



RURAL LEARNING ALLIANCES

Case Study – Nathalia Learning Community 2015

“A leading voice on rural education”



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RURAL LEARNING ALLIANCES:

Internationally, the policy direction of many countries (including Australia) has been changing in recent times with a growing emphasis on greater autonomy provided to local learning communities, and the growing development of partnerships of education organisations within these learning communities to provide a high quality education for their children and young people.

Many researchers indicate that children and young people within rural and remote communities are provided with environments that support them in developing a range of attributes at a higher level compared to their regional and urban peers. High levels of community participation; greater levels of resilience; stronger links between education, community, family and children and young people; and earlier involvement in leadership roles and positions of responsibility within their schools and broader community are all attributes which have been identified.

However, there are still a range of challenges that face rural and remote learning communities in providing high quality learning for their children and young people. These briefly include:

- the gap in student learning outcomes compared to their urban peers – especially in the higher levels of schooling, early years vulnerability, and engagement in the middle years;
- different pathways taken by young people after completing school with much lower uptake of Higher Education courses;
- the difficulty in recruiting and retaining high quality education leaders and educators to rural and remote communities;
- limited access to a breadth of learning options and programs, support services, public services (eg transport), and employment.

Within rural and remote communities across Victoria the concept of clustering has been seen as a valuable support strategy to support education leaders in addressing these challenges and improve learning outcomes for children and young people. Clustering has been a key strategy in many education initiatives over the past 30 years including initiatives such as Disadvantaged Schools, Country Areas, Telematics, Resource Agreement 3, and Shared Specialists.

The introduction of concepts such as Schools of the Future, and Self Managing Schools, during the 1990s where resources were allocated to individual education organisations, many of these cluster arrangements have decreased, and in many cases ceased.

In more recent times, however, there has been a growing interest amongst rural and remote communities to strengthen and reimagine the concept of clustering as a viable support approach for such learning communities, and this has been especially evident in areas such as LOTE provision, VCE provision, and Trade Training Centres.

The Rural Learning Alliances initiative was developed by the Country Education Partnership to support rural and remote education communities in establishing locally determined collaborative alliances (Rural Learning Alliances) to build on, and strengthen current and past cluster and co-operative arrangements. These Learning Alliances aim to be a more robust form of partnership, promoting a locally determined support approach (inclusive of early years, schooling and further education) while retaining the uniqueness of each partner, with a high focus on developing a “culture of improvement” that embraces collaborative leadership and challenges each partner to succeed.

Such a proposal has been based on the work of a number of individuals and organizations including David Hargreaves; National College of School Leadership in the UK; Michael Fullan and the Ontario Education region; Maggie Farrar, Robert Hill and Steve Munby from the Centre for Best Teaching in the UK; Knowledge Works initiatives within the US as well as the experiences from other states and countries who have utilized collaborative approaches as a key support strategy in enhancing and improving learning opportunities and outcomes for children and young people. (For example, “Collaborative Impact” initiative operating within the US; the “Collaborative Champion” initiatives within Canada; the “Leading Schools Alliances” operating within the UK; and the various cluster initiatives operating within other states of Australia).

From these experiences and learnings, CEP developed a support framework upon which a number of rural and remote education communities could be supported in forming locally determined collaborative partnerships to enhance and improve education provision for their whole community.



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Central to this framework are a number of key principles that each Learning Alliance are supported in embracing:

- Moral Responsibility for ALL Children and Young People within the Community - shared approach and structure to learning development and provision while acknowledging the uniqueness of each individual education organization;
- Act of Kindness - a shared "Culture for Improvement" to ensure all leaders, educators and learners succeed; builds the capacity of all educators across the Rural Learning Alliance and facilitates the use, and sharing of, teacher expertise and skills across the Rural Learning Alliance; and encourages the use of resources in a collaborative way across the Rural Learning Alliance;
- Action Research Focused - the utilisation of Action Research Teams as the core tool essential for successful outcomes, and provides a strong focus on the development of specific strategies for enhancing and improving teaching and learning, especially within identified areas of focus and curriculum need.

The Country Education Partnership has developed a range of support initiatives in supporting the development of the Rural Learning Alliance, and they have been developed based on best practice evident in other education jurisdictions and focus on five stages of development:

- Initiation and Focus – exploration of data, current state of play, and initial exploration of Learning Alliance potential;
- Learning Alliance Leadership Development – a structured leadership program for the Learning Alliance Leadership Team;
- Building the Learning Alliance – development of vision, objectives, values, key areas of focus, etc;
- Plan and Implement Learning Alliance Plan – development of a Learning Alliance Action Plan;
- Accountability and evaluation – review of the Learning Alliance and future planning.

