

Northern Territory
Education Engagement
STRATEGY 2022–2031





“We acknowledge all those who have taught and learned on the lands and seas for generations, and the contribution they have made to learning that continues today.

The Education Engagement Strategy 2022–2031 is for all families, educators and communities who seek to help our children and young people to engage in learning in the Northern Territory.

It has been prepared to support all students: for those whose ancestors have learned on this land for thousands of years, and those who have arrived here yesterday, today and tomorrow.”

“We are committed to continuing to grow our connection with young people, families and communities to engage every child in learning.”

WARNING: This report may contain images and stories of deceased persons.

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Minister's foreword

A quality education empowers our children and young people. It unlocks their full potential and provides opportunities to help them succeed in life.

Currently, too many of our children and young people are not fully engaged in their education; they are attending school sporadically or not at all.

This is particularly the case for many Aboriginal children. Too many.

The reasons for this are complex but we absolutely owe it to them to do better when it comes to ensuring they are supported, motivated and inspired to engage with their learning every day.

At a community level, we are investing in new and improved housing, in quality health care and in early year's education to ensure Territory children have the basic building blocks of a good life.

But we also need to be honest about the fact that our education system is not working for many of our children and young people, particularly those living in remote communities and on homelands.

This Strategy underpins our intention to do a better job of listening to what communities and families are telling us – and putting them at the centre of decisions about how to educate their children.

What we have heard loud and clear is that children and young people need to be taught from within the frame of their own culture and their own language.

Learning needs to be relevant to their lives and it needs to respect and build from the knowledge systems, cultural values and first languages they learn within their family and community networks from the day they are born.

For many families and communities, cultural responsiveness is a key element of this approach. We are investing in bilingual and cultural learning and there are examples across the Territory of where this is working well. But we simply aren't doing it enough or as effectively as we need to.

It needs to be embedded in our curriculum and across the education system.

We need more Aboriginal teachers and other staff in classrooms.

We need to bring communities and families and their ways of teaching and learning into the classroom.

We need to provide more opportunities for meaningful learning so that our children remain engaged, as well as ensuring that our education system supports our kids' physical and mental well-being and diversity.

Everyone needs to work together and side by side to ensure children and young people get a quality education that has its foundations in culture and first language.

We are incredibly fortunate to have great educators both in the early learning sector and throughout our schools who work hard to provide our children with nurturing and creative learning environments.

The Strategy also outlines how we do a better job of ensuring they are supported to deliver culturally relevant teaching and learning, in conjunction with local communities and families.

I would like to thank everyone who participated in the consultation for this strategy and shared their voice and feedback. Your views and ideas have helped us shape the NT Education Engagement Strategy and given us a greater understanding and appreciation of our children and young people's opportunities and challenges.

This Strategy is not the end of the conversation, rather it signals the beginning of a new way forward for education in the Northern Territory.

We have already begun work to implement the 18 actions and ten deliverables included in the strategy – and we will continue to work with schools, educators, families and communities to keep on this path.

There is no silver bullet when it comes to delivering a quality education for every child and young person.

Instead, we need to continue to work together to create a system that is relevant, engaging, culturally responsive and flexible so every student can find their place to thrive.



The Hon Lauren Moss
Minister for Education

Education Engagement Strategy Summary

“Let kids do stuff they think engages them while teaching them the stuff they need to learn.”

- NT Learning Commission Student



Engagement

Young people in the Northern Territory start in early learning programs and school education already equipped with deeply established knowledge systems, cultural values and ways of learning that have been shaped by their families and communities. Our education system must reflect the rich cultural, social and linguistic diversity amongst our learners.

A quality education empowers our young people and unlocks their full potential. For this to be realised, children and students must be motivated, challenged and see value in their education, feel safe and welcome in their learning environment, and have supportive and respectful relationships.

Foundations of engagement



We are committed to continuing to grow our connection with young people, families and communities to engage every child in learning.



Relationships

Children and students feel a strong sense of belonging through positive relationships with their peers and educators.



Wellbeing and inclusion

The learning environment is safe, supportive and welcoming for all students and their families.

Cultural, social and linguistic diversity amongst our learners is valued, celebrated and embedded in learning.



Culture and identity

Student's beliefs, interests and aspirations are at the centre of their learning.



Belief and motivation

Education Engagement Goals and Actions

1. Education is a partnership

GOAL

Families and education services work together to ensure all children and young people get the best start to learning and they are supported and encouraged to continue their learning journey.

