

Submission to the consultation on the purpose of public education in South Australia

Social Ventures Australia

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Introduction

We welcome the opportunity to provide input to the South Australian Government's consultation on the purpose of public education.

Social Ventures Australia (SVA) is a not-for-profit organisation with the mission to alleviate disadvantage, towards an Australia where all people and communities thrive. We influence systems to deliver better social outcomes for people by learning what works in communities, helping organisations be more effective, sharing our perspectives, advocating for change and influencing systems.

Improving educational outcomes for students experiencing disadvantage has been a major focus for SVA since our founding twenty years ago, in recognition of its importance in improving outcomes across the life course. Over the past ten years, SVA has incubated two ventures with the goal of supporting teachers and school leaders as professionals:

- **The Connection** is a collaborative network initiative for education systems that was created by SVA in 2013. *The Connection* initiative began in a codesign process combining insights from both education stakeholders and practicing professionals in schools. *The Connection* supports and builds the capacity of school leadership teams in schools located in challenged communities to improve the outcomes of their students. *The Connection* builds a culture of collaboration to share expertise and knowledge based on network theory. The network is designed to assist school leaders in fast changing contexts to address common challenges together and then drive evidence-informed action in their schools collectively. It is designed to grow school site leadership capacity and accelerate impact across education systems. *The Connection* has operated in South Australia since 2015. We currently work with 13 schools as part of the Rural Remote Regional Small Schools initiative, and an active alumni group of 14 schools from previous cohorts.
- **Evidence for Learning** (E4L) is a non-profit education venture incubated by SVA. Established in 2015, E4L is committed to ensuring all children throughout Australia, regardless of background, make the best possible learning progress. E4L does this by improving the quality, availability and use of evidence in education and collaborating with education researchers, policy makers, systems leaders, educators, professional learning providers, philanthropists and the wider community. E4L holds the exclusive Australian licence to education research, assets and tools produced by the UK's Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and localises these for Australian educators. Over the last seven years, E4L has delivered over 400 professional learning events directly reaching over 12,000 early years and school educators. E4L has over 18,000 users, most of whom are educators, frequently accessing materials via the E4L website. In partnership with the South Australian Department for Education and independent evaluators, E4L has supported evaluation, program logic development and evidence scans of online tutoring in South Australia and a randomised control trial of the South Australian Department for Education's Thinking Maths initiative. E4L has also provided professional learning support for South Australian educators via E4L's national webinars, online workshops delivered in partnership with The Brown Collective and Catholic Education South Australia, and presentations at forums such as the South Australian Primary Principals Association conference.

In recent years, SVA has had an increasing focus on the early years, as a foundation for better future outcomes. In this domain, the **Restacking the Odds** initiative is particularly relevant to this consultation process. *Restacking the Odds* aims to drive equitable outcomes by ensuring that children

and families can access a combination of high-quality, evidence-informed, community-based services.¹ The initiative's unique approach uses data and evidence-based indicators to focus on *how* to work differently to improve outcomes for children, families and communities. The early years of school (defined as Reception through to Year 3) is one of the five platforms it investigates.

Our input to this consultation process is informed by our experience working on these and related initiatives. In summary, to achieve effective and equitable educational outcomes, we believe that educators must be prepared with the knowledge, skills and tools they will need to respond to the individual needs of students and communities, operating within a high-performing system.

Recognising the wide range of issues raised in the guidance material, our submission focusses on those areas where our past work has given us insight into one or more relevant issues. We have structured our response to align with the questions presented in the guidance material, and within each section have focussed on the elements in which we have particular experience. We have provided input to the following areas:

- 1. What should be the overriding purpose of public education in South Australia?
- 6. In preparing students to participate in the industries of the future, what is the role of: public education? business and industry? non-governmental organisations?
- 8. How can our education system be flexible enough to build on the strengths of individual students while ensuring all students receive a high-quality education experience?
- 9. What research and experiences from other places can South Australia learn from?
- 10. Is there any change in the skills, tools and support our staff need to apply their profession for the benefit of each student?
- 11. How would you or your organisation like to be involved in any future opportunities for discussions about public education in South Australia?