The support mechanisms provided by CEP to enable the development of the Learning Alliances include:

- the provision of a brokerage role to support the development of Rural Learning Alliances inclusive of early years, schools and further education (where appropriate);
- the development of a professional development program to support Learning Alliance leadership teams to develop visions, objectives and approaches to support the development of a "culture of improvement" across the Learning Alliance;
- the development of a Collaborative Leadership program for the Learning Alliance leadership team;
- the provision of a coach to assist in the development of the Rural Learning Alliance;
- the opportunity to access professional development and learning from other jurisdictions including overseas leadership tours, visits by international education leaders with expertise within this area, and the sharing of learnings across the Rural Learning Alliances;
- the facilitation of an Action Research approach in the development of initiatives that would see improved teaching and learning focusing on a key curriculum area, that would then result in enhanced opportunities and outcomes for students within the Alliance.

During 2015, CEP supported four rural education communities in developing strategies and approaches that would see them move towards a Rural Learning Alliance – both the Department of Education and Training and the Rural Dioceses of the Catholic Education Office provided financial support to CEP to undertake this work.

The Rural Learning Alliances have been supported in developing a "Alliance Agreement" to provide a framework for their thinking, behavior and focus – each of the four Learning Alliances have developed such an agreement as a result of the support provided. An example of a Learning Alliance Agreement is attached.

The four Rural Learning Alliances supported included (in all but one Rural Learning Alliance education organisations from both catholic and government sectors have been involved):

- Far East Gippsland Learning Alliance;
- Karmai Learning Alliance, based around Korumburra;
- St Arnaud Learning Alliance;
- Nathalia Learning Community.

The following Case Studies provide an overview of the developments, activities, outcomes and impacts that each of the four Rural Learning Alliances has been able to achieve over the past couple of years.

It needs to be kept in mind, that some of these Learning Alliances have been involved in partnership activity for some time now, while others have only just begun their journey along the collaborative continuum and each education community has a story to tell.

As a result of this work throughout 2015, the Country Education Partnership has received numerous inquiries, and requests to support a number of other rural and remote learning communities in the development of collaborative approaches to support the ongoing development and provision of education within their communities.

CASE STUDY: NATHALIA

Nathalia Community:

Nathalia is located on the land of the Yorta Yorta and Bangarang People – the original owners of the land, and encompasses the rural communities of Barmah, Picola, Waaia, and Nathalia.

The Nathalia District has a population of 4300 with dairy farming, cropping, light manufacturing, grazing, health services and education the main industries.

The township of Nathalia is located on the banks of the Broken Creek situated approximately 43km North of Shepparton, midway between Echuca and Cobram on the Murray Valley Highway. The township population is approximately 1450. It is a community that is proud of its heritage with a thriving arts community, and a significant number of historic buildings.

The Barmah Forest National Park is located on the Murray River, and a short drive from Nathalia and is a very popular tourist destination. The Barmah township has a significant indigenous population and is the home for one of the longest living civilisations on earth.

The Nathalia community has seen a steady change in its demographics over recent times, with an increasing number transient families moving into the area and an increasing unemployment rate.

Nathalia Education Community:

The Nathalia Community is serviced by a number of education organisations that provide learning programs for the community. In summary these organisations include:

- Nathalia Secondary College;
- St Marys of the Angels Catholic Secondary College;
- St Francis Primary School;
- Nathalia Primary School;
- Barmah Kindergarten and Occasional Care Centre;
- Nathalia and District Pre School Centre.

The Nathalia Education Community services a geographic radius of approximately 40kms where the large percentage of students of the education community comes from. The exception to this is, with St Marys of the Angels Secondary College being a regional catholic secondary college; it attracts students from communities as far as 45 minutes bus travel away.

A significant number of students who attend the schools within Nathalia travel into Nathalia by school bus.

Due to its close location to Barmah, there are also a number of indigenous students who attend the Nathalia Learning Community schools.

The four schools that comprise the Nathalia Learning Community are located within an “education precinct” where the four school sites are within walking distance from one another with the pre school and early years services being close by. The Barmah Pre School is located a short 15 minute drive away.

The schools within the Nathalia Education Community have a total of 899 students from Foundation to Year 12.

