

## Recipient Details

Name of organisation or individual: [O] South Australian Area Schools Leaders Association (SAASLA)

Reference Type: Principal association

State or territory: SA

Serial Identification Number: 478426

## Responses

### Curriculum and assessment

Curriculum delivery is extremely difficult with a lack of suitably qualified, experienced teachers - especially in the secondary and senior secondary years. This is especially relevant in the areas of maths, science, technology and languages.

The development of curriculum in a rural setting has many challenges compounded by distance to resources, lack of internet bandwidth, lack of experienced peer teachers to team and work with to develop curriculum and lack of observational opportunities.

the chance for teachers to moderate their marking with peers has additional complexities in rural schools, who often operate with single person faculties or year levels. Trying to provide efficient, comprehensive moderation activities with other experienced, confident subject/year level teachers is challenging.

Rating: 6

### Teachers and teaching

Issues; Lack of experienced teachers in country sites - Often required to teach out of their area of expertise. Graduate release time of 0.1 doesn't allow flexibility to allow staff to access T & D eg. Don't have access to 4pm training opportunities that their city colleagues can access. Isolation can add to the challenge of keeping staff beyond one year, with the homesickness and missing family and friends. Experienced gained is lost by the site when the teacher transfers as soon as they are able - 2 years for permanent employees, 4 years for staff in remote sites. City sites poach our high performing staff through the transfer process. The less capable staff struggle to win positions and often have no choice but to stay. This results in a never ending cycle of losing expertise and quality teachers.

Lack of mentoring support in many sites, many single faculty or year level teachers

Isolation from other sites due to distance, Lack of access to off site T & D

Cost of using own vehicle to travel. Lack of support services for staff in managing a diverse range of disabilities. Teachers often being supported by inexperienced leaders.

Difficulty attracting high quality and experienced applicants, less remote schools and metro schools are always accepted in preference.

Ideas:

Financially supporting practicing placements for rural areas, promotion in tertiary courses

Training for teachers to prepare them to work in the country, many ill equipped to deal with the challenges. Rural scholarship programmes, especially in hard to staff subjects- target the students with country backgrounds who aspire to live and work in the country.

Country incentive scheme should not finish after 5 years, incentives should be included for teachers to stay beyond the 5 years. Enticements for experienced teachers to move into the country sites and attracting staff in hard to staff subjects eg TST, Maths, LOTE,

Greater promotion of the virtues of working in the country area.

Rating: 7

Leaders and leadership

Leaders: Issues

Difficulty in attracting staff to country sites for leadership, most positions are filled from with the sites.

Incentives need to be long term.

The appointments could/ should be for life.

Lack of leadership density compounds the issues- more leadership time should be provided, particularly in small schools.

Inexperienced leaders should be linked to experienced leaders for at least the first 6 months.

Incentives to attract experienced leaders to the country - housing, travel, study leave after x years of service etc.

Leadership trading for aspiring leaders needs to be a priority.

Leaders training needs to be a priority and made accessible for all.

Initiating 'swaps' for 6 and 12 month blocks - city to country- may be a means of attracting experienced leaders to the country- try before you buy!

Pathway for leaders in country sites who wish to transfer back, the current feeling is that country experiences aren't valued in the panel process.

Provision of IT resources/ access which is often an added expense for country staff.

Funding to cover the real cost of T&D to sites.

Release time (TRT) - access to relievers and a pool of staff that could be accessed- this is a major stumbling block for teachers and leaders and our ability to provide cover for T& D.

Rating: 7

School and Community

What's Working:

- Strong community partnerships 'It takes a village to raise a successful child'
- Outstanding achievements in rural regions not being recognised

- We have talented staff who are able to diversify their skills to better meet student needs, small cohorts and curriculum requests
- Often teachers are working outside of their trained areas
- Rural schools are the training ground for new teachers and schools are compelled to tap into wider community supports
- Links between Rural Schools for goodwill in relation to sharing staff/students with a variety of local delivery models to support kids
- Open Access is inconsistent in software/teacher practice but does work for some rural students
- Smaller class sizes and vertically grouped classes help us to meet the students/community needs
- Community Confidence in local schools ability to offer a complete and challenging curriculum.
- Lower rates of truancy
- Strong community connections to the school as a Central Learning Hub.

#### Challenges/Future Needs:

- Finding, retaining multi skilled teachers
- Access to appropriate professional development and learning communities
- Lack of variety of practice to support good learning
- Infrastructure to support genuine connection beyond local community (IT/Travel)
- Services to support physical/mental health of all community members
- Funding to attract and retain talented staff/community members
- Mobility: Staff training ground and staff turn over for consistency for students/community
- Specialist Learning areas: Single person faculty's, Majority of staff needing full time work to be economically viable
- ICT Connection
- Complexities of living in a fish bowl
- Needing genuine incentives to attract and retain quality staff
- Ancillary staff capacity building and support
- Aspirations of students and families to think/see beyond what they know
- Growth mindset about opportunities of regional work over city headset
- No real incentive for Leaders to be attracted to start or stay in Leadership

Rating: 6

## Information and Communication Technology

Most isolated schools need the best bandwidth to provide equity in access to teaching resources and learning experiences.