While we have endeavoured to keep our responses concise, we would be pleased to provide further information about any of the matters discussed here.

¹ The initiative is a collaboration between the Centre for Community Child Health (Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI)), Social Ventures Australia (SVA) and Bain & Company.

1. What should be the overriding purpose of public education in South Australia?

SVA shares the vision, articulated in the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration, of an Australian education system that encourages and supports every student to be the very best they can be, no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenges they may face.² The overriding purpose of public education in South Australia should be to fulfil this vision for South Australian students.

Presently Australian children don't have an equal opportunity to access a high-quality education, with children from disadvantaged backgrounds likely to start behind and be at high risk of falling further behind. An excellent and equitable approach to education requires ensuring that home, community, and formal education environments all support learning. It means harnessing the drivers for improving education outcomes, particularly by supporting effective teaching, from early childhood education, through formal schooling and in the school-to-work transition (including further education). It also means that the overall system – together with the home and community, and formal education environments – supports the learning needs of different cohorts of students.

Further detail about our vision for education, including our evidence-based analysis of the drivers of better education outcomes, can be found in SVA's Education Perspective Paper,³ as well as our supplementary Perspective Papers on three specific cohorts: children in out-of-home care;⁴ children disengaged from education;⁵ and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.⁶

SVA has a vision of a reconciled Australia, in which substantive rights and opportunities are guaranteed for all Australians. We accept the generous invitation in the Uluru Statement from the Heart to walk with First Nations people in a movement of the Australian people for a better future. We believe that the principles of First Nations self-determination and self-governance should be a focus of all systems, including the South Australian public education system.

² Education Council, [Alice Springs \(Mparntwe\) Education Declaration](#), Education Council, 2019

³ Social Ventures Australia (SVA), [Education Perspective Paper \[PDF\]](#), SVA, 2016

⁴ SVA, [Education Perspective Paper: Children in out of home care \[PDF\]](#), SVA, 2019

⁵ SVA, [Education Perspective Paper: Children disengaged from education \[PDF\]](#), SVA, 2019

⁶ SVA, [Education Perspective Paper: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children \[PDF\]](#), SVA, 2019

6. In preparing students to participate in the industries of the future, what is the role of (a) public education (b) business and industry (c) non-governmental organisations?

Our experience working in South Australia and elsewhere has shown us the potential of partnerships between education systems and external organisations to improve educational outcomes for students, including preparation for the workforce. As noted above, we believe that achieving great education outcomes requires the involvement of the broader community as well as education systems.

We understand that not all communities have equal access to the resources and social capital that enable these partnerships. Some schools have limited capacity to offer opportunities and experiences to inspire, equip and inform students' aspirations for both future work and life options. Targeted sector partnerships with educators can alleviate the impact of these issues, and also share some responsibility to ensure education and work skills are aligned so that students have the skills and competencies to be resilient and adaptable in a fast-changing world.

The Connection's work in South Australia provides several examples of these partnerships:

- SAMSUNG Australia's support for *The Connection* has brought significant investment in resources to each participating school to utilise and create STEM learning opportunities. It included hardware technology, as well as expanding opportunities for rural South Australian students to travel and both ground and broaden their perspectives on a range of issues, such as STEM career choices.
- Oracle has provided opportunities that engage students in exploring career options outside their known sphere of influence and immediate experience, for example by providing access to accomplished STEM professionals. Stirling North Primary School in Port Augusta were involved and featured in a recorded Let's Chat series where students interviewed Oracle STEM professionals about their work and careers in STEM.
- Non-government organisations also provide partnership to enrich resources to address target issues. SVA, Australian Schools Plus, The Smith Family and others add to the resource base for school sites and educators in tailored ways to alleviate the demographic inequity in opportunity and support educators to grow education outcomes. Via *The Connection*, Schools Plus has supported Jevois Primary School to build an interactive play based and designed learning area in the school outdoor area to enhance curriculum offerings.
- Food Ladder is a not for profit providing operational greenhouses to encourage food gardening and first hand food cultivation and nutrition learning in community. Their partnership with Ungarra Primary School and Cowell Area School were recently highlighted in social media and on ABC radio.

