

# What is the Big Picture design for schools?

**The Big Picture Education Distinguishers.**



**Big Picture**  
EDUCATION AUSTRALIA  
ONE STUDENT AT A TIME IN  
A COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS  
SMALL SCHOOLS BY DESIGN



Big Picture Education Australia is a not-for-profit network of educators implementing a distinctive design for schools in a range of different community settings. Our purpose is to influence vital changes in education. Our motivation is that too many of our young people are not achieving their potential. Many are not engaged in school learning and some do not complete school.

We do not own schools or manage them. We work with education systems to adapt the innovative Big Picture Education (BPE) design to fit specific schools and communities. Across Australia nearly 40 sites currently explore the BPE design. New schools, existing schools converting to BPE, Big Picture Academies within schools and other sites work to improve learning. Underpinning the BPE design are some important distinguishers (outlined opposite).

## Big Picture schools educate one student at a time, within a community of learners.

They are lively proof that all young people, and especially our underserved students, can succeed in school. It happens by adhering to four basic principles

1. Learning must be based on each student's interests and needs.
2. Curriculum must be relevant to the students and allow them to do real work outside of school.
3. Students must connect to adult mentors outside the school who share the interests and support the learning of the students.
4. Students' development and their abilities must be measured by the quality of their work and how this work changes them.



Every day we strive to form deep ties that connect students, teachers, families, mentors and the entire community. We devote extra time and energy to helping our students succeed in high school and go beyond, into further learning or work. This is why Big Picture Education works.

Big Picture students learn together in small groups, called advisories, with an advisory teacher who guides the same group for a number of years. A parent or adult advocate of each student is also enlisted as an active resource for the school community. All students help create their own curriculum, a personal one, that reflects and expands their own interests and aspirations. The school days include off-campus internships generated from each student's interests. This real-life training could be in a law office, an arts studio, a research laboratory, a hospital, a national park ... it could be anywhere.



Big Picture students also take on further education including courses in various certificates and at TAFE and university. Each term they exhibit their work to their advisory teacher, peers, parents, mentors and others in the community. Students help each other to reinforce their individual passions for work in the real world. The result is a self-teaching community of learners where no one feels left out.

This is the breakthrough strategy  
It involves the school

# The Big Picture Education Distinguishers.

There are a number of design elements that, in combination, distinguish Big Picture Education from other designs of schooling. These elements or 'distinguishers' influence everything that advisory teachers, leaders, students and families try to do in a Big Picture school or program.

The distinguishers are:

**1. Academic rigour: Head, heart and hand**

Big Picture schools have a strong intellectual purpose for each and every student. Students are continually challenged to deepen their learning and improve their performance across five learning goals: quantitative reasoning, empirical reasoning, social reasoning, communication skills and personal qualities. A high standard of academic work is expected of all students.

**2. Leaving to learn: Learning through internships**

Students work two days a week in an interest-based internship with a mentor from the community on an intellectually rigorous real-world project that is connected to their learning goals.

**3. Personalisation: One student at a time**

With the help of the advisory teacher and parents, each student develops a learning plan that explores their interests and passions, and identifies personal learning goals, authentic project work and wider curriculum requirements. This plan is reviewed and updated regularly.

**4. Authentic assessment**

Each term the students exhibit their portfolios of work to a panel made up of the advisory teacher, family, peers, the mentor, and others from the community. They provide evidence of progress against their learning goals and they reflect on the process of their learning.

**5. Collaboration for learning**

Students work in one-on-one or small group learning environments around their interests both inside and outside the school. Through internships, the community plays an integral role in the education of the students.

**6. Learning in advisory**

Students are in an advisory group of no more than 17 students and an advisory teacher. They stay in the same advisory for much of their secondary education. The advisory teacher manages each student's learning plan and ensures that all learning goals and the National Curriculum are covered.

**7. Trust, respect and care**

One of the striking things about Big Picture schools is the ease with which students interact with adults in both the school and the wider community. A culture of trust, respect and care is shared between students and adults, as well as among students themselves.

**8. Everyone's a leader**

In Big Picture Schools, leadership is shared among the principal, staff, students, family, and community partners. Opportunities for leadership are created for everyone.

**9. Families are enrolled too**

Big Picture schools aim for real family engagement. Parents or carers are regarded as essential members of the learning team, beginning with the application process and progressing through to learning plan development, exhibitions and graduation.

**10. Creating futures**

All students are expected to graduate from school to further learning. They are prepared for, and connected to, opportunities for learning at university and/or other further education.

**11. Teachers and leaders are learners too**

New ideas constantly emerge as part of the learning cycle process. Teachers and leaders in Big Picture schools and programs regularly attend to new ideas and learn new ways of working. They develop reflective practice and find ways of sharing this learning with others.

**12. Diverse and enduring partnerships**

A Big Picture School has a strong focus on building and creating external partnerships. These include partnerships with: the family, mentors, local councils, businesses, universities, TAFE colleges and other training providers. These partnerships give students the opportunities to pursue their learning and achieve their goals

strategy that engages young people and encourages them to do their best. school and the teachers. It involves the family and it involves the community. Over time it transforms community.

# Big Picture

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