

TEACH FOR AUSTRALIA
IMPACT RESEARCH:
CONTRIBUTION
TO SCHOOL
IMPROVEMENTS



Summary Report

Pam Kennedy and Mark Planigale

December 2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Lirata Consulting acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which this evaluation took place, the Boon Wurrung, Wurundjeri, Wotjobaluk, Wergaia, Jupagalk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Jawoyn, Dagoman, Wardaman and Noongar peoples. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and future.

RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

Lirata would like to thank all participants who contributed their time to this research. Lirata acknowledges that school staff are busy people, and activities such as participating in research are additional to their daily work. In particular, Lirata would like to acknowledge and thank the four schools involved:

- **Horsham College**
- **Mill Park Secondary College**
- **Southern River College**
- **St Joseph's Catholic College.**

We gratefully acknowledge the participation and contributions of the Principals of all four schools for sharing their understandings of school improvements and achievements with us, and to the Executive staff, Heads of Learning Areas, teaching staff, pastoral care

staff, TFA Alumni and Associates of the schools that participated in the case studies, who provided a deeper understanding of school improvements and shared their experience of the Teach For Australia program with us.

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INTRODUCING TEACH FOR AUSTRALIA AND ITS LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Teach For Australia (TFA) is a not-for-profit education leadership collective, and is part of the *Teach For All* global network of 60 independent organisations tackling the complex challenges faced by children in communities experiencing systemic disadvantage. Each network partner recruits, supports and develops promising future leaders to teach in their nations' under-resourced schools and communities. With this foundation in place, Teach For All partners work with others inside and outside of education, to ensure all children are able to fulfill their potential (Teach For All, 2022).



TFA's flagship program is the **Leadership Development Program (LDP)**, an employment-based pathway into teaching which sees Associates¹ employed in teaching roles while earning their Master of Teaching (Secondary) (Leading Learning) through Australian Catholic University. The LDP model ensures they can contribute to schools as soon as possible. Associates also participate in a range of targeted professional development opportunities and receive one-on-one coaching from in-school mentors and coaches employed by TFA.

Over the past 14 years, TFA has placed more than 1200 Associates in 250+ partner schools across six states and territories, with the majority of schools being in regional, rural and remote locations. As of 2022, LDP Alumni and Associates have collectively reached over 450,000 students (TFA, 2022). While 72% of program graduates continue in careers in teaching or school leadership, others move on to government, policy, research, not-for-profit or social enterprise roles. The LDP is delivered as part of the High Achieving Teachers Program with the support of the Australian Government Department of Education.

TFA also offers the **Future Leaders Program**, which prepares aspiring leaders in schools facing systemic disadvantage in outer regional and remote locations for the challenges and rewards of school leadership, and the **Mentor Development Program** for experienced teachers, to equip them to provide in-school mentoring for LDP Associates.



RESEARCH AIMS AND METHODS

In 2019, TFA decided to learn more about how partner schools were achieving their improvement aspirations, as well as the role that their partnership with TFA played in these achievements. TFA commissioned Lirata Consulting to conduct this research, using a case study approach; Lirata's findings are presented in this report.

To explore TFA's contribution to school level improvements and achievements, the research team investigated three key research questions, based on the perspectives of the school community:

1. What school-level improvements or achievements have schools experienced since partnering with TFA?
2. How have TFA Associates and/or Alumni contributed to these improvements or achievements?
3. How could TFA improve its support to schools and communities facing educational disadvantage?

