

PBL in practice

PBL in rural and remote schools

Rural and remote schools are schools located outside of major cities. They may be schools in outer regional areas, or schools in remote or very remote areas.

Most of Queensland's rural and remote schools are located in the Far North, North, Central and Darling Downs South West regions. These schools are often small, including some with fewer than 10 students and only one teacher.

This PBL in practice paper discusses the challenges and opportunities of implementing PBL in rural or remote settings and provides evidence-informed strategies for successful implementation.

References

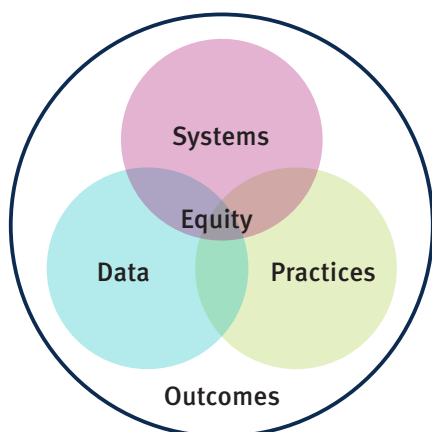
Downes, N., & Roberts, P. (2018). Revisiting the schoolhouse: A literature review on staffing rural, remote and isolated schools in Australia 2004-2016. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 28(1), 31-54.

Robbie K., Van Lone, J., Kern, L., & George, H. P. (August, 2021). Using a PBIS Framework: Working Smarter, Not Harder in Rural Schools. Center on PBIS, University of Oregon. www.pbis.org

Starr, K., & White, S. (2008). The small rural school principalship: Key challenges and cross-school responses. *Journal of Research in Rural Education* (Online), 23(5), 1.

Using the PBL framework in rural schools

Rural and remote schools can use the PBL problem-solving process to address their unique challenges. The PBL decision-making model incorporates a focus on **systems**, **practices**, and **data** to achieve better student **outcomes**.



Adapted from *Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Implementation Blueprint*, 2023. Used with permission.

For example, a school might have a way to teach appropriate student behaviour, such as a matrix and lesson bank (**systems**), that relies on staff explicitly teaching and modelling expected behaviours (**practices**). It also has a way to track whether lessons are being taught (**data**). This information is used by the school PBL team to look for ways to ensure that lessons are being taught by all staff, thereby increasing prosocial student behaviour (**outcomes**).

Challenges

Several challenges in relation to education in rural and remote areas have been identified in the research. These include:

- higher rates of staff turnover
- more beginning and early career teachers
- range of specialist staff
- access to face-to-face professional development
- limited access to resources and services
- social isolation.

Opportunities

There are also many advantages to working in rural and remote schools, including:

- leadership opportunities
- accelerated professional growth
- sense of community belonging
- a unique lifestyle
- opportunity to build positive relationships.

Clustering

Research has highlighted important ways that schools in rural and remote areas can work in clusters to overcome mutual challenges. Leveraging school clusters can be an effective way to provide leadership and support for PBL implementation.

Networking

Schools can network to exchange information and share practices. An example of networking in PBL is when schools share resources, such as lesson plans for teaching expectations.

Coordination

Coordination follows on from networking to enact practices. An example would be co-planning community events or activities.

Cooperation

Cooperation involves the sharing of personnel, resources, or facilities. PBL schools can co-operate by swapping internal coaches to conduct surveys or facilitate meetings.

Collaboration

When schools collaborate, they enhance capacity for mutual benefit. Examples would be setting up a PBL Community of Practice, or schools providing professional development to each other on a rotational basis.

A school example

Bush P–10 School has received reports of student disrespect and inappropriate language on the school bus from the bus company. They apply the PBL decision-making model, using the following steps:

1. *Identify the problem* by looking at the **data**. The school realises that they do not have any data about student behaviour on school buses. They therefore talk to the bus company to establish the issues of concern. In addition, an anonymous survey is set up to collect student perceptions about bus behaviour.
2. *Analyse the data*. By looking at the data received from the bus company and students the team was able to see that a minority of students in Years 8 and 9 were verbally harassing younger students and swearing at bus drivers when reprimanded.
3. *Decide on actions*. The team began by reviewing the **system** for teaching, reinforcing and monitoring bus travel expectations. A script was developed for bus drivers to use and a staff member volunteered to travel on the bus to model providing corrective feedback to students. Additional time was scheduled to reteach the expectations and procedures for bus travel with all students travelling on school buses (**practices**). Students in Year 8 and 9 were provided with an additional 15 minutes to practise following bus procedures before the afternoon bus journey. It was also recognised that there would need to be further work done on being kind to each other and how best to respond to teasing or harassment.
4. *Monitor and evaluate outcomes*. The school planned to check in with the bus company at the end of each week to see if students were being respectful and there had been a decrease in swearing at drivers.

Successful strategies

Challenge	Strategy
School is too small to maintain a PBL team	• Incorporate PBL decision making model into regular school meetings. • Seek P&C, staff, family, community and student input.
High staff turnover	• Document PBL procedures and include in staff induction. • Allocate time within regular meetings to revisit and problem-solve. • Ensure that ancillary staff, students and the community know 'the PBL story'. • Double up on key PBL team roles.
Many early career staff	• Partner with nearby schools to share expertise. • Build systems that support PD, mentoring and coaching.
Frequent principal changes	• Get whole school buy-in by building PBL knowledge among teachers, ancillary staff, parents and students. • Seek support from School Supervisor. • Annual review of Student Code of Conduct.
Lack of services for students with complex needs	• Seek community and regional support to map and source outreach services. • Map student needs and match with school-based interventions.
Difficulty obtaining relief teachers for planning/training release	• Seek support from region. • Access online training options. • Record PD.

Rural and remote schools face ongoing challenges, but also possess strengths which can be used to overcome barriers. By using the PBL decision-making model, schools can maximise available resources and work collaboratively within clusters to ensure positive outcomes for all students.