

FLYING MINUTE: SUBMISSION ON THE DRAFT REGIONAL EDUCATION STRATEGY

By Hannah Godsave, Policy Manager Community

WALGA RECOMMENDATION

That State Council endorse the Submission on the Draft Regional Education Strategy.

RESOLUTION 244.FM/2024

CARRIED

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Department of Education has released the [Draft Regional Education Strategy](#) (Draft Strategy) for comment.
- The Draft Strategy sets out a vision for equitable educational opportunities for students in the regions, underpinned by four pillars:
 - Building the capacity of our regional workforce
 - Expand curriculum delivery
 - Strengthen support for student wellbeing
 - Develop partnerships to create opportunity.
- WALGA has developed a Submission on the Draft Strategy, informed by submissions from the Great Southern and Central Country Zones and Advocacy Position 3.6 Children and Young People.
- The Submission recommends that the Strategy:
 - Clearly state the duration of the Strategy and the regional education issues the Strategy seeks to address.
 - Include regional education profiles and develop place-based actions and goals.
 - Further develop the content and data under the four pillars to clearly articulate Strategy actions and outcomes.
 - Implementation is adequate funded to ensure that it will deliver actions, outcomes and effective evaluation.
 - Should address the urgent issue of undersupply of Government Regional Officer Housing (GROH).
 - Should acknowledge the wider community implications of regional education challenges and build on existing strategic documents to create a whole of government approach.
 - Commit to ongoing place-based engagement with communities and Local Governments on the development and delivery of the Strategy.
- The People and Place Policy Team endorsed the Submission.

ATTACHMENT

- Submission on Draft Regional Education Strategy.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This Submission aligns with Advocacy Position, [3.6 Children and Young People](#).

3.6 Children and Young People

The Local Government sector supports the development and well-being of children and young people through strategic partnerships and a combination of services and facility provision. The Association advocates that the State and Commonwealth should continue to invest in the wellbeing of young West Australians.

BACKGROUND

The [Draft Regional Education Strategy](#) (Draft Strategy) was released for consultation on 22 July 2024. The Draft Strategy aims to provide a framework to guide more effective delivery of education in regional, rural and remote locations, focusing on improved education and wellbeing opportunities.

The Draft Strategy articulates a vision for equitable educational opportunities for students in the regions, underpinned by four pillars:

- Building the capacity of our regional workforce
- Expand curriculum delivery
- Strengthen support for student wellbeing
- Develop partnerships to create opportunity.

Considerable interest in regional education has been expressed by Local Government. In November 2023 a motion from the Great Southern Country Zone requested that:

WALGA advocate to the Department of Education, on behalf of rural and remote districts, that greater efforts be made to reduce the inequality of educational opportunity.

This motion was subsequently supported by an additional eight Country Zones in April 2024. WALGA hosted an online information and feedback session with the Department of Education (20 August 2024).

The consultation period for the draft Strategy closed on Friday 20 September 2024. WALGA requested, and received, an extension to enable the Submission to be considered by State Council. The People and Place Policy Team endorsed the Submission out of session.

COMMENT

The provision of education sits within the remit of the Australian and State Government. However, it is intrinsically linked to wider individual, family and community services, outcomes and issues that Local Government is responsible for and therefore impacts on functions and responsibilities.

The Draft Strategy includes high-level statements of intent without reference to data, analysis of current settings and issues or clear and measurable outcomes or actions.

WALGA's Submission supports and builds on feedback provided by the Great Southern and Central County Zones and the feedback from the information session. The Submission recommends that the Strategy needs to clearly articulate goals and measurable actions, underpinned by additional funding and evaluation.

The Submission does not include feedback on specific local area issues which are best provided by individual Local Governments and Zones. The Department of Education has strongly encouraged regional Local Governments to provide feedback on Local Governments perspective regarding regional education needs and issues.

WALGA will continue to encourage the Department of Education to engage with non-metropolitan Local Governments to develop and implement the Strategy.

FLYING MINUTE OUTCOME

Poll created: 24/09/2024 at 15:56

Poll closed: 01/10/2024 at 23:59

The submission was endorsed.