	2005	2011	2015	Percentage Difference
Primary School Students	282	230	238	-16%
Secondary College Students	446	498	661	+48%

While there has been a slight decrease in the student population at a primary school level over the past ten years, there has been a slight increase in the number of primary students enrolled over the past five years. The student enrolment at a secondary school level has increased significantly over this time, and this is primarily due to the increased number of students who travel “into Nathalia” to attend the two secondary schools.

A unique feature of the Nathalia Learning Community is that all the children and young people of school age who live within the Nathalia community attend one of the four schools within Nathalia.

In 2015, the Nathalia education community recorded an Index of Community Socio Educational Advantage (ICSEA) of 968 – below the national average. A deeper look at their figures indicates that 41% of families within the Nathalia community are located within the “bottom quarter” of family background indicators – well above the national average of 25%.

Nathalia Learning Community

“Maximising Opportunities through Partnership”

The Nathalia Learning Community has been working as a cross sectoral partnership for some time now, and in recent times this partnership has strengthened to ensure that the learning that is developed and provided for students within this rural community provides a breadth of learning opportunities for every students needs and desires.

In the early days of its existence, the Nathalia Learning Community established a number of initiatives aimed at enhancing the education opportunities for their students. The focus of these initiatives centred on curriculum areas such as numeracy, literacy, the arts, as well as post compulsory learning. Mobile education resources, sharing of staff across schools, and pooling of resources were strategies utilised within these initiatives.

During the 1990s, the two secondary colleges developed a common VCE timetable, thus allowing students to access programs across the two schools, resulting in students having access to a broader range of VCE programs. However, for those students who were interested in undertaking vocational studies, they were required to travel to Shepparton to access such programs – only a small number of students participated in these programs due to travel and cost challenges.

While the specific initiatives developed across the Nathalia Learning Community, and the development of more options for VCE students, the leadership team of the Nathalia Learning Community in 2011 expressed a real desire to strengthen their partnership with a key focus on developing a “Culture of Improvement” across the whole Nathalia Learning Community to address the increasing challenges they were facing. Two key areas of focus included:

- Student performance especially across VCE, literacy and numeracy, (and across all measured year levels) where student learning outcomes across these areas were lower than their peers in other parts of Victoria, and in general were not improving;
- The low level of student motivation being identified amongst education organisations working with young people within Nathalia – a key area highlighted within the Student Opinion survey which showed that student motivation and learning confidence were within the bottom quartile of the Student Opinion survey results, especially at a secondary school level.

The result of these discussions was the subsequent involvement of the Nathalia Learning Community within the Country Education Partnerships (CEP) Rural Learning Alliance initiative. After a number of professional development forums facilitated by CEP, the Nathalia Learning Community established a stronger Learning Alliance underpinned by an agreement, which in summary entails:

Vision:

In the context of successful shared relationships education organisations (cross sector and cross age), the Nathalia Learning Community seeks to enhance education opportunities and improve student outcomes for all young people if Nathalia.

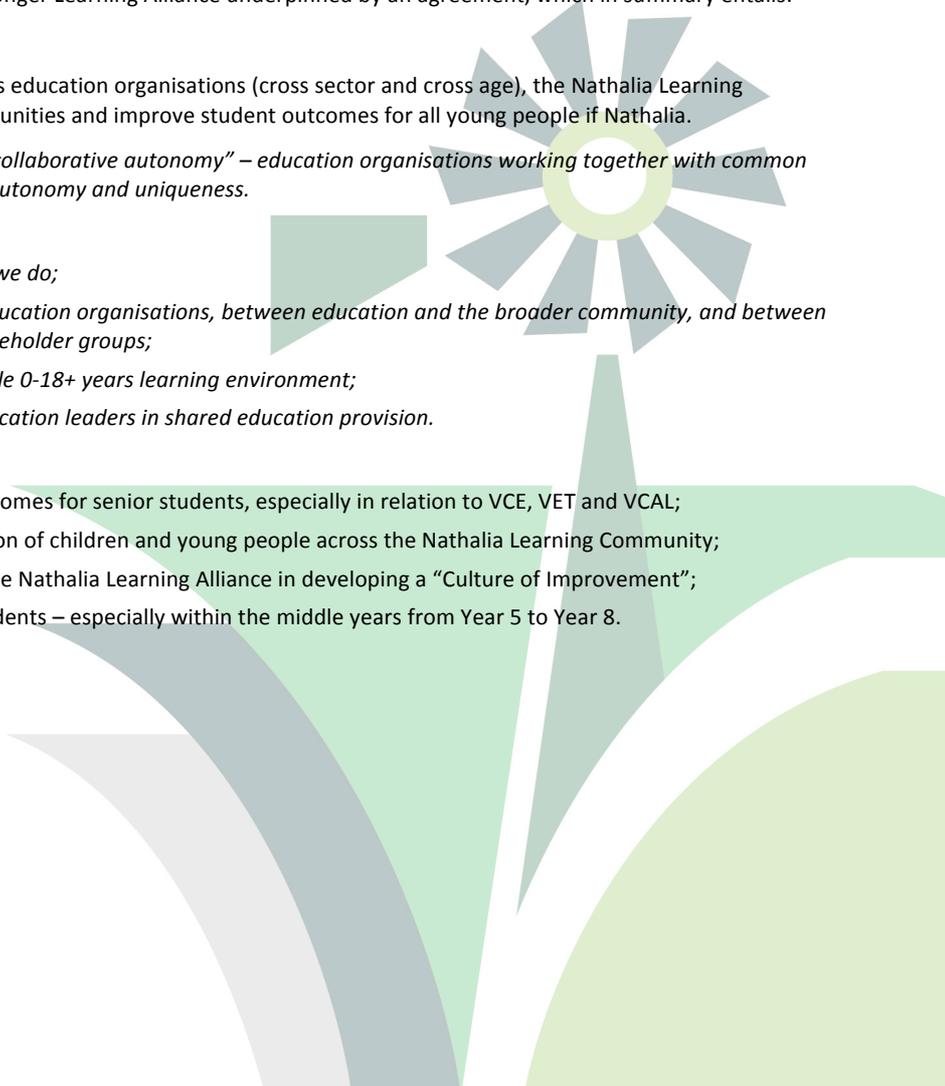
The Nathalia Learning Community believes in “collaborative autonomy” – education organisations working together with common aims and objectives while retaining a sense of autonomy and uniqueness.

