

# Where a student lives matters: Young people in remote communities missing out

*Educational Opportunity 2020* is the first major study to assess performance against the our nationally agreed educational goals that are set out in the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration. The report examines young people's progress at four key educational milestones, from the early years through to young adulthood. It looks not only at academic achievement, but the extent to which our education system is supporting young Australians to be confident and creative, and actively engaged in their communities and the world.

The report shows that despite Australia's commitment to equity and opportunity for all, a student's geographic location, and whether they live in a city, regional or remote area matters. There are entrenched patterns of educational opportunity and achievement – with students in remote areas more often missing out.

## Key findings

- Children in city and regional areas are more often developmentally ready for school than those in very remote communities. 79.2 per cent of children in cities are developmentally on track at school entry, while only 54.5 per cent of children in very remote areas meet this benchmark.
- In the middle years, there are strong associations between location and reading and numeracy skills. 78.5 per cent of Year 7 students living in Australia's major cities are above the national minimum standard in both skills, compared to 69.9 per cent in regional areas, 64.6 per cent in outer regional areas and less than half (45 per cent) living in remote or very remote parts of the country.
- In the senior years, the likelihood of completing Year 12 falls with level of remoteness. Just over 85 per cent of 19-year-olds living in Australia's major cities have completed a Year 12 or equivalent qualification, compared to around 70-72 per cent in inner and outer regional areas, 65 per cent in remote Australia and fewer than one in two (48.4 per cent) living in very remote parts of the country.
- Differences in the proportions of 19-year-olds obtaining an ATAR also emerge according to location. While around 68 per cent of those living in metropolitan areas had obtained an ATAR, this fell to 49.6 per cent of those in provincial areas, and only 31.9 per cent of students in remote parts of the country.
- Across the country approximately 70 per cent of 24 year-old Australians were engaged in full-time employment, education or training. Young adults in city areas were more likely to be engaged full-time (72.8 per cent) than those in outer regional and remote areas (around 62-63 per cent) and very remote areas (52.3 per cent).
- By age 24, around 73 per cent of Australians have gained a post-school qualification, or are working towards one. While 76.2 per cent of young people in major cities have met this milestone, the figure falls to 56 per cent and 42.8 per cent respectively in remote, and very remote areas. Young people living outside of major cities are also much less likely to have or be pursuing university degrees (13-23 per cent compared with 47.2 per cent of city residents).

## Proportion of children and young people in different locations that are succeeding on indicators of educational opportunity (%)

	Successful lifelong learners		Creative and confident individuals		Active and informed citizens	
<b>Entry to school</b>	On track on all key domains	On track in literacy and numeracy	On track in social competence	On track in emotional maturity	On track in responsibility and respect & prosocial and helping behaviour	
Major city	79.2%	85.8%	76.6%	77.9%	85.6%	
Inner regional	77.7%	82.8%	75.1%	76.1%	85.6%	
Outer regional	75.4%	80.4%	73.2%	74.1%	84.0%	
Remote	73.4%	78.5%	73.0%	75.4%	83.8%	
Very remote	54.5%	58.6%	57.6%	61.7%	72.9%	
<b>Middle school years</b>	Above NMS in Reading and Numeracy	At or above international benchmark in science	Exhibits behaviours indicative of creativity	Possesses strong self-efficacy or belief in self	Informed about current events and global issues	Believes in importance of civic activities to citizenship
Major city	78.5%	70% (Metro)	73.9% (Metro)	68.2% (Metro)	63.7% (Metro)	63.5% (Metro)
Inner regional	69.9%	65% (Provincial)	71.1% (Non-metro)	66.1% (Non-metro)	66.2% (Regional)	62.5% (Regional)
Outer regional	64.6%				70.5% (Remote)	65.7% (Remote)
Remote/very remote	45.0%	46% (Remote)				
<b>Senior school years</b>	Attains Year 12 or equivalent certificate	At or above benchmark in math, science & reading	Strong creative problem solving skills	Possesses strong self-efficacy or belief in self	Informed about current events and global issues	Believes in importance of civic activities to citizenship
Major city	85.1%	74.3% (Metro)	66% (Metro)			67.4% (Metro)
Inner regional	72.0%	67.8% (Provincial)	60% (Provincial)			58.8% (Provincial)
Outer regional	70.9%					62.6% (Remote)
Remote	65.0%	49.0% (Remote)	49% (Remote)			
Very remote	48.4%					
<b>Early adulthood</b>	Fully engaged in work, education or training	Gained or studying post-school qualification	Adaptable to change and open to new ideas	Confident in self and the future	Keeps informed about the world	Active in the community
Major city	72.8%	76.2%				
Inner regional	62.0%	64.5%				
Outer regional	63.0%	61.0%				
Remote	63.4%	56.0%				
Very remote	52.3%	42.8%				

**Source:** Lamb et al, Educational Opportunity in Australia 2020

**Note:** readers should take caution when comparing results of different indicators as measures used for location vary (see main report for more detail). In addition, a grey cell indicates data is not available for that measure.