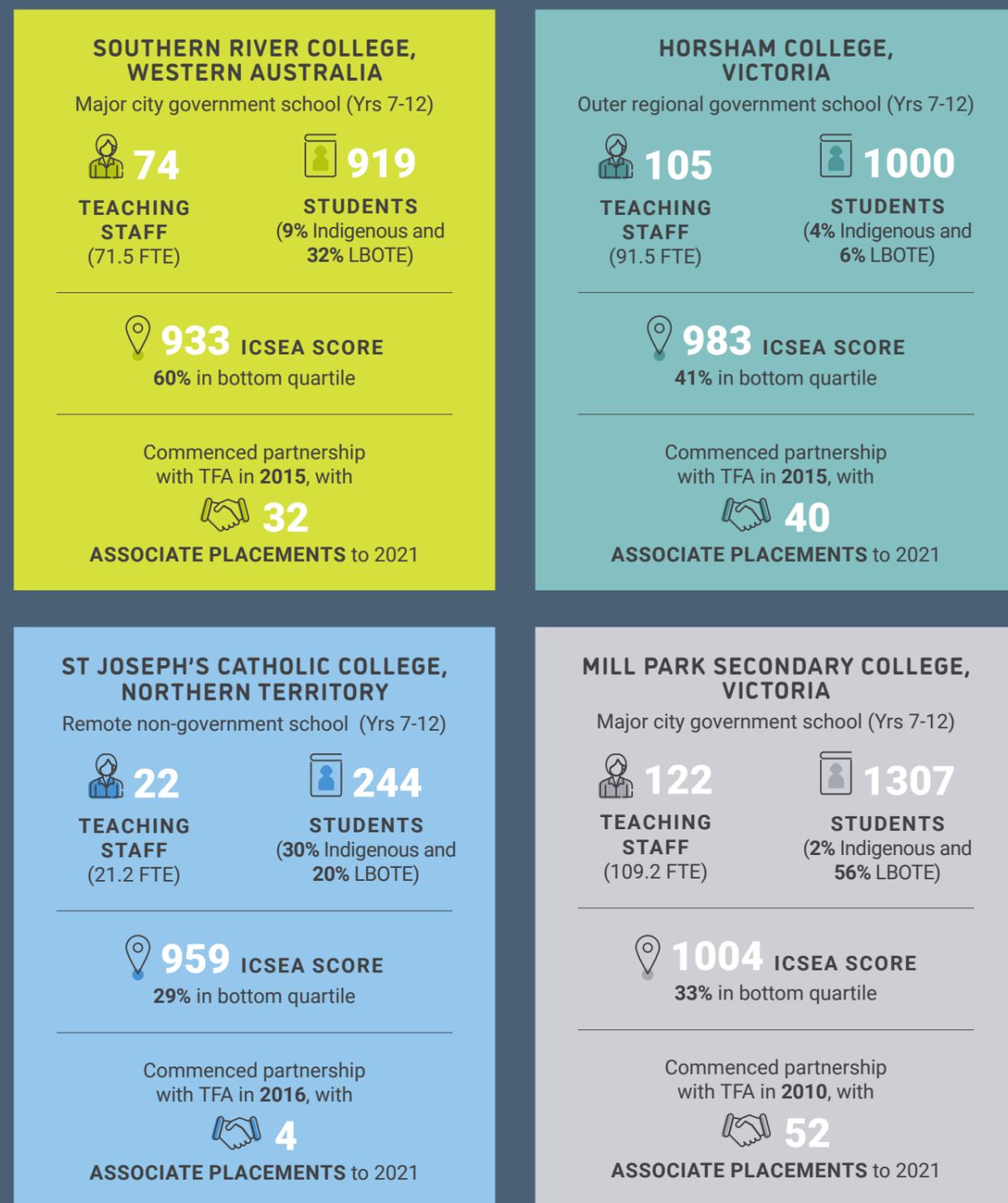
Four schools were recruited into the research as case study sites, representing a diversity of characteristics (including state, location, size, student diversity and types of impacts anecdotally reported to TFA). A short profile of these schools is included in **Figure 1**.

Following initial interviews with school Principals, data about school-level improvements and achievements was collected from the case study schools through follow-up interviews with school leaders, teachers and pastoral care staff, and review of documentation and published statistics.

Although the four schools are diverse in their student populations and community contexts, all entered into partnership with TFA to fill gaps in their teacher numbers and profile, which were often in key subject areas they found traditionally hard to fill.

¹ Teachers undertaking post-graduate studies in TFA's LDP are known as Associates. Graduates of LDP are known as Alumni.

Figure 1: Brief profile of participating schools^{2 3}



² ICSEA is a scale of socioeducational advantage that is computed for each school using a composite measure of parent's occupation, parent's education, geographical location and proportion of students identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. ICSEA enables comparisons to be made between a selected school and all students with a similar socio-educational background and what this brings to their academic studies. ICSEA values typically range from approximately 500 (representing schools with student with low levels of educational advantage) to about 1300 (representing schools with students from extremely advantaged backgrounds), with the median rating being 1000. (<https://www.myschool.edu.au/media/1820/guide-to-understanding-icsea-values.pdf>)

³ In addition to their Associate placements, Mill Park Secondary College and St Joseph's Catholic College have employed 8 and 2 Alumni respectively, who completed their Master's qualification elsewhere.