Actions

- Build on current work to implement models of local decision making in all schools, focused on improvement, and ensuring everyone has a say in key decisions on how the education service operates.
- Work with families and community elders to support families to reengage children and young people in an appropriate education program.
- Develop consultative and decision making mechanisms to capture Aboriginal perspectives and student voice on matters of policy development and program delivery.
- Work with communities to identify ways cultural learning can be recognised in and through the curriculum.

2. The right people

GOAL

Positive, energetic, culturally responsive and skilled educators motivate children and young people to engage in learning and experience success.

Actions

- Provide professional development opportunities to increase educator pedagogical skill, encourage high levels of engagement, motivation and self efficacy of learners.
- Accelerate and expand programs, development opportunities and pathways that attract, retain and promote Aboriginal educators.
- Consult with remote early years and school educators to identify a range of targeted strategies that encourage long term retention.
- Tailor and deliver localised cultural responsiveness training in community, by community, for all new recruits to the community.

“When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.”

- Uluru Statement from the Heart

3. Meaningful learning

GOAL

More children participate in early years programs regularly and more students complete their schooling to achieve their goals.

Actions

- Provide expanded approaches to learning that include flexible learning arrangements such as learning through digital technologies as well as practical, active and creative subject offerings and learning experiences.
- Embed Aboriginal language and cultural knowledge and perspectives in education programs and services, including bilingual education, especially for learners in remote communities.
- Teach localised Aboriginal culture, language, knowledge and history to all children and students to create learning environments that are based on common appreciation and respect for all.

4. Wellbeing and inclusion

GOAL

The learner’s health, wellbeing and learning needs are recognised and addressed.

Actions

- Ensure early childhood services and schools are inclusive of all children, young people and their families.
- Strengthen systems for early and timely support for children and students with diverse needs.
- Families and education services partner to support positive student behaviour including the use of trauma informed approaches.
- Align resources across NT government agencies to address the diverse needs of young Territorians.
- Develop a cross sector approach to address the educational needs of students with high levels of mobility and absenteeism.

Expert Reference Group

Message from the Chair

This Strategy has been shaped with the voices of families, community members, young people and educators across the Territory who have told us, in sometimes confronting ways, about why so many young people are disengaging from education, and what we can do better to engage them.

The message of the Northern Territory Education Engagement Strategy is clear: for students in the Northern Territory to successfully engage in education, educators must listen, develop trust, and collaborate with families, with communities and most of all, with our children and students.

As Chair of the Expert Reference Group, I am privileged to have worked with some of Australia's pre-eminent experts in the field of Aboriginal education to guide and steer the work of the Strategy. We have been challenged by the information shared with us, and we worked hard collectively to make sure it is reflected in the Strategy. Importantly, we have guided the work to ensure it meets the needs of all children and young people, from all walks of life and in all education environments.



Our communities play a key role in leading our schools and so this strategy is about creating strong partnerships between schools and communities and building on our strengths to make positive changes that last.

The undertaking now to bring this Strategy to life is to continue the conversations we have started and partner with families and communities to ensure all children and young people in the Northern Territory get a great education.

Professor Ruth Wallace

Dean, Charles Darwin University
Dean, College of Indigenous Futures,
Arts and Society
Dean, College of Education
Director, Northern Institute

Northern Territory Education Engagement Strategy

Re-engaging disengaged families and students takes time, patience and an open heart.

A quality education empowers our young people and unlocks their full potential. For this to be realised, children and students must be motivated, challenged and see value in their education, feel safe and welcome in their learning environment, and have supportive and respectful relationships.

Young people in the Northern Territory start in early learning programs and school education already equipped with deeply established knowledge systems, cultural values and ways of learning that have been shaped by their families and communities. Our education systems must reflect the rich cultural, social and linguistic diversity among our learners to ensure all Territorians are able to learn, contribute and achieve.

There are 4 foundational elements that need to be in place in the educational program to engage young people in learning: aligned beliefs and motivations; respectful and caring relationships;

“Our vision is for a world class education system that encourages every student to be the very best they can be, no matter where they live or what kind of challenges they may face.”

- Alice Springs (Mparntwe)
Education Declaration

recognition and inclusion of families’ identity and culture; and, safe, supportive and inclusive learning environments. All schools and early learning centres will work to ensure these foundations are embedded in the services’ culture and practice. The strategy also sets out goals and actions in areas that require reform.