Often ICT technical help is prohibitively expensive given time and distance for experts to provide support necessary.

Lack of ICT knowledge and experience within current staff, and difficulties in attracting and retaining those with ICT knowledge.

Lack of willingness for metropolitan sites, organisations ( Education Departments) and individuals to embrace technology to minimise the tyranny of distance.

Rating: 7

## Entrepreneurship and schools

National Rural Principal Association

Given the consistency of issues faced by rural schools and communities across Australia there is a need to promote the establishment of a peak body to represent Rural Education nationally – SAASLA is suggesting the establish a National Rural Principal Association, or such body. This need is supported by Western Australia District High Schools Administrators Association and also the Victorian Country Education Partnerships (CEP), which all represent rural education issues within their states. Despite our efforts over the past few years we have been unable to identify any active rural education representational state bodies in NSW, Queensland, NT and Tasmania – perhaps a sign that rural education is currently quite unorganised and disparate in representation across Australia.

The aim of the peak body will be to represent Rural Education nationally as a consultative group which would lobby regarding rural education issues with both Federal and State Governments. Minister Birmingham has been approached by SAASLA with the concept and has received positive feedback about the establishment of such a group – there was also the suggestion that a national rural education conference could assist in helping surface and support many of the issues faced by rural schools across Australia.

Rating: 1

Improving access – enrolments, clusters, distance education and boarding

Distance Learning & supporting diverse learning needs

Systemic change required to enable access and connectivity to software / infrastructure that already exist e.g Microsoft suite, NBN

Decd and federal collaboration to enable effective support and utilisation of state and NDIS resources to support students with disabilities

Attraction and retention initiatives to ensure skilled staff are working in rural and remote areas

Recognize intrinsic capacity of distance delivery to provide high quality educational programmes and outcomes

When localised distance learning is funded centrally and supported locally by communities, students and staff high outcomes have resulted historically

Rating for enrolments: 6

Rating for clusters: 4

Rating for distance education: 7

Rating for boarding: 1

Diversity

Often rural communities lack a diverse range of people and schools struggle to provide ways to provide students with exposure to different cultures and people with different needs.

Providing opportunities for sites to increase their access to diversity would be a positive strategy.

Rating: 3

Transitioning beyond school

Transition beyond school is often a daunting process for rural students, especially if moving from rural communities away from their families and supports - very often to large metropolitan centres.

Mentoring and/or linking transitioning students with more experienced peers would provide additional support.

Rating: 5

Additional Comments

16 Week impromptu Rural Leader Case Study

The following are the challenges identified by a very experienced metro principal, previous Education Director and Central Office employee who was appointed as Principal this year to a very remote Area School, after her first sixteen weeks in the role she identified:

Starting again with new teachers - every year

Fly-in fly out support - difficulties with building relationships and inconsistencies in service.

Need for coaches, mentoring - little expertise internally to support each other

Having teams come in dominates the agenda while they're here, we work on their input

No TRT or budget for the release needed to make the visits work

Preferred travel mode is driving to conferences etc Loss of days due to travel time enormously expensive. TRT Days we don't get a budget for. More disruption to classes and learning as teachers cover for each other.

Really good staff needed, but they're not going to come out to us if they can be appointed closer to Adelaide

Incentives and loading needed to increase- HR pool still very thin!

Losing staff when incentives run out (after 5 years)

We have CAMHS once a month - overloaded service

We have identified 30 of our Year 6-10 students who have difficulties with grief/loss, trauma, anger management, health/wellbeing difficulties

Limited in-town support, 5.5 hour drive to nearest support or \$500 return flight to Adelaide. Families can't afford to go.

High cost of maintenance work - Costs are often double or more than metro sites pay.

Federal money for a redevelopment but might be too expensive because of distance/lack of tradies in town

We have a great bank balance, but all of it is committed. We're broke! Bet many others are too, despite apparent bank balances.

I know I thought that I was sensitive to the needs of remote schools when I worked in State Office, but I think that the reality is much more challenging than people can possibly understand until they're here.

There are so many key challenges but the reality is that the most effective and significant block to increasing outcomes for students comes down to:

- 1) Our ability to attract and retain quality leaders.
- 2) Our ability to put high quality and appropriately trained teachers in classrooms.

There should be the capacity to increase our funding even more disproportionately than it currently is, based on the following key facts:

Remote sites employ a high proportion of early years teachers and so the real cost of staffing is significantly lower. Country sites have been subsidising the staffing costs of our city sites for generations!

The cost of training for city sites is also being subsidised by the country. Early career teachers learn their trade in the country and return to the city, often as high functioning, quality teachers. City sites haven't had to invest any capital in their training, they receive the benefits of all the hard work of the country sites in our system.