These additional resources and tailored strategic responses can help to level the playing field of opportunity in future work.

8. How can our education system be flexible enough to build on the strengths of individual students while ensuring all students receive a high-quality education experience?

Investing in educational leadership quality through capacity building is an important leverage point in the education system. High quality leaders can enable or disable high quality teaching and learning through the daily decisions and choices they make for and with their teams in their work. Quality leaders at the school and district level are best placed to balance the overarching importance of equitable access to quality education, with the needs and strengths of the students and communities that they work with daily.

We know that leaders in the field are instrumental in providing strategic support to their teams of educators, that then directly impacts the direct experience of the student in their learning.

Effective school and site leaders need an authorising environment that provides shared accountability for impact in a fast changing context. The work of *The Connection* demonstrates that the opportunity to collaborate in structured networks can provide an authorising environment with inbuilt collective accountability, and where site leaders use their collective expertise to translate high quality teaching actions into practices that are responsive to the needs of their students.⁷

Further information about the potential for collaborative networks is provided in Section 10 below.

We also know from the national and international evidence base on education, such as that found in E4L's Teaching & Learning Toolkit, that high-quality teaching and learning approaches benefit all children and young people and can have an even greater impact on children and young people experiencing disadvantage and lower prior achievers.⁸ Education systems should focus on high-quality teaching and learning practices that support all children and young people. Teachers and school leaders should be supported to use high-quality evidence to inform their decision making, which will enable them to adopt and adapt the most impactful approaches to meet the needs and strengths of children and young people.

With high-quality teaching and learning practices in place, the need for extra support for children and young people should reduce. However, sometimes, some children will need targeted small-group or one-to-one support. We know that high-quality targeted support can support these children to catch up with their peers.⁹ Tutoring, for example, is one approach that can have up to an average of five months' impact on learning outcomes.¹⁰

Research to date from *Restacking the Odds* has shown that using evidence-based lead indicators for tracking education strategies can reveal otherwise hidden gaps in services.¹¹ Mapping and understanding these gaps can help educators and other practitioners better address the needs of individuals and communities.

⁷ A Singhania, N Hard and T Bentley, *Unleashing the power of the collective in education: the impact evaluation of SVA Bright Spots Schools Connection*, RMIT University, 2020

⁸ Evidence for Learning (E4L), *Teaching & Learning Toolkit*, E4L website, n.d., accessed March 2023

⁹ E4L's evidence-based Guidance Reports on literacy and mathematics summarise the evidence on providing high-quality targeted support. See E4L, *Guidance Reports*, E4L website, E4L website, n.d., accessed March 2023

¹⁰ E4L's Teaching and Learning Toolkit contains evidence on one to one tuition and small group tuition. See E4L, *One to one tuition*, E4L website, n.d., accessed March 2023; E4L, *Small group tuition*, E4L website, n.d., accessed March 2023

¹¹ Centre for Community Child Health, *Restacking the odds (RSTO)*, CCCH website, n.d., accessed March 2023

9. What research and experiences from other places can South Australia learn from?

There is a growing international body of research, case studies and evidence about the value of collaborative leadership within education systems supported by networked design, including the work of *The Connection* in South Australia and elsewhere. We would like to draw your attention to the following material, and would be happy to provide further detail:

