

Sponsor: City of Greater Bendigo

Refuter: TBC

A Bill for an Act relating to the Equal Access to Education Bill 2021.

To be enacted by the YMCA Victoria Youth Parliament;

Equal Access to Education Bill 2021

A Bill for an Act to provide access to educational resources for rural and regional students in Victoria. This Bill establishes the Rural and Regional Education Support Service Victoria who shall be responsible for the implementation of the Rural and Regional Education Access Package. This package shall provide rural and regional school students and schools additional access to camps and excursions, tuition services and integration aides, books and library resources, technology resources, and information for careers.

This Bill was created to bridge the divide between education resources within Metropolitan areas and Rural and Regional Victoria. This divide was acknowledged by the Victorian Government through the Expert Advisory Panel into Rural and Regional Victoria in 2019. Therefore, this Bill aims to address the growing disparity between students in Victoria, by providing additional services and opportunities that rural and regional students do not normally have access to.

PART I—Preliminary

Clause 1 Purpose

The main purposes of this Act are—

- (a) to enhance access to education, career and further learning resources for rural and regional students in Victoria;
- (b) to fund camps and excursions for rural and regional students in Victoria, increasing access to enrichment activities;
- (c) to provide additional support to rural and regional students by ensuring access to integration aides, tuition services and technology.

Clause 2 Commencement

This Bill shall commence upon receiving assent from the Youth Governor of Victoria.

Clause 3 Definitions

In this Bill, we define the following to mean—

- (a) **excursion** means activities organised by the school where the students are taken out of the school grounds;
- (b) **high achieving** means students who shown academic ability as observed and determined by their teachers;
- (c) **integration aide** means a person employed by a school to assist the teacher and to support students throughout the school day. They support learners with their behaviour, learning, access to activities, activities of daily living and academic and content learning;
- (d) **portable internet device** means a device that allows you to access internet away from a wired network;
- (e) **regional Victorian city** means the largest regional cities in Victoria, including but not limited to—
 - (i) Ballarat;
 - (ii) Bendigo;
 - (iii) Geelong;
 - (iv) Horsham;
 - (v) Latrobe;
 - (vi) Mildura;
 - (vii) Shepparton;
 - (viii) wangaratta;
 - (ix) Warrnambool;
 - (x) Wodonga;
- (f) **rural and regional** means the regions of—
 - (i) Loddon Mallee;

- (ii) Grampians;
- (iii) Hume;
- (iv) Barwon-South West;
- (v) Gippsland;
- (g) **RREAP** means Rural and Regional Education Access Package;
- (h) **RRESS** means Rural and Regional Education Support Service;
- (i) **smart device** means tablet that can access the internet;
- (j) **ungraded students** means students who haven't been placed in a specific year level;
- (k) **VCAL** means Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning;
- (l) **VCE** means Victorian Certificate of Education;
- (m) **VET** means Vocational Education and Training;

Part II—Establishment

Clause 4 Establishment of the Rural and Regional Education Support Service Victoria

- 4.1 The Rural and Regional Education Support Service Victoria (RESS) shall be established, operate under, and draw funding from the Victorian Department of Education and Training.
- 4.2 RESS shall be responsible for the development and implementation of the Rural and Regional Education Access Package (RREAP).

Clause 5 Eligibility

- 5.1 All primary and secondary students within a rural/regional LGA schools will be eligible for RREAP.
- 5.2 Any students who are home-schooled shall be determined eligible at the discretion of the RESS.

Clause 6 Provision of camp and excursion support and funding

- 6.1 RREAP shall provide funding for camps and excursions to eligible schools as determined by RESS
- 6.2 This funding shall not be impeded by the receipt of the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund granted by the Department of Education and Training and as such eligible students shall be allocated both.
- 6.2 Victorian Public Primary Schools shall be granted \$100 per student including ungraded students.
- 6.3 Victorian Public Secondary Schools shall be granted \$150 per student including ungraded students.
- 6.4 RESS shall establish the Events and Opportunities Unit—
 - (a) the Events and Opportunities Unit shall cultivate opportunities for, and distribute information surrounding, camp and excursion sites, educational resources and places of interest relating to the curriculum;
 - (b) the Events and Opportunities Unit shall coordinate and facilitate a minimum of one residential camp for primary aged students and one for secondary aged students annually.
- 6.5 A second residential camp shall be coordinated for students who meet the following criteria—
 - (a) Students from Rural and Regional Victoria who are deemed High Achieving by their schools.
- 6.6 Camps shall occur in metropolitan areas where possible.
- 6.7 Interstate camps may occur at the discretion of the RESS.

Clause 7 Tutoring and additional support

- 7.1 RREAP shall include a tutoring program for students living in rural and regional Victoria—
- (a) rural and regional Schools shall apply for a tutor through RREAP;
 - (b) RRESS shall assess applications and provide tutors that match the needs of the applicant.
- 7.2 Tutoring classes shall occur weekly in groups of no more than 10 students—
- (a) core curriculum classes shall be made available to all eligible primary and secondary school students in a face-to-face learning environment where possible;
 - (b) elective or specialty classes shall be made available to all eligible secondary school students in either a face-to-face or online learning environment.
- 7.3 RRESS shall employ university students to conduct these tutoring classes in eligible schools—
- (a) university students who are undertaking a teaching degree or a university course relevant to the tutoring subject shall be eligible for this role;
 - (b) all tutors shall undertake a two week intensive course focused on techniques for teaching and online tutoring.
- 7.4 Additional Integration Aides shall be available for eligible primary and secondary schools through RREAP on the basis of academic abilities—
- (a) schools shall be required to submit a NAPLAN result which indicates a student test scores are on average one band below the average standard.

Clause 8 Access to technology and internet services

- 8.1. RRESS shall offer rural and regional students a rebate for internet and portable internet devices—
- (a) primary school aged students shall be entitled to a rebate of \$180 annually;
 - (b) secondary school aged students shall be entitled to a rebate of \$360 annually;
 - (c) Rebates shall be awarded to each child that is eligible.
- 8.2 RRESS shall implement a computer and smart device loan program—
- (a) parents, guardians and teachers shall apply for devices directly from RRESS.
 - (b) RRESS shall distribute computers and smart devices based on the applicant's needs as determined in the application process.

- 8.3 Training for the use of loaned device will be provided to all teachers and parents by RRESS—
- (a) professional development seminars on how to use the offered devices and programs to aid in teaching will be provided to teachers;
 - (b) parents and students will have access to online video tutorials on how to use offered devices and programs.

Clause 9 Access to information grants

- 9.1 RRESS shall provide library resource grants of \$5000 to all RREAP eligible schools—
- (a) this grant shall be used for library resources including but not limited to—
 - (i) furniture and storage;
 - (ii) books;
 - (ii) technology;
 - (iv) stationary;
 - (v) literacy programs;
 - (b) schools can re-apply for grants annually.

Clause 10 Careers and Futures resources

- 10.1 RREAP shall coordinate a Careers Exhibition twice yearly, hosted in a different Regional Victorian City each time—
- (a) the Careers Exhibition shall be for students in years 9-12 and include the following —
 - (i) university and TAFE information relating to VET, VCE and VCAL pathways;
 - (ii) Broader education services, including but not limited to Victorian emergency services training academies;
 - (iii) foreign exchange programs;
 - (b) Careers and Futures information packages shall be distributed following the Careers Exhibition. They shall include the following content —
 - (i) applicable information on university scholarships, bursaries and grants targeted towards regional and rural students;
 - (ii) information surrounding university, TAFE and broader education pathways including prerequisite and recommended subjects and how to access these in a rural and regional learning environment such as via distance education.