

*UNDERSTANDING
EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES
AND OUTCOMES:
A South Australian Atlas*

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Foreword

The Smith Family is proud to be involved in the publication of *Understanding Educational Outcomes and Opportunities: An Atlas of South Australia*.

As a nation, our social and economic prosperity depends upon our children being able to access a world class education – not just to prepare them for future jobs, but to ensure they are able to participate effectively in the 21st century knowledge era.

Over the past decade, the South Australian Government, the Australian Federal Government, businesses and the community as a whole have embraced education and understand its importance for individuals, particularly in the critical developmental years of early childhood. However, it is clear that the quality and quantity of educational opportunities remain very different for children around Australia, with those living in disadvantaged communities having access to far fewer resources or support for their learning. Without appropriate interventions, these children are likely to grow up facing the same barriers to their participation that their parents faced in the past, and that their own children will face in the future.

The key to successfully breaking this cycle of disadvantage is to ensure that children in all communities have the same chance to realise their potential through education as any other, regardless of their background. To achieve this, we need quality contemporary data that clearly identify where extra support is required to improve the educational outcomes of individuals, families and communities as a whole.

Understanding Educational Outcomes and Opportunities: An Atlas of South Australia is an initiative of The Smith Family and PHIDU (the Public Health Information Development Unit) with funding from the Department of Education and Children's Services. It is designed to meet this need by providing a resource to help schools, community organisations and government at all levels engage in evidence-based planning and policy development, as well as effective cross-sector partnerships to support better educational opportunities for children across the life course. It also establishes benchmarks against which subsequent performance of our early childhood and education sectors may be measured as required under the National Education Agreement and the Schooling/ Early Childhood Education National Partnerships. The Atlas also provides important information about the social and economic contexts in which children and young people develop and learn, and schools and teachers go about their work. Unless we take account of these differing contexts, performance cannot be assessed.

Focusing primarily on indicators of access and participation, the Atlas also includes data sourced from the National Assessment Program in Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI), providing detailed information on children across a range of indicators associated with their literacy and numeracy, as well as providing a picture of early childhood outcomes. All the data in the Atlas is also available on the PHIDU website (www.publichealth.gov.au) in addition to interactive mapping and graphics packages that can be used to analyse the findings in different ways.

The Atlas is a powerful tool in collaboratively working towards the future education and wellbeing of South Australians. In particular, it will assist policymakers, teachers and practitioners in identifying and addressing inequalities in education, which is an important aim of South Australia's Strategic Plan, the Department of Education and Children's Services Strategic Plan and the COAG Melbourne Declaration more broadly.

If other states and territories in Australia follow the example of South Australia in producing and maintaining this kind of resource, we will be able to take a great step forward in creating a more caring and cohesive community for our children.



Elaine Henry

CEO, The Smith Family

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