KEY FINDINGS

This research has identified five key findings about TFA's contribution to school-level improvement.

FINDING #1

TFA Associates and Alumni make considerable contributions to school level improvements, including improvements in pedagogy, student pathways and retention, student outcomes, student engagement and wellbeing, community engagement and school culture and professionalism. TFA teachers have had a significant impact on strengthening STEM programs in particular, as a learning area and as an approach that influences other curricula.

FINDING #2

TFA's contributions to change are enabled through the vision, leadership and planning of senior school leaders and the wrap-around support of Associates from schools and TFA. This research found TFA teachers positively contribute to a culture of improvement, but also have greater impact when it is in place.

FINDING #3

All schools spoke of progress in meeting the need for high quality teaching capacity and capability, and improvements in pedagogy and the quality of teaching and learning in their schools since partnering with TFA. The range of other improvements reported by schools are included in the next section, *Domains of Impact* (see page 07).

FINDING #4

The research found clear evidence that TFA Associates and Alumni were strong contributors to school-level improvements and achievements. Examples of Associate and Alumni contributions include:

- Being the drivers of and/or strong contributors to the introduction of new pedagogical approaches, tools and evidence-informed practice (e.g. introducing Google Classroom at Mill Park Secondary College, Explicit Instruction and Stanford Design Model implementation at Southern River College)
- Enabling STEM and specialist subjects to be introduced (e.g. specialist maths, chemistry, permaculture, mechatronics)
- Enabling the introduction of new programs or projects in the school (e.g. the ISAAC Club at Southern River College and the Sink Hole project at St Joseph's Christian College)
- Strengthening student engagement, behaviours and wellbeing (e.g. the development and implementation of the Student Education Model at Mill Park Secondary College, Expected Behaviours policy and guidelines at Horsham College).

FINDING #5

The research found specific evidence that TFA Associates/Alumni are 'drivers for change' and this can have flow-on effects in energising others to engage in change. A school can amplify the benefits of its partnership with TFA when there are multiple TFA Associates/Alumni at the school.

Causal factors that contribute to TFA Associates'/Alumni's ability to enable change include:

- TFA's recruitment and selection processes, which play an important role in ensuring that TFA Associates have the requisite qualities of leadership, drive, passion, energy and commitment, as well as their life and industry experience
- The social justice framing of the Masters course that ensures the teaching and learning knowledge and skills that Associates develop can be appropriately applied to engage students facing systemic or social disadvantage in effective learning experiences
- Associates having the ability to contribute and/or lead the broader implementation and evaluation of new models and frameworks for teaching and learning school-wide
- The movement of TFA Associates/Alumni into school leadership roles, enhancing their ability to influence the culture, practice and systems within schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING IMPACT

In response to the final research question, recommendations were provided to TFA to support their continuous improvement approach. These included: maintaining access to high quality mentoring and streamlining workloads for all Associates; creating further opportunities for schools to provide feedback to TFA; and, refining practical advice provided to schools to support incoming Associates so that they are set up for success. The research clearly demonstrated that these schools were keen to continue working with TFA to further strengthen the program, and to continue to build evidence-informed practice.



DOMAINS OF IMPACT

A set of themes around school-level impact emerged from the research findings, some of which were common to all four schools. These themes are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Achievements and improvements, as nominated by the schools themselves as Research Topics

Key Theme	Sub-Theme	Southern River College	St Joseph's Catholic College	Mill Park Secondary College	Horsham College
Strengthening pedagogy	Meeting the need for high quality teaching capacity and capability	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Improving pedagogy	✓	✓	✓	✓
Improvements in STEM	Strong STEM programs	✓	✓		
	STEM as a teaching and learning approach	✓			
Improved student pathways, retention and academic achievement	Tailored learning pathways	✓		✓	✓
	Student retention and post-school pathways	✓	✓		
	Academic achievement	✓	✓	✓	✓
Improved student engagement and wellbeing	Student enrolment, engagement and attendance		✓		✓
	Positive behaviours	✓	✓	✓	✓
Improved community engagement	Positive community relationships		✓		✓
	Enhancing school reputation	✓	✓		✓
Stronger school culture, professionalism and leadership	Improving school culture and professionalism	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Leadership approaches and structures	✓			✓

Examples of these are demonstrated in the schools' stories that follow.