- Reports by The Centre for Universal Education at Brookings Institution and The Education Commission cover research about meso-level networks within systems of education that play an intermediary role between school sites at the micro-level, and government policy at the macro-level. They explore how such networks play a pivotal role in scaling the kind of deep change required to achieve system-wide transformation.¹²
- Education expert Michael Fullan identifies ‘social intelligence’ as a lever of school system success. Social intelligence refers to collaboration and connected networks of shared and mobilised expertise and knowledge. His recent work discusses approaches to embedding collaboration into the life and culture of schools and systems, with educators supporting each other to tackle the hard work together collaboratively within and beyond the school.¹³ *The Connection* SVA model is used as an example of such an approach.
- The United Nations Transforming Education summit in 2022 considered two publications on education leadership: *Education reimaged: leadership for a new era* and *Education reimaged: leadership for transformation: leading into the emerging future*.¹⁴ These papers argue that new frames and systems of education leadership across the globe are needed to navigate unprecedented challenges. The reports concluded that education leaders need to grow and develop together, to enhance and bolster the collective capacity of the education system and profession to flourish in this time of uncertainty. The reports include a comprehensive series of case studies of collaborative and networked models from across the world, including *The Connection’s* work in Australia.
- The opportunity to build effective and functional collaborative system networks where impact can be measured and tracked is based on the principles and evidence of network science. Professor Alan Daly from the University of California has led important work globally in this field for over a decade. His work in education leadership is summarised succinctly in the article *Rethinking Social Networks for Equity, Excellence and Flourishing*.¹⁵ It provides insights and signposts to support effective network design for impact and how it can be tracked and measured.

In the area of education evidence, South Australia could learn from England’s Department for Education’s experience with funding an independent evidence institute, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), to foster an evidence-informed culture across the education system. This kind of stewardship of education evidence could involve, for example, investing in rigorous research trials, such as randomised control trials, in areas of priority for educators, and the use of sensitive measures of student progress in key outcomes.¹⁶ It could also involve:

- Supporting capability-building related to the use of evidence to inform practice (see below)

¹² D Istance, A Paniagua, R Winthrop and L Ziegler, *Learning to leapfrog: innovative pedagogies to transform education: summary findings: policy brief*, Center for Universal Education at Brookings, 2019; Education Commission, *Transforming the education workforce: learning teams for a learning generation*, Education Commission, 2020

¹³ M Fullan, *The right drivers for whole systems success*. CSE Leading Education Series, Centre for Strategic Education, 2021
¹⁴ Centre for Strategic Education (CSE), *Education reimaged: Leadership for transformation: leading into the emerging future*, CSE, 2022; CSE, *Education reimaged: Leadership for a new era*, CSE, 2022

¹⁵ A Daly and J Brooks, ‘Rethinking social networks for equity, excellence and flourishing’, *SVA Quarterly*, 24 March 2022.

¹⁶ For a description of how the Education Endowment Foundation approaches rigorous evaluation, see Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), *Process and people: our approach to evaluation*, EEF website, n.d., accessed March 2023.

- Implementing policy responses to encourage schools, early learning settings and professional learning providers to use evidence to inform their decision-making (e.g. schools needing to demonstrate what evidence they are using to inform the spend of their Pupil Premium funding in England, and policy frameworks in England are independently reviewed to ensure they are underpinned by robust evidence)¹⁷
- Staying connected to the global education evidence ecosystem through partners and providers. *Evidence for Learning's* ongoing partnership with the UK's EEF provides one mechanism for such a connection.

The experience of *Restacking the Odds* in identifying evidence-based quality indicators for the early years of school may also be of interest and relevance to the South Australian education system. These indicators are tied to school processes (i.e. process indicators at the classroom, student or lesson level that contribute to the achievement of high-quality outcomes) and teaching staff competencies (i.e. provider indicators).¹⁸

The identification of evidence-based indicators provides a potential framework to guide quality in schools. Populating the indicators gives practitioners data to better understand performance and select quality improvement initiatives. Embedding lead indicators of quality system has potential to elicit an array of benefits including:

- At the school/classroom level for continuous improvement, including early intervention.
- At the state or system level to inform decisions on resourcing and support for schools and at the regional level to create learning collaboratives to drive systemic change in response to local context.
- Over time, to track how school processes are impacting student outcomes and inform policy responses at the population level.