The Northern Territory Education Engagement Strategy is built on what we heard from children and young people, their families, the community and educators. This strategy will promote the continuing conversations with our partners to build connection and understanding that leads to engagement for all children and students in their learning.

Public consultations



10000

people engaged in the consultation



72

consultation sessions across the NT



5

public forums

26%

young people

40%

identified as Aboriginal

45 conversations

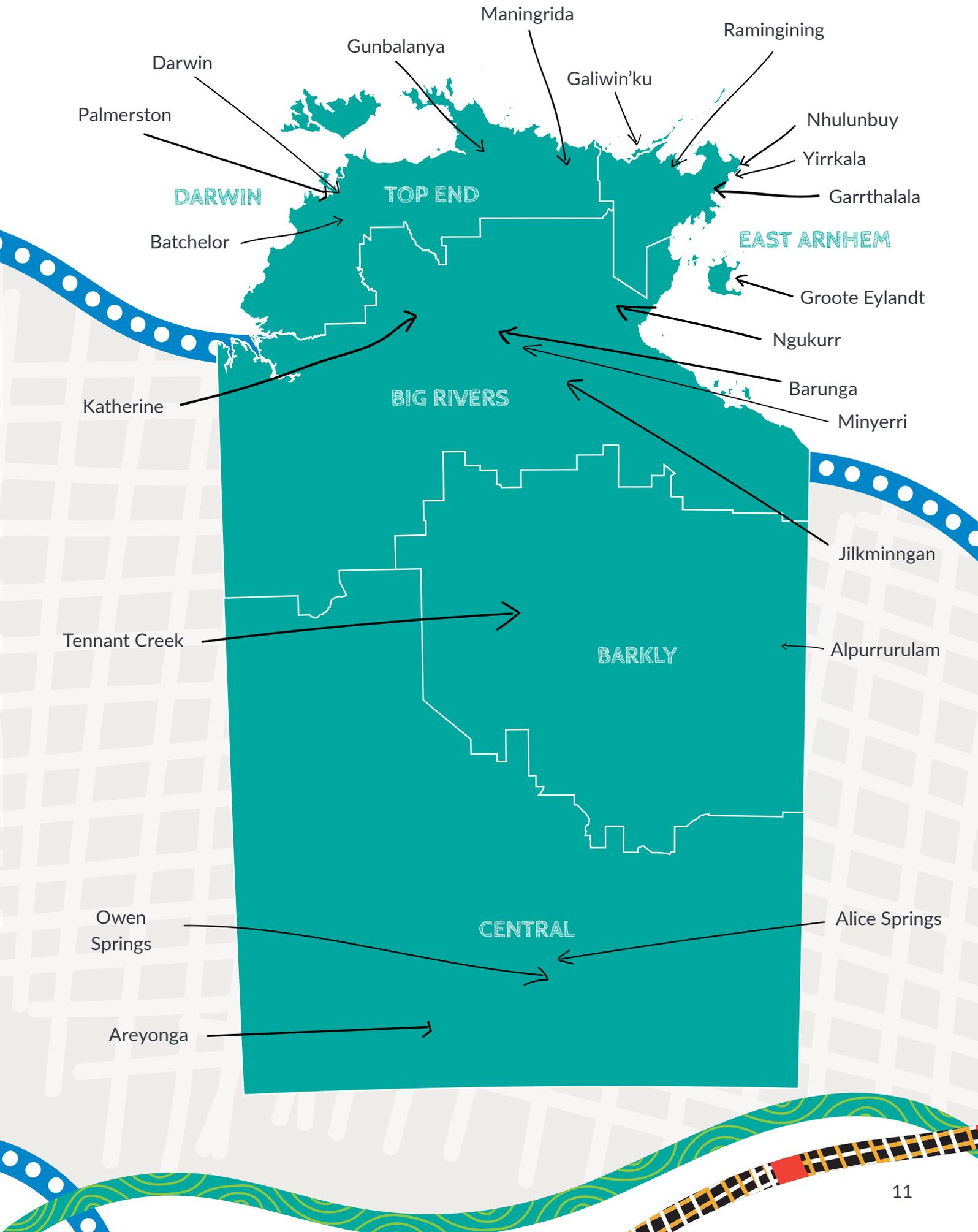
60%

remote/very remote areas

22

workshops





Responses from young people

"I learn at home and at school and back at bush my family teach me the culture and my homeland and they encourage me more about the homeland culture."

