

Focus on Maths: Improving mathematics education in disadvantaged Australian schools

AAMT's Focus on Maths program has had a fruitful 2024, supporting 13 schools across Australia in addressing the mathematics education gap. Launched in late 2023, the program targets schools in low socio-economic, rural, or remote areas, with out-of-field teachers or First Nations students. By funding locally tailored mathematics professional learning initiatives, Focus on Maths is helping to build teacher capacity and self-efficacy.

2024: A year of growth and impact

In its first full year, the program received 67 applications, approving 19 diverse projects designed to meet local needs. In states and territories from north to south and east to west, 70 teachers have so far completed learning activities, with direct benefit to over 2,600 students.

Where required, AAMT supported participating schools in identifying relevant learning activities, ensuring the professional development was practical, targeted and context specific. As needed, some funding was also applied to purchase classroom resources directly linked to professional learning.

Key results demonstrate enhanced teacher knowledge, confidence and skills in teaching mathematics. Professional learning sessions supported evidence-based pedagogies and strategies, such as the use of manipulatives, culturally responsive practices or a focus on improving Year 6 to 7 transition, that directly improved classroom experiences. One participant noted 'The targeted professional learning was very focused on what I needed to learn ... hands-on teaching to cater for the needs of children with low literacy and numeracy.'

Additionally, the program fostered valuable professional networking opportunities among teachers. These networks enabled peer learning, mentorship and collaboration, within and beyond individual schools into the broader maths teaching community. In many schools, the Focus on Maths project helped raise the profile of maths and numeracy teaching and stimulated an ongoing commitment to fund more investment in maths professional learning.



Success stories

Case studies illustrate the program's tangible impact. For example, a remote primary school in the Northern Territory leveraged their \$3,600 Focus on Maths grant to support local Aboriginal teachers in maths professional learning. This carefully considered approach helped build capacity among First Nations educators and recognised their significant potential to support and drive student success. As local teachers developed maths learning activities in language, there was a visible effect on student engagement as 'students love it ... they appreciate having their Elders teach them'.

In contrast, a metropolitan secondary school in New South Wales used a \$10,000 grant to establish a dedicated numeracy space and fund teacher professional learning using hands-on activities. The school reported significant improvements in teacher confidence, student participation and achievement, with one teacher saying 'the student engagement - I feel like that's increased a lot' and 'we know that our kids are moving up the ladder, they are achieving their outcomes.'

Looking ahead

As the program enters its second full year, AAMT remains committed to scaling and sustaining these initiatives. Plans for 2025 include supporting 12 new projects, building on the successful model from 2024 and having learned from the most effective initiatives.

By continuing to invest in tailored professional learning and fostering collaborative networks, Focus on Maths is a program that at its heart seeks to enable all students, regardless of their background or location to access quality mathematics education.

The Focus on Maths program remains open to applications year-round, with the evaluation and selection process for Funding Round 4 closing on 30 March 2025. You can read our application guidelines on our website. If you teach in a primary or secondary school with an ICSEA score below 1000 and have a maths professional learning project in mind, why not apply for funding in 2025 at <https://aamt.edu.au/teachers/grants/focus-on-maths/> ?