Submission on
Department of Education Draft
Regional Education Strategy

October 2024

About WALGA

The Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) is an independent, member-based, not for profit organisation representing and supporting the WA Local Government sector.

Our membership includes all 139 Local Governments in the State. WALGA uses its influence, support and expertise to deliver better outcomes for WA Local Governments and their communities.

We advocate to all levels of Government on behalf of our Members, and provide expert advice, services and support to Local Governments. WALGA's vision is for agile and inclusive Local Governments enhancing community wellbeing and enabling economic prosperity.

Acknowledgement of Country

WALGA acknowledges the continuing connection of Aboriginal people to Country, culture and community. We embrace the vast Aboriginal cultural diversity throughout Western Australia, including Boorloo (Perth), on the land of the Whadjuk Nyoongar People, where WALGA is located and we acknowledge and pay respect to Elders past and present.

Introduction

WALGA appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft Regional Education Strategy (the Strategy) and thanks the Department of Education for presenting to Members at the consultation webinar on 21 August 2024, [available to view here](#). The Strategy sets out current initiatives and new opportunities across four pillars to achieve the vision for equitable educational opportunities for students in the regions.

The Local Government sector in regional WA is diverse. The 109 Local Governments outside of the metropolitan area support over 690,000 West Australians with populations ranging from 100 to over 99,000.¹ Regional WA is geographically and demographically diverse. As a result, there is a significant variety in the range of functions and services that are provided by Local Government, depending on the size and location of the Local Government and the needs of their communities. Notwithstanding their differences, all Local Governments provide a key connection to communities at the local and regional level.

The provision of education sits within the remit of the Australian and State Government. However, it is intrinsically linked to wider individual, family and community services, outcomes and issues that Local Government is responsible for. Local Government provide a holistic community view of the challenges and potential solutions to regional education in WA.

This WALGA Submission supports and builds on feedback provided directly by the Great Southern and Central County Zones. WALGA also draws the Department's attention to any

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, regional population 2022-23 <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/regional-population/latest-release>

submissions provided by individual Local Governments who are best placed to provide feedback on specific local area issues.

The Submission considers regional education as it relates to our member Local Governments.

This Submission aligns to WALGA advocacy position 3.6 which states that:

The Local Government sector supports the development and well-being of children and young people through strategic partnerships and a combination of services and facility provision. The Association advocates that the State and Commonwealth should continue to invest in the wellbeing of young West Australians.

March 2012

This Submission provides specific commentary on the Strategy's vision and pillars and outlines the key challenges for the Local Government sector in relation to housing, the need for a whole of government response and ongoing engagement with the sector and the community.

Strategy Vision

WALGA welcomes and supports the Strategy's Vision, which puts the needs of students at the centre of the Strategy:

"our vision is for every one of our students in the regions to have equitable educational opportunities that will enable them to achieve their potential and put them on a pathway to a successful future".

Unfortunately, based on feedback from Local Government, this is not the current experience for all students in the regions which impacts beyond the individual, onto their families and the wider community.

WALGA recommends that this section states the intended duration of the Strategy and clearly identify the issues that the Strategy seeks to address. This will create an essential benchmark for improvement and better define the scope and intent of the Strategy.

The Strategy acknowledges the diversity of regional WA, including identifying the regions within WA and the number of schools and students in each, but does not provide regional profiles or regional specific goals or actions. As currently drafted, this results in a homogenous approach that does not address the local issues schools and their communities are facing. The inclusion of regional profiles, and the use of these profiles, will assist in developing place-based actions and goals.

Recommendation 1: That the Strategy clearly state the duration of the Strategy and the regional education issues the Strategy seeks to address.

Recommendation 2: That the Strategy include regional education profiles and develop place-based actions and goals.

Strategy Pillars

The Strategy sets out current initiatives and new opportunities to deliver the future direction of public school education in regional settings through four pillars:

1. Build the capability of our regional workforce
2. Expand curriculum delivery
3. Strengthen support for student wellbeing
4. Develop partnerships to create opportunity.