STORIES OF IMPACT

The following stories come from the two colleges where researchers had the opportunity to explore more fully the identified improvements – how they happened, what enabled change, and how TFA contributed to the change.

1. BUILDING STRONG STEM PROGRAMS

Domains of impact – Improvements in STEM, Strengthening pedagogy, Improved student pathways; improved community engagement

Many schools engage with TFA to grow their STEM capacity and capability. For some schools, this included an interest in providing specialised subject offerings beyond 'core' STEM subjects, which is only possible with high calibre STEM teachers and investment in program development. Leaders at **St Joseph's Catholic College** recognised that a credible and sustainable senior years program depended on being able to offer a high-quality STEM learning area.

TFA Associates brought with them the knowledge to be able to develop high quality programs in their areas of expertise; in turn, this has enabled other teachers to be able to adopt these learning packages in their own classrooms.

"Change hasn't happened just because of TFA teachers, but it could not have happened without TFA teachers – their compassion ... their driving force ..."

– HC Principal

"This has definitely allowed us to put in place good science and maths programs, delivered by teachers who have sound content knowledge - using proper STEM teachers, an area we had previously found difficult to recruit to. Now we are able to recruit more teachers who are STEM specialists e.g. teachers who can teach Math Methods and Specialist Maths, Physics, Chemistry, Robotics Programs. And as a result, more students are wanting to do these programs."

– SJCC Principal

Their STEM program is now taught by confident and capable teachers who relish the opportunity to teach specialist subjects at senior levels, as well as supporting the development of strong programs in maths and science in younger years, including primary. Students benefit through participating in real life projects to which they could easily relate, such as *The sink hole project*. Facilitated by a TFA Associate, this project integrated biology, chemistry and geology with environmental preservation and outdoor education. Student projects such as these have gone on to foster positive community engagement, and enhanced their reputation as a school of choice.



2. ENGAGING STUDENTS AND IMPROVING BEHAVIOURS AND WELLBEING

Domains of impact: Improved student engagement and wellbeing, Stronger school culture, professionalism and leadership

Students are more positively engaged in learning, and succeeding, as a result of changes in teaching practices. These include a greater emphasis on trauma-informed practice and enhanced student-centred approaches. Schools noted that these changes also resulted in improved attendance, wellbeing and behaviours.

A previous Principal at **St Joseph's Catholic College** spoke about behaviour management, and the number of incidents relating to poor behaviours. But as time went on, reports diminished both in frequency and severity. The Principal attributed this in part to the work of two TFA Associates, who invested a lot of time in both primary and secondary students, and demonstrated their passion for improving and supporting them, both during school hours and in break times. *'That was the stuff that makes the difference. It was profound'*. College leaders believed that the level of commitment shown far exceeded what would be expected of an early career teacher. This impact also flowed into the pastoral care area, where better relationships were built with students.

3. USING DATA FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING IMPROVEMENT

Domains of impact: Strengthening pedagogy, Stronger school culture, professionalism and leadership

Collecting and analysing data for monitoring and evaluating performance is essential to guide decision-making about a school's improvement focus in teaching and learning. While data can take many forms, one common example is targeted student outcome measures. TFA Associates and Alumni contributed and often led the way in building the emphasis on using good data to improve teaching and learning practice and outcomes. This was based on their Master's studies and research capabilities and, for some, their industry backgrounds. Across the schools, the research team heard feedback that Associates were more likely to seek evidence of change and improvement than their counterparts.

TFA Associates at **Southern River College** noted that collecting and analysing outcomes data enabled them to identify the learning activities that were achieving the greatest impact. They could then establish individual or whole-of-learning-area improvement plans to strengthen high impact areas further, or to address deficits in other areas. Staff provided an example relating to gaining a better understanding the impact of streaming classes, and asking the question *'How effective is this?'*

As a result of early work in this area, one TFA Associate has taken a lead in strengthening diagnostic data collection and analysis, re-designing assessment rubrics and standards and looking at how internal measures fit with Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and other data. School leaders note that this initiative has come from a genuine interest in wanting to learn about performance, and not being judgemental. This has been augmented by observation sessions, where teachers can observe other teachers' practice, both learning from this and providing critical feedback. These measures have had a positive impact on all teachers.