- Youth Forum East Arnhem



What we heard:

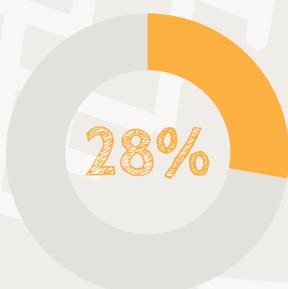
Learning must be fun and engaging with more hands on experiences inside and outside the classroom.

Positive relationships with teachers who support, motivate and inspire is critical to engagement.

Education must provide young people with the belief, and the skills and knowledge to pursue their dreams.

Key themes:

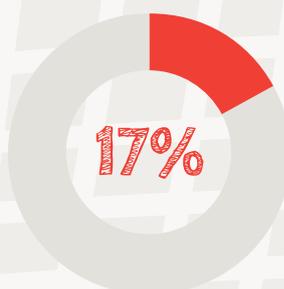
Motivation



Meaningful learning



Relationships and expert educators



Wellbeing and inclusion



Relationships and expert educators



A positive relationship with the teacher was an important comment people made through the consultations.

Young people told us they want teachers who are motivated and passionate, who build strong bonds and mutual respect with the young people they teach.

Motivation



Young people want learning to be fun and engaging. They want to have an active voice in their learning experiences.

Young people told us the importance of celebrating learning progress – regardless of how big or small.

Meaningful learning



Young people want to be challenged by their learning, to push themselves and feel a sense of accomplishment.

Meaningful learning should inspire. Young people told us that they want to see the practical value of their education and understand where it can take them after school.

Wellbeing and inclusion



Young people told us that schools need to make them feel safe, confident, protected and included. The learning environment should be welcoming and reflect the diversity of the children and students.



“My teachers are really making an effort to see how I’m progressing and that I’m attending classes... I have such a good connection with the support teachers and the teachers because we talk about life.”

- Youth Forum

“I want to be able to enjoy what the teacher is teaching me so that I can have fun.”

- Youth Forum Darwin

“Learn subjects and skills that will set you up for life.”

- Youth Forum
Palmerston

“We don’t like fighting, or feeling judged, bullied or not a part of school.”

- Youth Forum Darwin

“Explore different ways of teaching rather than just the conventional age old ways.”

- Youth Forum Darwin

“We need more compassion, respect, caring for others and teachers knowing about other kids.”

- Youth Forum Darwin

Responses from families



What we heard:

Parents and families must partner with the school and take shared responsibility to engage young people.

It is important that learning spaces provide culturally sensitive and culturally relevant learning opportunities.

The learning environment must be a safe and enjoyable space where young people feel comfortable and valued.

Key themes:

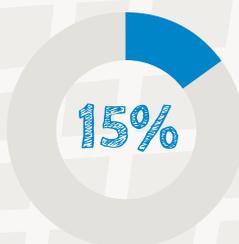
Motivation



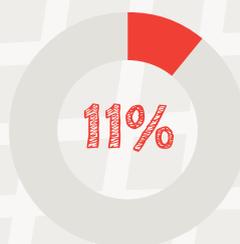
Meaningful learning



Culture and identity



Relationships and expert educators



Wellbeing and inclusion



Culture and identity



Families highlighted that language and culture must be embedded in schools.

Increasing two way learning keeps culture strong, and values and promotes the diverse knowledge systems that all young people bring to learning.

Families told us that schools need to be culturally responsive spaces, where staff have deep understanding of the local context and community.

Wellbeing and inclusion

Families highlighted the importance of their child feeling safe, secure and respected by their peers and school staff.

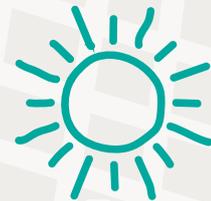
Families also called attention to community issues affecting their child's engagement in learning and the need for effective service collaboration to address the holistic needs of their child.

Relationships



Families told us that parent-school relationships are key to engaging young people. Parents and families are first teachers and they must feel welcome and included in a young person's journey through their education.

Our schools must build relationships with the communities they service, giving the community legitimate voice to provide guidance and direction.



"Community members are regularly involved in on country learning with students from the local school. Elders view this as a means of ensuring the community and the school are connected, while also allowing for the sharing of cultural knowledge."

- Community Forum East Arnhem

"If the school is a safe place and the family and community can trust the school they would feel more comfortable to send their kids there."