The Nathalia Learning Community will:

- *Hold the students at the centre of all we do;*
- *Build strong relationships between education organisations, between education and the broader community, and between the Learning Community and key stakeholder groups;*
- *Build a strong, resilient and sustainable 0-18+ years learning environment;*
- *Develop and maintain a profile of education leaders in shared education provision.*

Key Focus Areas:

- Enhancing the opportunities and outcomes for senior students, especially in relation to VCE, VET and VCAL;
- Improve the aspirations and motivation of children and young people across the Nathalia Learning Community;
- Build the capacity of all staff across the Nathalia Learning Alliance in developing a “Culture of Improvement”;
- Improve the literacy outcomes of students – especially within the middle years from Year 5 to Year 8.



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Current Initiatives of the Nathalia Learning Community:

The Nathalia Learning Community has facilitated a number of education initiatives directed at achieving the alliances overall vision of enhancing student opportunities and improved learning outcomes. Many of these have had a impact on student learning, as well as build the capacity of all teachers within the Learning Community.

They have included:

- ***Branding:***

A key area of discussion within the education leadership group of the Nathalia Learning Community was the symbolic representation of the Learning Community to the wider education community and the general Nathalia community.

The development of a Nathalia Learning Community logo, that included the Nathalia Learning Community motto, was completed and is utilised in any promotion, activity or publication developed by the Learning Community. One significant example is that all staff (both teachers and support staff) from all the education organisations have nametags that carry the Nathalia Learning Community brand and also include the school in which they are based.

This has proven to be a very positive and powerful initiative amongst the Nathalia Learning Community.

- ***Post Compulsory Provision:***

The provision of a comprehensive VCE program, access to accessible vocational programs, and a quality VCAL program have been central to the discussion within the Nathalia Learning Community for some time, and in a sense has been the catalyst for the strengthening of the Learning Community.

While the two secondary schools established a common timetable for the provision of such programs during the 1990's, it wasn't until a couple of years ago that they began to plan and develop a comprehensive approach to their development and delivery. Since this time the two schools plan, develop and provide one VCE program for all students across the two secondary schools and students are able to attend classes in either school, as well as be taught by a teacher from either school – a task that is made easier due to the location of each school being 100 metres from each other.

The program is developed together to give students a breadth of offerings and the education leadership teams strategically plan the offerings and allocate/recruit staff on an annual basis.

Through the Trade Training Centre initiative, the Nathalia Learning Community has been able to develop an innovative approach to the provision of VET and VCAL programs based within their community – something they were not able to achieve prior to this initiative.

In partnership with a neighbouring rural school (St Augustine's, Kyabram) the Trade Training Centre gained resources and currently offer five course for student from the three schools – it is expected that a further course will operate in 2016 – Automotive, Building and Construction, Engineering, Hairdressing, Hospitality, and Electrical.