"We all expect to get feedback, and critique of our work. Looking at making positive changes – that's a good thing."

– SRC Teaching staff

4. POSITIVELY INFLUENCING SCHOOL CULTURE

Domains of impact: Stronger school culture, professionalism and leadership; Improved educational achievement

Researchers identified that the presence of TFA Associates and Alumni within schools, when supported by good leadership and change management, had a broader positive impact on school culture – over and above the work done directly by TFA Associates and Alumni themselves. This magnifies the contribution of the TFA partnership, by facilitating alignment of the broader school staff group around positive outcomes. It also produces a self-reinforcing effect through which schools become more focused on recruiting other staff who can continue to progress these positive changes.

For example, **St Joseph's Catholic College** school leaders noted that the improvements initiated by TFA Associates/Alumni 'have been embedded into school culture and practice in ways that enable that practice to continue beyond the time that the TFA teacher is at the school. Built into school culture and expectations. It's not just about what they are doing, it's the expectations that we now have, the programs we can offer. It becomes part of our identity. We can make this sustainable. We look at recruiting people who can continue to build on this'. This 'raises the bar' for all staff within the school. Principals spoke of the juggle of building their desired school culture, and ensuring all staff are equipped to deliver – TFA Associates and other graduate teachers, alongside longer-term staff.

5. HIGH QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING EXPERIENCES, ACHIEVING RESULTS

Domains of impact: Strengthening pedagogy, Improved student pathways, retention and academic achievement

All four schools started from a point where recruiting and retaining sufficient high quality teaching staff with the skills and commitment to work with systemically disadvantaged students was a pressing issue. This was especially the case with respect to maths and science subjects. This lack of available teaching staff is exacerbated in regional and rural areas of Australia, especially where remoteness, access to services and cost of living pressures are in play.

Southern River College aimed to ensure that its staff adopt best-practice, evidence-based teaching and learning practice across the curriculum, customised to the learning needs of students (SRC, 2016). They sought to achieve this through introducing and embedding a range of teaching and learning strategies and approaches integrated with behaviour management models, and backed by a strong, inclusive school culture. They forged a number of critical partnerships to support them in introducing and embedding improvements, including with TFA, Fogarty Foundation, Corwin and others. TFA Associates and Alumni have a strong theoretical grounding in these approaches through their studies, and were keen to implement change.

"I try to apply project-based learning through experiments and projects once a week. I teach a very low literacy and numeracy class. The only way that I can get things across, is when it's hands-on learning."

– SRC TFA teacher

As a result of changes which have improved practice across all learning areas, the College has achieved better student outcomes, examples of which are:

- ✓ Students with additional learning needs being able to return to mainstream learning in later school years, through the college's Learning Centre and its tailored learning approach
- ✓ More than 90% of the 2020 Year 12 student cohort achieved Western Australian Certificate of Education eligibility, as a pathway to further studies (made possible by the work of TFA Associates and others to provide additional tuition for students in the Online Literacy and Numeracy Assessment in Years 10-12)
- ✓ More than 20% of this same cohort had taken up an ATAR pathway, compared with 2% early in the school's TFA partnership, with ATAR results exceeding those of like schools in 2018-19
- ✓ More than 60% of 2019 Year 12 students went on to further studies (compared with less than 40% in 2010).

"There is greater understanding among students that there are a variety of pathways. TFA Associates really focus on excellence looking different for different students."

– SRC staff member

"When comparing students' aspirations now, it's amazing ... an exponential shift and the aspirations of community have changed for our young people."

– SRC leader



Stories of Impact

FINAL REFLECTIONS

The research, shows that **TFA Associates and Alumni are passionate, energetic, enthusiastic, caring and committed people who bring contemporary teaching and learning practice knowledge and strong subject and industry knowledge and experience to bear on their emerging and consolidating skills as teachers.** This places them well to be change agents. Many staff commented on the flow-on effect of their energy and enthusiasm, as well as their commitment to learn, change and improve. The schools spoken to as part of this research provided clear evidence that **TFA had contributed to important positive changes for students, staff and the broader school community.**

"The way they approach the students, the different cohorts from different backgrounds, their belief in the students. I think the students feel that. It grows as well. The TFA cohort are definitely helping with that, changing mindsets."