- Community Forum East Arnhem

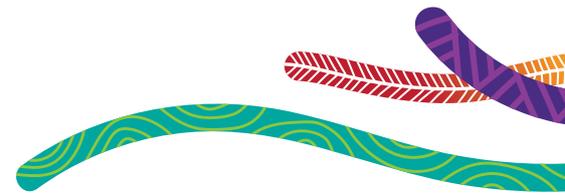
"I want my daughter to achieve at school to feel proud and to be an independent woman. I want her to be able to choose her own path. Education is a mechanism to do this."

- Parent Forum Palmerston

"I'd like to see from the deepest part of my heart I'd like to see parents engaging with their children in the time of their education, to walk along beside them and make them feel that they are not alone."

- Community Forum Big Rivers





Foundations for Engagement

Foundations for Engagement describe the essential characteristics found in the environments, relationships, resources and values, where engagement in learning is present. In general the foundations are established locally, informed by evidence, built in partnership with community and aligned to local values, contexts, and strengths.

Relationships



Children and students feel a strong sense of belonging through positive relationships with their peers and educators.

Communities have a sense of ownership and pride in the education service and the programs delivered.

Schools, parents, families and communities have a shared role and responsibility in supporting the education of learners.

Relationships are based on open communication, trust, respect, honesty, shared values and expectations.

Beliefs and Motivation



Children and students' beliefs, interests and aspirations are at the centre of their learning.

Inviting, welcoming and appropriate learning environments motivate the learner.

Children and students see the value that education provides for their future, and there are clear pathways to achieving their goals.

All students are challenged and rewarded with genuine success in learning.

Culture and identity



Cultural, social and linguistic diversity amongst our learners is understood, valued, celebrated and embedded in learning.

The beliefs, values and aspirations of families and the education service are in alignment.

Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives, identities, values and cultures are embedded in learning.

Our workforce reflects the diversity of the learners, and our educators know their children and students and how they learn.

Wellbeing and Inclusion



The learning environment is safe, supportive and welcoming for all children, students and their families.

Children and students are supported to manage their wellbeing and to achieve success through an inclusive learning culture.

Strong systems provide early and timely support for children and young people's diverse needs.





Achieving better engagement in education

Goals and actions

The Education Engagement goals and actions support the strategy's commitment to continuing to grow our connection with young people, families and communities to engage every child in learning.

The strategy identifies four goals to increase the engagement of children and young people in education programs in the Northern Territory. These goals include strengthening partnerships with families and communities; ensuring educators are well equipped to support the needs of young people; providing opportunities for meaningful learning; and attending to the emotional, social, psychological and physical needs of the learner.

The actions to achieve the goals have been identified as needed reforms through consultations, are based on evidence, and build on the Foundations for Engagement.

To continue our conversation, implementation will be co-designed with communities and families ensuring relevance to place. Some actions require system reform such as the establishment of a peak Aboriginal body, or are activities that promote greater collaboration across education sectors and support agencies.

Governance and reporting

A Governance and Implementation Committee will be established to develop and oversee joint implementation of the strategic actions over the life of the strategy. This will include identifying a set of realistic performance measures guided by government and departmental priority measures.

The committee will include membership from all NT education sectors. The group will take regular advice from key advisory groups including the NT education Aboriginal peak group and the NT education student and youth representative group. This will ensure we remain true to the intent of the strategy and that we continue conversations with our partners, which is the key to the success of this strategy.

The committee will meet biannually to review progress on the strategy, including milestones and performance.

A statement of progress will be released by the group after each meeting. The group will also report progress to the Minister for Education.

The strategy will be reviewed every three years and adjusted as agreed by the minister.



1

Education is a partnership

“How can we work together? Fitting the non-Indigenous world, and the Yolngu world. Imagine a solution so powerfully strong that it actually creates a cultural framework.”

- Community member, East Arnhem

Children and students see positive relationships between educators and their families and recognise that the important people in their lives are working together to support their education.

Families are the first educators of their children and influence their children’s learning before, during and after their school education.

Education is a partnership based on the collective responsibility of parents, families, early years services, schools and the community to educate

children and students. Working together provides the best possible support, resources and expertise for learners.

Strong place-based partnerships support:

- educators to learn about the culture and beliefs of the learner
- families to have a voice in shaping their children’s education
- communities to have shared ownership over what happens in education services.

GOAL

Families and education services work together to ensure all children and students get the best start to learning and are supported and encouraged to continue their learning journey.