¹⁷ For a description of how Pupil Premium funding and strategy development in schools in England is linked to the best evidence, see EEF, [Using your pupil premium funding effectively](#), EEF website, n.d., accessed March 2023. For an overview of the EEF's evidence guardianship work to ensure that that policy frameworks on teacher development are underpinned by robust evidence, see EEF, [Evidence guardianship](#), EEF website, n.d., accessed March 2023

¹⁸ For the full set of indicators and further details on the methodology and findings, see C Molloy, R Beatson, S Cawley, C Harrop, S Goldfeld and N Perini, [Restacking the odds – communication summary: the early years of school: an evidence-based review of indicators to assess quality](#) [PDF], MCRI, SVA and Bain & Company, 2020. The full technical report is currently being peer reviewed and will be published soon.

10. Is there any change in the skills, tools and support our staff need to apply their profession for the benefit of each student?

SVA’s experience with *The Connection* and *Evidence for Learning* has highlighted for us that teachers and school leaders can benefit from two key supports that will help them to learn and improve their practice:

- Support to effectively collaborate with peers within and beyond their school
- Support to build, share and use evidence effectively

Supporting educators through these two approaches will help provide them with the skills and tools they need to meet current students’ needs, as well as the flexibility to respond to future needs arising in a rapidly changing and complex environment.

Collaborative network design

Education in the current era is a collective responsibility and requires deep collaborative effort. Education staff need more systemic and supportive ways to learn together and collaborate effectively and efficiently, to both share and develop their expertise and knowledge informing their practices. The growing complexities facing education systems in teaching and learning practice is a shared concern. Responding to complexity requires the application of collective expertise and knowledge in new ways.

Learning from the work in *The Connection*, SVA proposes that embedding collaborative network design in education systems is a key tool for enabling this learning. It can also contribute to building a collaborative culture within and across school sites and locations, which may support improved student learning outcomes.

Effective collaboration is delivered in networks to support education staff. In the experience of SVA’s work in *The Connection*, successful collaboration is based on a combination of four characteristics and four conditions, as shown in the table below. Further information on these characteristics and conditions can be found in the 2020 evaluation of *The Connection*.¹⁹

Characteristics	Conditions
1. Shared moral purpose across the diverse group of actors	1. An explicit and shared improvement agenda
2. A culture of trust and safe environment	2. Access to resources, including infrastructure, human and financial
3. Collective accountability for shared success and impact	3. Close integration between system policy priority areas and network priorities
4. Willingness to learn, share and exchange expertise by inclusive participation and structured inquiry	4. Active, strategic alignment between the system and networks planning and accountability frameworks

We know that there is significant education expertise already within the education system, but it is often isolated in individuals or single schools. This expertise is a largely untapped asset that systems can use to improve practice more widely. Collective expertise and knowledge is generated by education staff collaborating through networks designed for amplifying impact. It is an important supportive strategy for education staff tackling complexity. Networks can also be designed to support educators facing specific challenges and opportunities, such as those working in rural, remote and

¹⁹ Singhanian et al, *Unleashing the power of the collective in education: the impact evaluation of SVA Bright Spots Schools Connection*

regional education settings; working with First Nations students and communities; and working in domains such as transitions from early years education to school.

Education staff have reported increased professional confidence, capacity, connection and support when working collaboratively.²⁰ This is particularly important for leaders in rural and regional school locations where isolation can be further limiting.²¹

Collaboration, when effectively embedded in a system, provides an authorising environment to share responsibility and act together with connected purpose and alignment. It has potential to build leadership capacity and shared accountability, and foster action that is responsive to the local context and tailored for learner cohort needs.