This has meant that students within the Nathalia community can access these programs locally and not have to travel to Shepparton to gain such programs.

- ***Nathalia Learning Community Data Analysis***

With the support of personnel within the Department of Education and Training, the Nathalia Learning Community developed a useful data analysis tool that was utilised to analyse relevant data sets across a Learning Community.

The principals have utilised this information in working with staff to develop a whole Learning Community approach to developing initiatives. One of the key outcomes of this tool was that individual education organisations could reflect on their own data in relation to the whole Learning Community data – surprisingly the data was very similar across all education organisations and provided a great foundation for ongoing focused discussions for the education leadership group.

- ***Staff Professional Capacity Development:***

The Nathalia Learning Community places a high priority on building the capacity of all staff within their alliance and as such has facilitated a number of high quality professional development activities and programs to enhance this capacity over the past four years.

The Learning Community ensures that any professional learning opportunity developed for staff is made available to all staff from within the Nathalia Learning Community.



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To support the provision of the professional learning programs, each of the Learning Communities organisations contribute an annual financial contribution to the Nathalia Learning Community so that such programs can be supported. In some cases, Learning Community School Governance bodies have also supported this approach through the allocation of scholarships to encourage staff involvement. The following is a brief overview of some of the Professional Learning provided.

- One of the key professional development programs supported by the Nathalia Learning Community over the past four years has been the involvement of staff in the CEP Overseas Education Leadership tour exploring the theme of “Developing a Culture of Improvement”. It is the intent of the Learning Community to support all members of the leadership teams to participate within the tour - a total of 12 education leaders from the Learning Community have participated thus far.

The school principals would argue strongly that this professional learning tour has been a real catalyst in strengthening the Nathalia Learning Community, and has also resulted in a number of high quality initiatives being developed.

- Another key professional learning strategy has been the support of whole of staff professional learning forums to provide the opportunity for all staff groups (both teaching and support staff) to be involved in high quality professional development. The Learning Community has taken the opportunity to engage people like Sir John Jones, Maggie Farrar, and George Otero to facilitate such days with their staff – the Learning Community has supported one of these forums each year.

These professional development days, locally held, have also been a key catalyst in strengthening the Learning Community, and have resulted in numerous teaching staff working across schools in developing student focused programs.

- A key tool that the Nathalia Learning Community has supported in recent time has been the organisations of “Learning Walks” for both teachers and parents. The Learning Community supports small groups of teachers and parents to spend time in a classroom of a high quality teacher, this having the opportunity to explore teaching and learning approaches, as well as be able to develop a relationship with such a quality educator to support their own development. Many Learning Walks have been held over the past eighteen months.

Parents also comment on how valuable such an initiative has been in assisting them to understand how great teaching and learning occurs, and explore how they can support their child’s learning outside the classroom.

- The Nathalia Learning Community facilitated the “High Reliability Literacy Teaching Practice” professional development program to be provided for a number of teaching staff across the Learning Community during 2015 as a strategy to address the low student learning outcomes within Literacy, especially within the middle years.
- Quality feedback provides a powerful learning environment for both teacher and students. To build a strong feedback culture within the Nathalia Learning Community, and to build on the work undertaken in 2014 and early 2015 (eg HRLTP and Learning Walks), Glenn Pearsall was engaged to work with groups of teachers across the Learning Community during the latter part of 2015 and will continue this support into 2016.
- Over the past couple of years, the Nathalia Learning Community has encouraged staff to work in cross school teams to address the learning needs and desires of particular student cohorts. One great example of this approach was the schools Early Years Teachers coming together to develop play based learning across the two primary schools. Under the leadership of a quality Early Years educator, the staff were involved in a range of professional learning discussions and forums to build their skills and knowledge in this area. Both primary schools have modified their teaching and learning approaches during 2015 to adopt a number of ideas and initiatives explored, with a special focus on play based learning.
- The Nathalia Learning Community also supported their middle leaders to participate within the Bastow Institute of Education Leadership Education “Bastow Changemakers” program during 2015.



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▪ *Student Programs;*

While the focus of the Nathalia Learning Community has centred on education provision at the senior end of schooling, and the building of capacity of all staff across the Learning Community (especially within literacy in recent times), there have been a number of specific initiatives that have been developed to enhance the education provision within the Nathalia district. Some of these include:

- Shared student centred literacy activities which, while focused on the two primary schools, also engages students from the secondary colleges through a mentoring role;
- Shared sporting programs – with the size of the two primary schools limiting their involvement in many sporting events, the two schools come together and support joint teams to participate in a range of sporting events outside their community. An exciting development that occurred in 2015 was the development of a Nathalia Primary School Football team that participates within the Shepparton competition over each weekend – children from both primary school communities are involved, thus allowing them to participate in such sporting opportunities that they wouldn't have gained otherwise.
- All schools within the Nathalia Learning Community participate in a range of community events as an "education community" – the Anzac celebrations are one example.