## What does this mean?

While many students from all locations succeed educationally, the research shows a clear and persistent pattern – students in regional and remote locations are more likely to be missing out on key indicators of educational opportunity. The gaps between students in major cities and remote and very remote areas are unacceptably high, particularly in relation to successful lifelong learner outcomes. These differences can limit the opportunities and choices available to young people in adulthood and are connected to poorer health and lower quality of life (Zajacova & Lawrence, 2018). Missing out on important educational opportunities also has broader ramifications, costing governments and communities billions of dollars (Lamb & Huo, 2017).

The educational challenges faced in regional and remote communities affect millions of Australians. There are more than two million Australians under the age of 24 living outside of major cities, including around 160,000 who live in remote or very remote areas (PHIDU, 2020). In addition, differences in educational opportunities between metro and regional or remote locations disproportionately impact Indigenous Australians. Around 62 per cent of Indigenous Australians under the age of 24 live outside of major cities and 17 per cent live in remote or very remote locations, compared to around 27 per cent and 2 per cent of all Australians aged 0-24 (PHIDU, 2020).

The gaps in outcomes point to policy and system failures. Australia is yet to overcome the enormous challenge of providing quality education to those outside urban centres. The student population outside of major cities is spread across a vast continent with the sixth lowest population density in the world, which raises significant challenges in the equitable provision of educational opportunities (UN, 2019). Compared to schools in metropolitan areas, schools in rural communities face greater teacher shortages, have worse access to instructional materials, and are often unable to offer the same breadth of academic curriculum (Perry, 2018).

Overcoming the educational challenges faced in regional and remote areas requires a comprehensive suite of policies from early childhood through to the early adult years. Part of the equation is getting resources to the areas and schools that need it most. That's about funding as well as broader incentives and supports to address teacher shortages and lift teaching and leadership capability. In addition, much more needs to be done to improve rates of attainment of Year 12 or equivalent qualifications and provide pathways to post-school studies in regional and remote areas. This is critical to meeting our national goals in education as well as ensuring all young people, regardless of where they grow up, have access to the same opportunities in adulthood.

## References

Lamb, S., and Huo, S., (2017) Counting the costs of lost opportunity in Australian education. Mitchell Institute report No. 02/2017. Mitchell Institute, Melbourne.

Perry, L. (2018) Educational inequality. How unequal? Insights on inequality. Committee for Economic Development of Australia.

Public Health Information Development Unit (PHIDU) (2020) Social Health Atlas of Australia Remoteness in Australia, 2020.

United Nations (UN) (2019) World Population Prospects 2019, population density by region, subregion and country. Online Edition. Rev. 1. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division.

Zajacova, A., and Lawrence, E.M., (2018) The Relationship Between Education and Health: Reducing Disparities Through a Contextual Approach. Annual Review of Public Health Vol29, pp 273-389.

## What we measured

**Milestone 1 – Early years** looked at which children were developmentally ready at the point of entry to school, across all five domains of the Australian Early Development Census as well as their skills in the basic literacy and numeracy subdomain. To understand early creativity and confidence the report uses the AEDC to assess development in social competence and emotional maturity. AEDC data on responsibility and respect as well as prosocial and helping behaviour is used to explore early indications of skills needed to be active and informed citizens.

**Milestone 2 – Middle years** used a range of data sources to look at Year 7 students' reading and numeracy, Year 8 students' achievement in science; and Year 6 students' proficiency in Information Communication Technology (NAPLAN, Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, NAP-ICT). It examined the proportion of 10 to 11 year old students reporting high levels of confidence and displaying various creative behaviours using data from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC). It also looked at civic knowledge, attitudes and skills in Year 6, using data from the National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship (NAP-CC).

**Milestone 3 – Senior school years** used the Census to examine what proportion of young people had attained a Year 12 or an equivalent qualification by the age of 19 and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data to look at achievement in reading, maths and science. It also examined proficiency in creative problem-solving, and confidence using data from PISA. Keeping informed about current events and belief in the importance of civic activities was explored using data from NAP-CC.

**Milestone 4 – Early adulthood** used the Census to look at engagement in full time work, training or study at age 24 and 29 as well as who had gained a post-school qualification. It also examined levels of self-reported creativity and confidence using the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY). The LSAY was also used to explore the extent to which young adults report being socially and politically active in their community and remaining informed about the world around them.

## More information

Educational opportunities in Australia 2020 was prepared by the Centre for International Research on Education Systems (CIREs) for the Mitchell Institute for Education and Health Policy – both at Victoria University.

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