Actions

- Build on current work to implement models of local decision making in all schools, focussed on improvement and ensuring everyone has a say in key decisions on how the education service operates.
- Work with families and community elders to support families to reengage children and young people in an appropriate education program.
- Develop consultative and decision-making mechanisms to capture Aboriginal perspectives and student voice on matters of policy development and program delivery.
- Work with communities to identify ways cultural learning can be recognised in and through the curriculum.

2 The right people

Relationships are at the heart of engaging children and young people in learning.

The right people refers to all those working in the education service, including educators, office staff, liaison officers, education leaders, and other staff. The right person will differ depending on the context and needs of each student.

A skilled education workforce plays an important role in cultivating an engaging learning environment. A skilled workforce occurs when the right people are attracted, recruited, and supported to do their jobs as effectively as possible. A skilled workforce can ensure all

children and young people have opportunities for success in learning.

More is needed to employ from the local community education and cultural leaders and educators to provide:

- cultural leadership and teaching
- role models and culturally safe spaces
- greater workforce continuity, particularly in remote areas.

A culturally responsive workforce understands the importance of drawing upon the cultural identity, knowledge and skills of each child and student.

“Teachers who love being around children and working with them to help give them the best possible future.”

- Student, Big Rivers

GOAL

Positive, energetic, culturally responsive and skilled educators motivate children and young people to engage in learning and experience success.

Actions

- Provide professional development opportunities to give educators more strategies to engage, motivate and encourage the self-efficacy of learners.
- Accelerate and expand programs, development opportunities and pathways that attract, retain and promote Aboriginal educators.
- Consult with remote educators to identify a range of strategies that encourage longer-term retention.
- Tailor and deliver localised cultural responsiveness training in community, by community, for all new recruits to the community.
- Support school leaders to drive implementation of the strategy.

3. Meaningful learning

“The reason we come to school is to build skills and knowledge to take to our communities and to build career pathways.”

- Student, East Arnhem

Children and students are more engaged in their learning when they are appropriately challenged through meaningful activities that can be applied in real-life situations.

It is important that children and students have a voice and control over the shape of their learning goals and the activities to achieve these goals can contribute to assessing their own progress.

Educators that set high standards, express belief in learners' capabilities and maintain a positive attitude have a positive impact on children.

They succeed in providing all children and students with opportunities for success and they celebrate this success.

Teaching and learning must be culturally responsive, catering to the diverse needs and motivations of each child or student.

High-quality early childhood education and care services, working in partnership with families and relevant agencies, are essential to set children up for success.

GOAL

Children participate regularly in early years programs, remain engaged through the stages of schooling and achieve success in their education.

Actions

- Provide expanded approaches to learning that include flexible learning arrangements such as learning through digital technologies as well as practical, active and creative subject offerings and learning experiences.
- Embed Aboriginal language and cultural knowledge and perspectives in education programs and services, including bilingual learning, especially for learners in remote communities.
- Teach localised Indigenous culture, language, knowledge and history to all children and students to create learning environments that are based on common appreciation and respect for all.
- Investigate ways to strengthen pathways in senior years and provide more pathway options.

4 Wellbeing and inclusion

“Schools need to be safe for all students - cultural needs, mental health needs, children in care, LGBTQI.”

- Young person, Palmerston

Wellbeing has an important role to play in education as it helps children and students engage in learning and become resilient life-long learners.

Physical, psychological and emotional wellbeing ensures children and students are able to respond positively to challenges and set and pursue learning goals.

Inclusive education services ensure every child and student feels welcome and accepted in their learning environment, and they are able to learn and achieve regardless of their background or personal circumstances.

Children and students experience inclusive education when they can access and fully participate in learning, alongside their peers, supported by appropriate adjustments and learning strategies tailored to accommodate needs and disabilities.

It is important that children and students are supported to manage their wellbeing through a collaborative and trauma-informed approach with parents, families, community organisations, services and agencies.

GOAL

Inclusive education supports the physical and mental wellbeing and diversity of all children and young people.

Actions

- Ensure early childhood services and schools are inclusive of all children, young people and their families.
- Strengthen systems for early and timely support for children and students with disability and diverse needs.
- Families and education services partner to support positive student behaviour, including the use of trauma informed approaches.
- Align resources across NT Government agencies to address the holistic needs of young Territorians.
- Develop a cross-sector approach to address the educational needs of students with high levels of mobility and absenteeism.