– SRC Learning Area Head

Schools recognise the contribution of TFA's flagship LDP and its support systems to enabling positive change in their schools. In addition to the examples cited in this report, schools noted:

- TFA's collaborative approach towards, and careful consideration of, the placement of TFA Associates
- TFA personnel working with schools to help prepare for Associate placements

- TFA providing professional development to mentors to ensure high quality learning opportunities for TFA Associates, and working with schools to consolidate wrap-around supports for TFA Associates, through roles such as Teaching and Learning Advisors
- TFA, through its strong relationship with its academic partner, providing a unique learning curriculum for Associates that is trauma-informed and grounded in social justice, which contributes to their ability to be highly skilled teachers in educationally disadvantaged communities.

These attributes of the LDP set Associates up for success, which in turn has enabled their contribution to school improvements and achievements.

"It's been probably the most enjoyable period of time in a school that I've been a part of. And the most rewarding in terms of the journey, both in leadership but also in terms of genuinely positive outcomes for students and for staff."

– HC Principal

One Principal commented on the **fundamental importance of TFA in tackling educational disadvantage**, noting that: *'in my view these people are delivering what the aspirations and hopes have been, when TFA was set up. No question about that'.*



Stories of Impact

A MESSAGE FROM TFA'S CEO AND FOUNDER

I am delighted to see this valuable piece of research completed for Teach For Australia.

On Teach For Australia's behalf, I would like to echo my sincere thanks to each of the partner schools involved - Southern River College, St Joseph's Catholic College, Mill Park Secondary College and Horsham College - and recognise the efforts of the Lirata team.

This work was originally commissioned in 2019 in order to understand Teach For Australia's contribution to school improvement. We saw a need for an independent research project that could help us assess and better understand our impact at a school level, while also pointing to ways we might boost support of teachers, schools and communities where educational disadvantage persists.

During 2020 and 2021, like everything in school systems across Australia, this project was disrupted by COVID. Lirata, Teach For Australia's own Measurement, Evaluation and Research team, and our partner schools all showed great patience and tenacity and together we accepted the necessity to divert from original plans. Cognisant of these challenges, it gives me additional pleasure to read through this high-quality research work and see it still honours the original scope despite those hurdles.

At Teach For Australia, we place a high value on gathering data to inform our decisions, and taking a reflective and continual improvement mindset to our work. This research builds on internal and external Measurement & Evaluation activity that is part of Teach For Australia's day-to-day, and it gives us an opportunity to step back and take a longer view of TFA's impact.

Among the key findings, the research identified that Associates and Alumni make considerable contributions to school level improvements, including improvements in pedagogy, student pathways and retention, student outcomes, student engagement and wellbeing, community engagement and school culture and professionalism. It also found TFA teachers positively contribute to a culture of improvement, but also have greater impact when it is in place. This reinforces TFA's belief that while our people

and programs can make impactful contributions, the benefits amplify when effort is collective and coordinated with other measures that similarly seek to support students, teachers and school leadership capabilities.

Similarly, the recommendations informed by this research also encourage TFA to keep working closely with our partner schools. Maintaining and boosting the high-quality elements of our program as we scale, such as our Associate mentoring support, is vital. We are truly grateful for the willingness expressed by our partner schools that they are keen to continue helping us strengthen and build our program offerings.

I was particularly humbled to read the supportive comments of principals and other teachers who speak so highly of the Teach For Australia Associates they work with, and who see the student-level and school-level contributions first hand. The research spoke to them working with humility in their school communities while also being "drivers for change". Teach For Australia's mission is to grow a community of leaders committed to equity for children, and it is heartening to see this mission reflected in Lirata's observations and findings.

From here, Teach For Australia will use this work to guide internal continuous improvement. This includes celebrating what is working well and looking for opportunities to grow. We will also socialise the chapters and summary with our external supporters and stakeholders who maintain strong interest in the impacts an organisation like Teach For Australia can influence at school and student level. Likewise, we will share the learnings with our global network partner, Teach For All.

While this is the first time Teach For Australia has commissioned such work to support our endeavours, I know it won't be the last. We pride ourselves on being a learning organisation, and one that values 'getting there together'. Tackling educational inequity requires collective effort, and Teach For Australia recognises that assessment, evaluation and continual improvement are critical to supporting the work we do, in service of students.

Sincerely,

Melodie Potts Rosevear

Founder and CEO, Teach For Australia

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