▪ *Early Years Provision;*

A couple of years ago the Nathalia Learning Alliance developed an Early Years Education Group involving the two primary schools, the two pre schools and the Early Years Centre, to explore ways in which they can provide an engaging and high quality learning and development program for children within their community.

This group has developed a range of activities including:

- The development of a "whole community" approach to transition from pre school into school which includes shared information, shared information sessions, and a shared transition program regardless of which school the children enrol;
- The provision of a number of workshops and forums for parents;

The discussions held within this group was the initial catalyst for the primary schools Early Years group to begin looking at play based learning within their two settings.

Impact of the Nathalia Learning Community:

The Nathalia Learning Community continues to have an enormous impact on the students of the Nathalia district. Students fully anticipate (as do their families, and the broader community) that they will share resources, expertise and facilities of the schools in the partnership and that this, by its very nature, enables them access to the best education available.

The Nathalia Learning Community offers more VCE subjects than many of the larger counterparts in regional centres; the Early Years students are getting the most dynamic learning environments; and other schools want to come and learn from its practice.

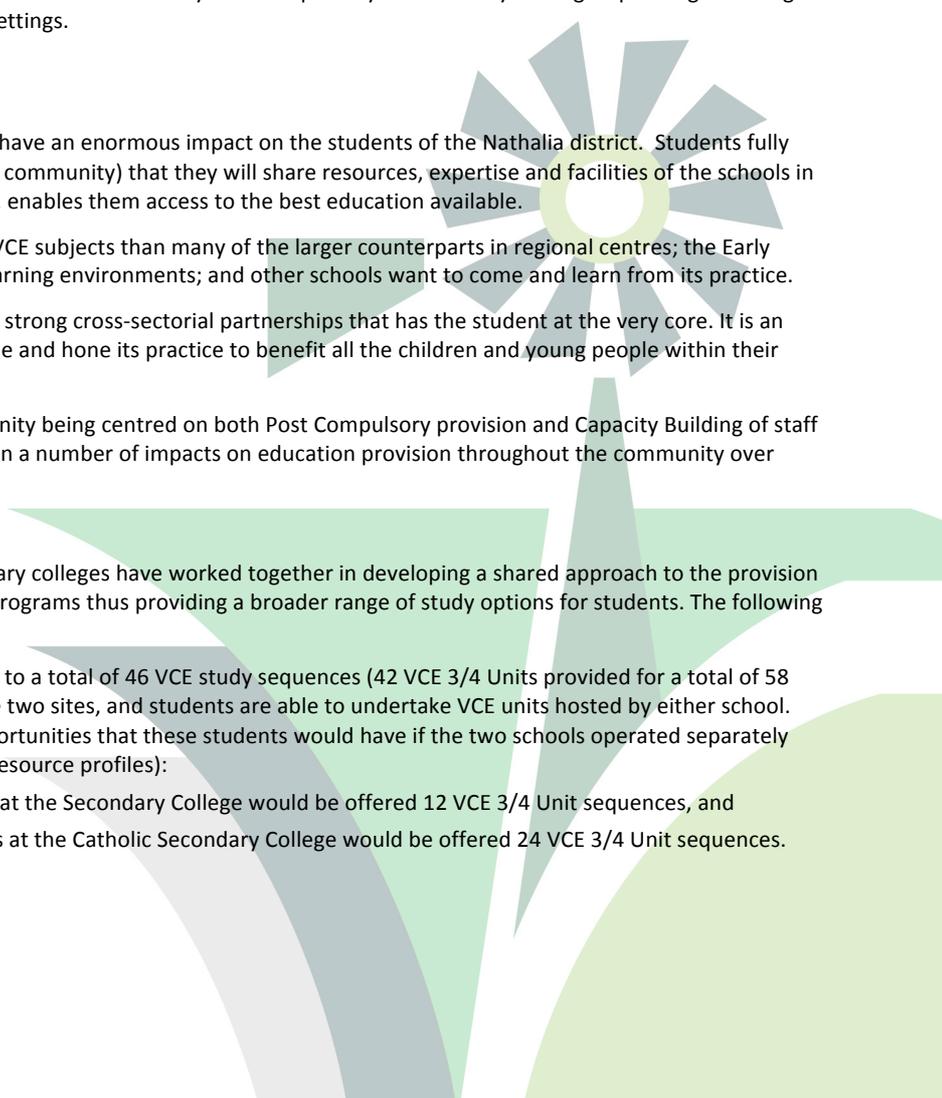
Nathalia Learning community is an alliance with strong cross-sectorial partnerships that has the student at the very core. It is an organisation that continues to develop, fine-tune and hone its practice to benefit all the children and young people within their community.

