increase the likelihood of students staying in their area to pursue a career.

PIEFA supports the proposal of Primary Industries Entrepreneurial Schools (PIES) as we have seen similar programs operate very successfully, such as the partnership between TASSAL and Tasmanian schools such as Huonville High School. Students are prepared for direct industry entry upon completion of their schooling and/or become interested in further study at a tertiary level as a result of such partnerships.

Rating: 6

Improving access – enrolments, clusters, distance education and boarding

The use of clusters to drive improved services and student outcomes has proven to be an effective strategy.

For example in Western Australia the system of Agricultural Colleges, although geographical disparate, are treated as the one educational district for staffing, professional learning and resourcing purposes.

Combining their resources has allowed each school to afford state of the art, industry standard equipment that has seen them recognised nationally as one of the best providers of VET education and training.

Likewise the shared knowledge and financial support has allowed these schools to become stronger than the sum of their parts.

Rating for enrolments: 4

Rating for clusters: 5

Rating for distance education: 5

Rating for boarding: 5

Diversity

PIEFA supports strategies of inclusions in all schools in all locations.

Rating: 7

Transitioning beyond school

PIEFA supports strategies that link schools with local industry to allow for seamless transition from RRR schools to local industries. This can be achieved by schools embedding food and fibre education across the entire school curriculum and implementing the PIES model or similar school/industry partnerships.

However schools do require additional support to develop necessary expertise and knowledge to allow for effective implementation.

PIEFA has recently taken over the management of the website www.careerharvest.com.au and will promote this as the one-stop shop for career pathways, case studies, internship information and scholarships for schools students. PIEFA is about to sign an MoU with www.myfutures.edu.au to make this content discoverable via this government portal.

Support in promoting this website and the scholarship opportunities in particular would be gratefully received.

Rating: 6

Additional Comments