Building a culture of effective collaboration requires intentional action in an authorising environment at all levels of the education system. It is not enough to simply encourage collaboration without putting the right structures and incentives in place. The South Australian education system could be repositioned to be more conducive to collaborative action, building on existing work by *The Connection* within South Australia.

Education evidence

Educators, educational leaders, and those who support them, need the capability to use evidence to inform their decision making about how to improve learning outcomes for students. Educators need to use rigorous, relevant and accessible evidence to inform their practice. Educational leaders need to use high-quality evidence to inform their annual improvement planning and decision making. This involves access to rigorous, relevant and accessible summaries of the latest research evidence relevant to the South Australian context and the capacity and capability to put it into practice through professional learning and other in-school supports, including the capability to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate improvement strategies in schools and early learning settings.

We know from *Evidence for Learning's* research investigation on *Getting Evidence Moving in Schools* that the work of using evidence to inform practice is complex, and it requires deliberate effort and multiple stages and actors.²² Professional learning providers and other supports can assist schools in putting evidence into practice to improve teaching and learning. Systems like South Australia should consider how to facilitate school-based evidence mobilisation enablers such as guidance in finding relevant, high-quality research; guidance in adapting evidence to the school or classroom; access to external expertise of professional learning providers; support from and discussion with colleagues related to rigorous evidence; support from school leaders for putting evidence into practice; and having regular, job-embedded meeting time to use evidence.²³

²⁰ Singhania et al, *Unleashing the power of the collective in education: the impact evaluation of SVA Bright Spots Schools Connection*. See also 2021 and 2022 Progress Reports of the Connection previously provided to the SA Department for Education.

²¹ Singhania et al, *Unleashing the power of the collective in education: the impact evaluation of SVA Bright Spots Schools Connection*

²² E4L's Getting Evidence Moving in Schools research and professional learning project ran from 2019-2022. See E4L, *Getting Evidence Moving in Schools (GEMS)*, E4L website, n.d., accessed March 2023

²³ These are the most common enablers of evidence mobilisation in schools from the *Getting Evidence Moving in Schools* research investigation. See E4L, *Getting Evidence Moving in Schools (GEMS)*

11. How would you or your organisation like to be involved in any future opportunities for discussions about public education in South Australia?

Since 2015, 28 South Australian schools have joined 44 schools from NSW and Victoria to participate in multiple year engagements in the national networked cohort *The Connection* (formerly Bright Spots Schools Connection), co-funded by government and philanthropy. There have been multiple assessments of the program, including annual progress reports on outcomes as well as two larger-scale evaluations.²⁴ The work concluded that networked system-wide school improvement is a crucial and collaborative responsibility of teachers, school leaders and systems leaders.²⁵

SVA would welcome the opportunity to discuss the broader application of this work within the South Australian context, building on past investments. We have recently provided an in-confidence 2022 progress report on recent work in South Australia to the Department for Education, which would further inform this discussion.

As part of an ongoing partnership, we could provide particular expertise in the areas of leadership capacity building; utilising collaboration and network design; mobilising evidence informed practice and early years education. As noted above, we can share insights with a joint focus on both education equity and excellence. The SVA team can also share information and broker relationships with key international and national researchers and practitioners.

In relation to the generation, translation and use of evidence to support both education equity and excellence, SVA would welcome the opportunity to continue to support South Australia's work via *Evidence for Learning's* evaluation, evidence synthesis and evidence mobilisation services, including through existing relationships and projects with Orbis.

²⁴ Singhanian et al, *Unleashing the power of the collective in education: the impact evaluation of SVA Bright Spots Schools Connection*; Australian Council of Education Research (ACER), *Evaluation of the Bright Spots Schools Connection final report*, ACER, 2018

²⁵ Singhanian et al, *Unleashing the power of the collective in education: the impact evaluation of SVA Bright Spots Schools Connection*