

# Keeping it hands-on and engaging for kids

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Page 4 | Section: NEWS SCHOOL

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The Courier

# Keeping it hands-on and engaging for kids

BY ROCHELLE KIRKHAM

A SCHOOL program that is improving student engagement and long-term education outcomes has expanded its reach in the Central Highlands region.

Three schools joined the Hands On Learning program in 2019 and another has announced it will begin the program this year.

Students across the region say participating in the program has improved their learning and behaviour in the classroom, as well as their happiness and attendance at school.

Regional Victoria Hands On Learning School Support Manager Steve Schneider said the feedback was exciting for the future of the program.

"We started the school year with two local schools and by the end of the year we have got six," he said. "It shows the word is getting around about what we do."

Phoenix P-12 Community College announced before Christmas they would begin running the Hands On Learning program in 2020.

It comes after Beaufort Secondary College, Creswick Primary School and Damascus College started the program in their schools.

Mount Clear College and Daylesford College have run the program for a number of years. Schools typically offer the program to about 10 students one day a week.

Students spend time working together on practical projects, including construction and hospitality, that foster teamwork, communication and problem-solving skills.



**TOGETHER:** Mount Clear College Hands on Learning program coordinator Brett Domaschew works with students Jahi, year 7, and Kyla, year 8, to nail a piece of wood to the dog kennel. **Pictures:** Kate Healy and Adam Trafford

The model creates a place to belong on school grounds but outside the classroom where students build relationships, learn through real-life projects that give back to the school community, and develop strategies to shift attitudes and behaviours that can be barriers to learning in the classroom.

Mr Schneider previously told *The Courier* the ultimate goal was to re-engage young people with education before they drop out, but also equip them with the skills to succeed at school.

"For so many kids, a traditional classroom setting isn't working for them," he said.

"For a lot of the children involved, they don't have

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For so many kids, a traditional classroom setting isn't working for them

Steve Schneider

the easiest life and this is somewhere they can spend the majority of the day doing something they are really interested in and passionate about with someone who is interested in them."

Students, parents and teachers involved in Hands On Learning provide feedback on the program each year. Collated feedback from the Central Highlands region

for 2019 shows 54 per cent of students said Hands On Learning was the key reason they had been engaged and motivated to come to school.

School staff feedback shows teachers' ability to work positively with a range of students, students' behaviour in the classroom and their ability to be calm and manage feelings had improved.



**FUN:** Liam and Reilly enjoy making planter boxes in Creswick Primary School's Hands on Learning program.