With the focus of the Nathalia Learning Community being centred on both Post Compulsory provision and Capacity Building of staff across the Learning Community, there have been a number of impacts on education provision throughout the community over recent times.

▪ *Post Compulsory Provision:*

As mentioned earlier, the two secondary colleges have worked together in developing a shared approach to the provision of VCE, Vocational Studies and VCAL programs thus providing a broader range of study options for students. The following impacts of such a partnership include:

- In 2015 students had access to a total of 46 VCE study sequences (42 VCE 3/4 Units provided for a total of 58 Year 12 students) across the two sites, and students are able to undertake VCE units hosted by either school. This compares with the opportunities that these students would have if the two schools operated separately (with the current staff and resource profiles):
 - Student at the Secondary College would be offered 12 VCE 3/4 Unit sequences, and
 - Students at the Catholic Secondary College would be offered 24 VCE 3/4 Unit sequences.

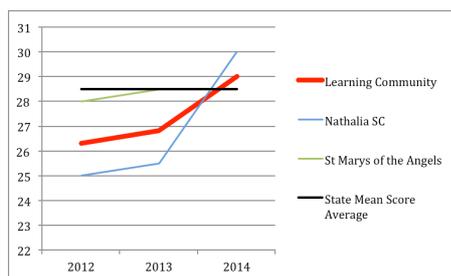


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During 2015, the VCE co-ordinators have indicated that as a result of the schools working in partnership, the large majority of students were able to study their first preference of VCE subject choice at 3/4 levels – something that would not be possible if the schools operated separately. In addition, many students indicated that they were able to study a VCE unit that they desired as a result of the shared provision approach- this would most likely not be possible if the two schools provided VCE separately.

This shared provision approach has allowed the Learning Community to combine small classes, share teachers, and the like, providing an economic saving for both secondary schools that are then distributed to other priority areas of the Learning Alliance. For example VET provision and building the capacity of teaching staff through professional development support.

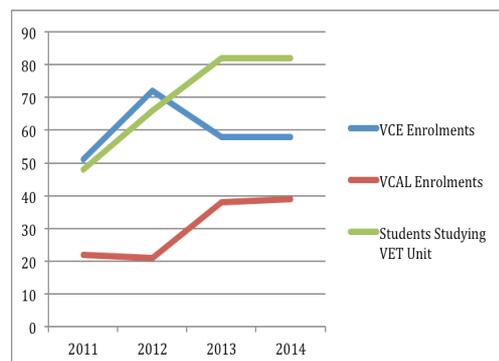
The partnership approach has also allowed the education leadership teams of the two schools to ensure that the best teachers are teaching units where they are most needed, and where their expertise is most valuable regardless of which school they are based. This has been a key focus of the schools in recent years, and the improvement in VCE results has shown – this is exemplified in the table below.



The VCE results over the past three years within the Nathalia Learning Alliance has increased significantly, and now students within Nathalia are gaining results at, or above, the state VCE Mean Score Average.

- With the recent development of a Trade Training Centre involving a partnership between Nathalia Secondary College, St Marys of the Angels Secondary College and St Augustines College in Kyabram, students within the Nathalia Learning Community now have access to 6 Vocational programs within their own community, thus meaning they are not required to travel into a regional centre (eg Shepparton), or further as students have been expected to do prior to the Centre being available locally.

The numbers of students involved in VET programs, either through school based apprenticeship programs, or through VCAL has increased significantly over the past three years since the Centres inception – see the table below.

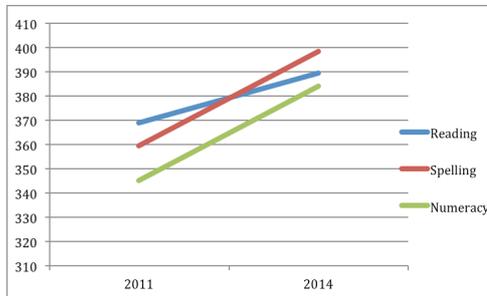


The number of students from the Nathalia Learning Community (not including students from St Augustine’s) undertaking vocational programs has increased significantly and while the VCE enrolments have decreased slightly, the biggest impact the development of the Trade Training Centre has had is that now the two schools can provide a post compulsory program that is reflective of every student’s needs and desires.



