



# Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)

## Snapshot: Augusta State School

Augusta State School is located in Augustine Heights in south-west Brisbane. It is a part of the Greater Springfield area, Australia's largest master planned community, making it a futures built school. Since opening in 2011 with 278 students, Augusta has continued to experience significant growth with a current enrolment of 879 students, 135 of which make up the six Prep classes. Students at the school come from a broad range of cultural backgrounds, with a small but increasing number of students for whom English is their second language. The school also has an increasing number of students who are living in a family with a member of the Australian Defence services.

As a new school, there was little long-term data. Now in their seventh year, the school has a variety of data sets, including Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data comparing between collections in 2012 and 2015, which they could begin interrogating to identify school trends. Principal Tammy Swane worked with Deputy Principal Tracie Best and Prep teacher Cheryl Mitchell to explore their AEDC data, and what it meant for their school and community.

### Looking at the data

The school's journey began with a visit from the Assistant Regional Director (ARD). The school worked with their ARD to consider their students'

current transition-to-school experience and what the AEDC told them about the development of children in their community when starting school. For some staff, the implementation and use of the AEDC tool was new to them. Prep teacher Cheryl, who had been involved in three previous collections, was an advocate for the value of the AEDC in providing a holistic picture of child development.

"The AEDC data helps us look at the whole child, not just their academic and oral language skills but also their social and emotional skills. It helps us get a good view of the 'backpack' that the child comes to school with, not just the academic side of things. As a Prep teacher, the AEDC data also helps us plan for the needs of the children in the community, which is helpful for planning our programs around the children," she said.

Tracie's conversation with her ARD and the regional transition team, together with Cheryl's experience, began a process of exploring the data and how it could support the school with transitioning children into Prep. Tracie described her first impressions of the data:

"At the beginning, I didn't see the true value in the data because I had no context...so for me it was around building an understanding of the context of the data, where it came from and what it gave us, which we could use to build our story," she said.



In looking at the AEDC data, the school recognised that although they felt they knew their students, and recognised the strengths and needs of students in the school, some of their understandings about what was contributing to students' development was based on their assumptions about families and the community.

"We had a good look at the data and realised that we didn't have all of the information. We could make assumptions in interpreting the data but we needed to get a much clearer picture," Tammy said.

Through their discussions about their assumptions, the school identified some areas where they wanted to gather more information.

### Who is your community?

Does your understanding of the community and your AEDC school profile rely on your assumptions?

Who could help you build a clearer picture of what is contributing to child development in your community?

While community infrastructure appeared to be in place, the social connections that support parents in their children's early years and help to enhance children's developmental outcomes and wellbeing were not clearly evident or easily visible. Tammy explained the services are in the community, and may not be visible to those who are not aware.

Additionally, given the age of the community, parents may need support to build connections with other families and clear opportunities to support one another.

"Our work now becomes about how we make sure that parents know what services are available to them that can help support their child's education before starting Prep," Tammy said.

## Working collaboratively

The school recognised that the AEDC data reflected their community rather than their school and that understanding and defining their community was one of the first steps to unpacking their data. They asked 'what is our community?'

Once they defined their community, the school was able to begin to identify potential partners who support children's development across the five AEDC domains.

The school extended their network, approaching other key organisations in the community who shared an interest in improving children's outcomes and connecting families in the community. The school invited Community Health and Early Childhood Education and Care providers to a discussion.

From these connections, the school was also able to identify additional stakeholders such as the Springfield Land Corporation, the University of Southern Queensland's Springfield Campus, Playgroups Queensland and the Ipswich City Council.



“One of the realisations we’ve had is that it’s not about Augusta State School, it’s about the community and the community which is inclusive of other schools. Establishing connections and identifying partners in the community to support our children in those areas in the early years is vital to support the children in our community,” said Tracie.

Drawing on the experiences of the community partners, the school started to explore issues impacting on service and support availability and utilisation in the community, and how these could be drawn upon to lift the capacities and strengthen social capital for the whole community. Through discussions and reflection it became clear that the action plan to support parents in the community was centred on extending and building community partnerships. As the community was futures built, the school remained the centre of the project, while they recognised that any attempt to improve the community would need to be collaborative.

“Schools are very busy places, and looking at the data has helped us consider not what else can we do, but who else can help us support the families that live in the community,” explained Tammy.

“We are lucky to be working in a community where people are willing to listen and be part of the plan, to provide a better opportunity for parents and children. All we needed to do was to invite these people to partner with us.”

#### Create webs of communication

By sharing your vision within your existing network, you can broaden your network and engage with new partners.

## Strategies to improve engagement

Talking about the AEDC as a group stimulated conversations of possible contributing factors and actions which could support positive movement in these domains. These discussions between the school and their community partners identified a variety of possible underlying challenges for families such as the age of the community, families in which both parents are working full-time, time-poor families and parental knowledge of child development. The group also identified some lost opportunities to make use of existing early years community allied health services.

Children become ineligible for these services at the age of five, thus many miss out through lack of identification of their needs in the year before they start school.



The supportive nature of the community was viewed as a significant strength, with the school’s focus on working in partnership with families and the inclusive culture of the school being drawn upon to begin developing connections between community supports and parents.

The group identified the potential benefits of supporting parents to engage with Early Childhood Education and Care services before their children start school and for communicating to parents the importance of rich early language environments and play experiences for their children’s development. The group also identified that connecting parents to each other in these early years could help to strengthen social capital for the whole community.

What are the strengths of your school and the community?

How can you draw on these strengths to enhance children's development and wellbeing?

The group is working together to develop a local playgroup, drawing upon supports from the University of Southern Queensland and TAFE students, who will help engage parents and children in quality early education environments and build parental knowledge around child development. Playgroups can assist with the child's transition into school, and provide parents with an opportunity to connect and discover services and supports. To build on the extensive local infrastructure, the group identified the potential of utilising Robelle Domain, a green public space (managed by Ipswich City Council) that is already utilised by many families, as a potential venue for a local playgroup. On approach, Ipswich City Council was eager to support a project to bring the community together and utilise infrastructure for social benefits.



## What's changed?

The school is now conducting their Prep enrolment process earlier in the year, in an effort to help identify children who may need additional support but would have 'aged out' by the time they begin formal schooling, and connecting them with relevant allied health services. Augusta is also planning to include additional questions in their Prep enrolment questionnaire to help them determine what parents know about the community and how they are connecting with services. This will assist the school in better understanding the needs of parents in the early years and help them to continue to shape local supports and connections.

Having seen the value of the AEDC for them and their planning, the school will continue to use the AEDC in the future to support strategic planning and in identifying the changing needs of the community as it develops.

## Take the next steps

1. Explore your community data at [www.aedc.gov.au/data](http://www.aedc.gov.au/data)
2. Critically reflect on your AEDC data and your knowledge of the students and families at your school.
3. Work collaboratively with your teaching team to plan and implement student-focused programming and practice.
4. Identify community groups and organisations who may partner with the school.
5. Explore the AEDC community data with community partners to identify areas of mutual concern and benefit.

To find out more about how you can start incorporating the AEDC in your planning, download the suite of AEDC resources online at [www.education.qld.gov.au/about-us/reporting-data-research/data/aus-early-development-census/school-resources](http://www.education.qld.gov.au/about-us/reporting-data-research/data/aus-early-development-census/school-resources).