

## SVA GROWING GREAT TEACHERS



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## OVERVIEW

The Growing Great Teachers (GGT) project presents 11 case studies showcasing programs and approaches that are improving the attraction and retention of early career teachers in low socioeconomic status (SES) schools, and a literature review. This research:

- a) Increases the understanding of what works to support and develop quality teaching in low SES schools;
- b) Informs SVA's work in replicating and scaling initiatives.

Attracting and improving the retention of early career teachers in low SES schools will improve education outcomes for students in disadvantaged communities.

## SITUATION

It is becoming more likely that Australian students will be taught by an early career teacher. This is even more common in low SES schools. With an ageing teacher workforce, half of all Australian teachers will reach retirement age in the next 5 – 10 years. This will leave up to 125,000 teaching positions to be filled by early career teachers. Therefore, it is critically important that the education system effectively supports and develops early career teachers.

However, the current system is not doing enough. One in two teachers currently leave the profession in the first 3 – 5 years of practice. This statistic is worse in low SES schools. Reasons for this high attrition rate include:

- **Lack of pastoral and professional support:** Support through methods such as inductions, in-school mentoring, and specialist coaching, mainly depends on the initiative of individual schools.
- **Cultural and contextual stress:** It is challenging to work in low SES schools. Students enter the classroom with complex personal and cultural backgrounds and this impacts the teaching and learning process.
- **Employment uncertainties:** Over 40% of early career teachers are employed on fixed term contracts and have problems gaining permanent teaching positions. It is not uncommon for early career teachers to work on a single term or semester basis. This creates job insecurity and contributes to early career teachers leaving the profession. 70% of early career teachers said that the uncertainties of their employment status had a negative effect on their teaching.
- **School locations:** Low SES schools are generally located in disadvantaged communities. These are often less desirable places to live and work. Once placed, early career teachers commonly work for a relatively short period of time and work towards being placed in higher SES areas.

After graduation, many teachers spend the first three years of practice in a low SES school. These schools are typically harder to staff; they're more demanding, require greater sacrifice, and are often thinly resourced. Early career teachers are more likely to teach in low SES schools because more experienced teachers often prefer to teach in higher SES schools.

Despite more teaching opportunities, low SES schools struggle to attract teachers. The highest performing teaching graduates (as recognised by universities) are often less likely to teach in a low SES school.



There are notable exceptions to this trend. However, these 'Bright Spots' are too often acting in isolation. Too many excellent early career teachers are not being directed and properly prepared to work in low SES schools. For those who are, retention rates are much higher in the initial 3-5 years.

There are three main system-level impacts of high early career teacher attrition rates:

- 1) **Lower student outcomes:** Low SES schools are disproportionately staffed by early career teachers. Consequently, high early career teacher attrition rates disproportionately affect low SES schools. In turn, students in low SES schools are less likely to be taught by an experienced teacher.
- 2) **Unrealised gains in teaching quality:** With half of new teachers leaving the profession in the first 3 – 5 years of practice, the education system is potentially losing thousands of quality teachers. This is a loss that can be reduced.
- 3) **Higher Commonwealth Government expenditure:** The total annual expenditure of the Australian Government on initial teacher education is approximately \$450 million. The high early career teacher attrition rates mean higher government expenditure to train additional teachers.

Quality teaching is the surest way to increase student outcomes. The most effective teachers can increase student outcomes twice as fast as the least effective teachers. Therefore, better professional support and development for teachers is essential to improve student outcomes in low SES schools.

## METHOD

The GGT project comprised two main stages of research:

1. **Academic Research and Environmental Scan:** SVA worked with Professor Brian Caldwell and the team at Educational Transformations to conduct a literature review and an environmental scan of great practice supporting early career teachers.
2. **Case Study Interviews:** Interviews were conducted with 52 people, including: early career teachers, school leaders, organisations, and key government personnel.

## LESSONS

This research reaffirmed the importance of investing in teachers, particularly in the early stages of their career. Specific practices have the potential to improve the attraction, retention, and effectiveness of early career teachers in low SES schools.

## 1. TEACHER TRAINING

Teacher training is critical for preparing and developing early career teachers to work in low SES schools. This includes both initial teacher education at university and ongoing training once placed within schools. Such effective practices included:

- A. **Early Exposure:** Early exposure through teacher practicums is critical to attracting quality early career teachers into low SES schools. This early exposure better prepares graduates for the demands of working in these contexts. As a result, graduate teachers are more likely to teach in low SES schools and more likely to stay in the profession.
- B. **Clinical Practice Training:** Early career teachers who received training in clinical teaching practice are more reflective and responsive to their students' needs. Clinical practice training equips early career teachers with the skills to accurately monitor and evaluate student progress. It also provides targeted methods to use this evidence to improve student outcomes. This is particularly beneficial for early career teachers in low SES schools, considering the wide range of student standards.
- C. **Teacher-led Professional Development:** This means that early career teachers are not passive participants (like in lectures), but are given the opportunity to advance their ideas and experiences, and encouraged to put these new skills into practice. Broadening networks through professional development also creates new sources of support and development.

## 2. OBSERVATION, APPRAISAL AND FEEDBACK

An emphasis on practical observation, appraisal and feedback played a role in all of the case studies. This process helps early career teachers to improve their teaching skills by identifying and developing aspects of their teaching.

- A. **Inductions:** Effective induction programs offer structured and ongoing support as the early career teacher develops professionally as a teacher. Examples include regular meetings with other early career teacher peers, structured programs assisting with teacher accreditation, and opportunities to learn from more experienced teachers, such as team-teaching and observation.
- B. **In-school Mentoring:** In-school mentors provide early career teachers with the pastoral support needed to thrive in low SES schools. All schools represented in this research partnered their early career teachers with in-school mentors in their initial years. For in-school mentoring to work effectively, carefully selecting able and willing mentors is essential.
- C. **Specialist Coaching:** Early career teachers who receive specialist coaching are more likely to become effective teachers and to stay in the profession. Receiving appraisal and feedback from trained coaches means that early career teachers can use these evidence-based methods in their classrooms.

## 3. EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

The types and amount of support and development available to early career teachers is often determined by individual schools.

The quality of school leaders therefore influences the professional growth of early career teachers.

- A. **Developing Teachers as Leaders:** Creating a structured and progressive program to develop the leadership capacity of early career teachers improves attraction and retention. The schools and organisations that have clear leadership paths are more likely to attract quality early career teachers. Once placed, the clear progressions and skills developed mean that early career teachers are more likely to be retained.
- B. **Open School Culture:** Schools that support open cultures of professional sharing, collegiality, and open-plan learning are enabling environments for early career teachers. They encourage peer learning between colleagues.

## NEXT STEPS – Replicate & Scale

SVA has begun the process of enabling some of the organisations and programs to grow via replication and scaling. The aim is to expand initiatives that are developing effective early career teachers in low SES schools.

This includes:

- Communicating great practice
- Building relationships between stakeholders
- Assisting with organisational development
- Providing strategic guidance
- Helping to secure the required capital for replication and scale.

SVA's aim is to support teaching in low SES schools to increase opportunities for students living in disadvantaged communities.

**Please visit the SVA Growing Great Teachers webpage at <http://socialventures.com.au/work/Growing-Great-Teachers> to view the case studies and research.**

*\*For a list of references please contact SVA Education*

Read the literature review [here](#).





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