▪ **Building Capacity of Learning Alliance Staff:**

There have been a number of impacts that have resulted from the variety of professional learning and development initiatives facilitated by the Nathalia Learning Community over the past eighteen months, although such impacts have been more at a staff level and as yet are still to be evidenced at a student learning level.



The exception to this has been the early years area where the Early Years Working Group has been operational for a longer period of time. For example student learning outcomes at Year 3 level have improved across the Learning Community during this time, especially in reading, spelling and numeracy.

In relation to the impact of the Nathalia Learning Community on staff capacity, the following areas provide a brief overview of such impacts:

- The education organisations have developed a Strategic Plan that details a common view and approach to the establishment of a “Culture of Improvement” in enhancing opportunities and outcomes across the Learning Community – an outcome of the Overseas Education Leadership tours undertaken by the Learning Communities Leadership Team;
- The increased professional dialogue that has developed across the education organisation within the Learning Community, especially within specific curriculum areas and also year levels. The HRLTP, Learning Walks, whole of Learning Community Professional Development activities, and the initial work of Glenn Pearsall have been key drivers in the development of these professional dialogues;
- Enhanced learning opportunities for students through the development of specific student activities across the Learning Community. For example the upper primary mentoring program, and the early years initiatives;
- The development of a cross sectorial coaching program focused on improving teaching and learning through the establishment of effective feedback strategies;
- At an education leadership level, there has been a strong collegiate approach developed across the Learning Community with principals providing valuable support to each other. One specific example of this collegiate support occurred early in 2015 when three of the school principals were on extended sick leave (simultaneously) and as a result there were acting roles within their schools to accommodate their absence. The substantive principal within the Learning Community provided valuable support to the three acting principals throughout this time through regular visits to each of the schools and offering to provide staff as required to assist if needed. These “acts of kindness” have been evident on a number of occasions, and at a range of levels over the past couple of years.

What’s Next?

The Nathalia Learning Community have identified two key focus areas for the coming year, both with a strong focus on the learning needs and aspirations of every student, as well as building on the learnings from the post compulsory focus of recent times.

- The Learning Community will continue a focus on building the capacity of its teaching staff, established over the past twelve months with a clear focus on improving teaching and learning across the Foundation to Year 12 continuum.

This focus will build on the initiatives that have operated over the past eighteen months (eg Learning Walks, HRLTP, and whole of staff professional development forums) and will initially utilise the expertise of Glenn Pearsall in facilitating workshops with the staff centring on developing a strong culture of improvement and more specifically building effective feedback at both a student and staff level.

- The second area of focus will centre on improving the learning outcomes within the middle years from Year 5 through to Year 8, and especially focus on:
 - Lifting student aspirations and engagement in learning;
 - Improving literacy learning outcomes (which are currently lower than the state average) across the middle years;

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- Engage with the broader community and key stakeholder groups in lifting the aspirations and engagement in education of young people.

The Nathalia Learning Alliance will utilise an action research approach to this focus area based on the learnings gained from similar approaches to engaging young people in learning and improving learning outcomes that they experienced on their education leaders tours of the UK.

Led by a Learning Community Action Research team, this area of work will ensure that this area gains significant focus over the next year or two.

In addition to these key focus areas, the Nathalia Learning Community will continue to focus on:

- Ensuring that the growth and development that has occurred at the post compulsory levels over the past three years is sustained and that the variations in student outcomes often associated with small cohorts of Year 12 VCE students can be “smoothed out”, resulting in a constant level of performance from year to year.
- Exploring ways in which the Nathalia Learning Community can be strengthened, and a keenness to work with education sectors in addressing some of the challenges faced (especially across the primary and secondary divide, and also across education sectors).

The desire of the Learning Community to explore the engagement of shared staff, developing sustainable leadership approaches for the Learning Community, and establishing a sustainable recruitment and retention approach to strengthen its overall teaching workforce.

- Further develop the whole of community data analysis tool to encompass other data sources, as a way to support the further development of the Nathalia Learning Community as well as develop a consistent approach to data collection ensuring there can be comparative analysis across all education organisations.
- Further develop the Early Years Working Group to further strengthen the provision of learning across the Foundation to Year 3 levels centred on a play based learning approach especially with a real focus on improving learning outcomes across literacy and numeracy.