The four pillars provide a good framework for the Strategy and align to Local Governments broad understanding of the critical issues that need to be addressed. This section of the Strategy is expressed as high level statements of intent without reference to data, analysis of current settings or clear and measurable outcomes or actions. Without these elements the Strategy does not clearly articulate the actions and measurables by which the document can be implemented and evaluated.

Under only one of the pillars is there any mention of additional funding. For the Strategy to be effectively implemented, appropriate levels of resourcing is essential.

The submissions from the Great Southern and Central County Zones further consider issues as they impact their communities under the four pillars, including access to technology, professional development and support for students with additional needs.

Recommendation 3: That the Strategy further develop the content and data under the four pillars to clearly articulate Strategy actions and outcomes.

Recommendation 4: That Government ensures the Strategy implementation is adequate funded to ensure that it will deliver actions, outcomes and effective evaluation.

Housing

The supply of Government Regional Officer Housing (GROH) is a critical enabling State Government lever to improve regional education. Demand for GROH housing significantly outstrips supply, resulting in Local Government intervention to ensure delivery of these essential services. WALGA is aware of many situations in which Local Governments have been requested to provide housing for teachers through existing stock or capital investment.

Supply of housing falls outside of Local Government responsibilities but where possible they do so to ensure the viability of their communities. In cases where housing has not been available through the private market, teachers are travelling over 120km a day between hotels and the schools they work in.

Failure to supply housing only further disincentivises teachers from accepting regional positions and places upward pressure on local rental markets. WALGA is working with the Department of Communities to address the urgent need for increased housing stock and urges the Department of Education to consider the impact of GROH supply within the Strategy.

Recommendation 5: The Strategy should address the urgent issue of undersupply of Government Regional Officer Housing.

Whole of Government response

Inequalities in access to local, high quality, public education has immediate as well as long term impacts on students and the wider community. These economic and social impacts are felt by Local

Governments as the tier of government closest to community. Impacts include, but are not limited to:

- Increased workforce attraction and retention challenges, which hinder economic growth.
- Exacerbating social-economic inequalities as families with means to afford private education, or relocate for better education options, leave regional communities.
- Contributing to population decline, and skewed demographics, with underrepresentation of school aged children and families, impairing the sustainability of regional towns.
- Reduced viability of regional business, sporting and recreational clubs, where large cohorts of children are not resident in the community.
- Family relationships, and community connectedness challenges, with implications for mental health and wellbeing of families and their children and community services.
- Cohorts of young people disengaged with mainstream education underachieving academically and lifetime impacts such as well-being, interaction with the justice system and financial instability.

These are key issues that State Government is addressing through multiple other strategic documents including:

- [Youth Action Plan \(in development\)](#)
- [Western Australian Mental Health Promotion, Mental Illness, Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Plan 2018-2025](#)
- [Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy- Western Australia 2021-2029](#)
- [Foundations for a Stronger Tomorrow - State Infrastructure Strategy.](#)
- [Future State Accelerating Diversity WA](#)
- [Early Years Partnership](#)

The Strategy's measurable success will be reliant on intersections with a range of other State Government strategies and initiatives, therefore a whole of government approach is essential.

Recommendation 6: The Strategy should acknowledge the wider community implications of regional education challenges and build on existing strategic documents to create a whole of government approach.

Ongoing Local Government and community engagement

The Strategy needs to identify and address the local and region specific education needs of communities if it is going to be effective. Ongoing engagement with local communities, and Local Governments, will be essential. WALGA is committed to ensuring Local Governments are engaged and partners in State Government policy and decision making. Local Governments are a key local stakeholder, and ideally placed to deliver partnering opportunities.

Recommendation 7: The Strategy commit to ongoing place-based engagement with communities and Local Governments on the development and delivery of the Strategy.

Conclusion

WALGA encourages the Department of Education to consider the impact of the Strategy within the context of wider community issues and outcomes. WALGA strongly urges the Department of Education to continue to engage with the Local Government sector throughout the development of the Strategy and ensures appropriate levels of resourcing to underpin effective implementation.