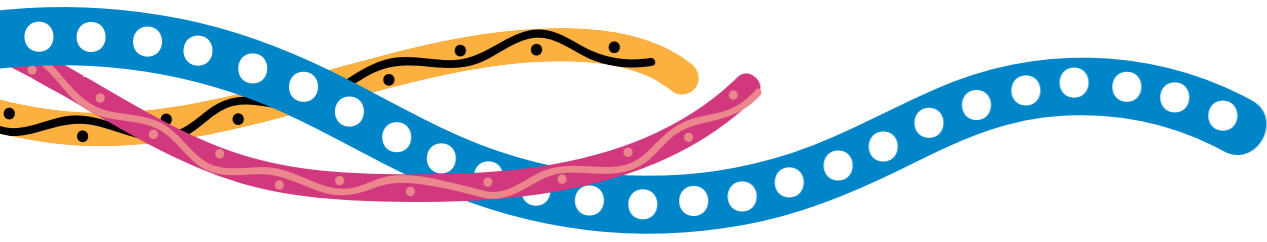


# Education Engagement Strategy DISCUSSION PAPER





## Minister's Foreword



A quality education is a critical foundation stone for a happy, prosperous life. The majority of Territory students are engaged learners who attend school every day.

But for some students, social, health and economic barriers make it difficult to engage with their education.

Successive schools, communities and governments have worked alongside families to improve school engagement. Despite this, we are not seeing the results across the board our children deserve.

When I visit schools, I see passionate teachers delivering engaging learning alongside supportive families who want the best possible start in life for their children.

I see communities who wrap around their schools and support all students.

This shows that by working together to improve student engagement, we can make a difference.

The Engagement Strategy Discussion Paper represents an opportunity for us all to come together to understand why students are disengaging from school, and take meaningful steps to reverse this.

We must listen and learn from children, families, teachers, and their communities. We need to understand how to improve the way we engage students with learning and overcome the barriers that stop them from engaging in school.

We can and must do better, and the Engagement Strategy will lay a strong foundation for action across the Territory.

**Lauren Moss**  
Minister for Education  
May 2021





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## Summary

*Education has the power to transform lives. It supports young people to realise their potential by providing skills they need to participate in the economy and in society, and contributing to every aspect of their wellbeing.*

*Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (2019)*

### HAVE YOUR SAY

We want to know what schools, early years programs and services, and the Education System can do to engage all children and young people in learning.

One of the most important issues facing education in the Territory is student engagement in learning. Engagement in learning is critical for student success, and research tells us that there is a strong correlation between student engagement and students completing their schooling. However, students withdraw from learning when they are not engaged and disengaged students will often remove themselves physically from the school.

The costs of young people not engaging in learning are high, for the young person and for society. Young people who are disengaged from education are at higher risk of experiencing poverty, poor health, unemployment and incarceration and lacking voice to speak for themselves. Disengagement from education can contribute directly to intergenerational disadvantage.

The Northern Territory (NT) education system has implemented many actions over time to encourage students to engage in learning. These actions have been informed by continuing conversations with students, parents, communities, teachers and non-government partners, and by a growing body of evidence. Reforms have focused on all aspects of a child's education journey including early childhood, school education, pathways from school to work and higher education, the education workforce and community engagement.

Many of these reforms have been successful at an individual or local level, but evidence shows that at the whole of system level student attendance continues to decline and young people continue to disengage from education. The decline in engagement has been evident for Aboriginal students in primary and secondary years, and across all

geolocations but is more pronounced in very remote areas. It is important to understand the underlying drivers that are causing this decline.

The Department of Education is developing an Education Engagement Strategy which will prioritise actions and resources to improve engagement in learning for all children and students.

This paper is intended to be a catalyst for discussions, views and ideas to inform the development of the Education Engagement Strategy. We are seeking views from students, parents, families, educators, school staff, communities and non-government organisations on how we can meaningfully engage children and students in learning so that all young Territorians become: confident and creative individuals; successful lifelong learners; and active and informed members of the community.

# Our context

Education and early childhood services in the Territory are provided across a vast and diverse context. Students, young children and their families are geographically dispersed across the 1.35 million km<sup>2</sup> of the Territory.

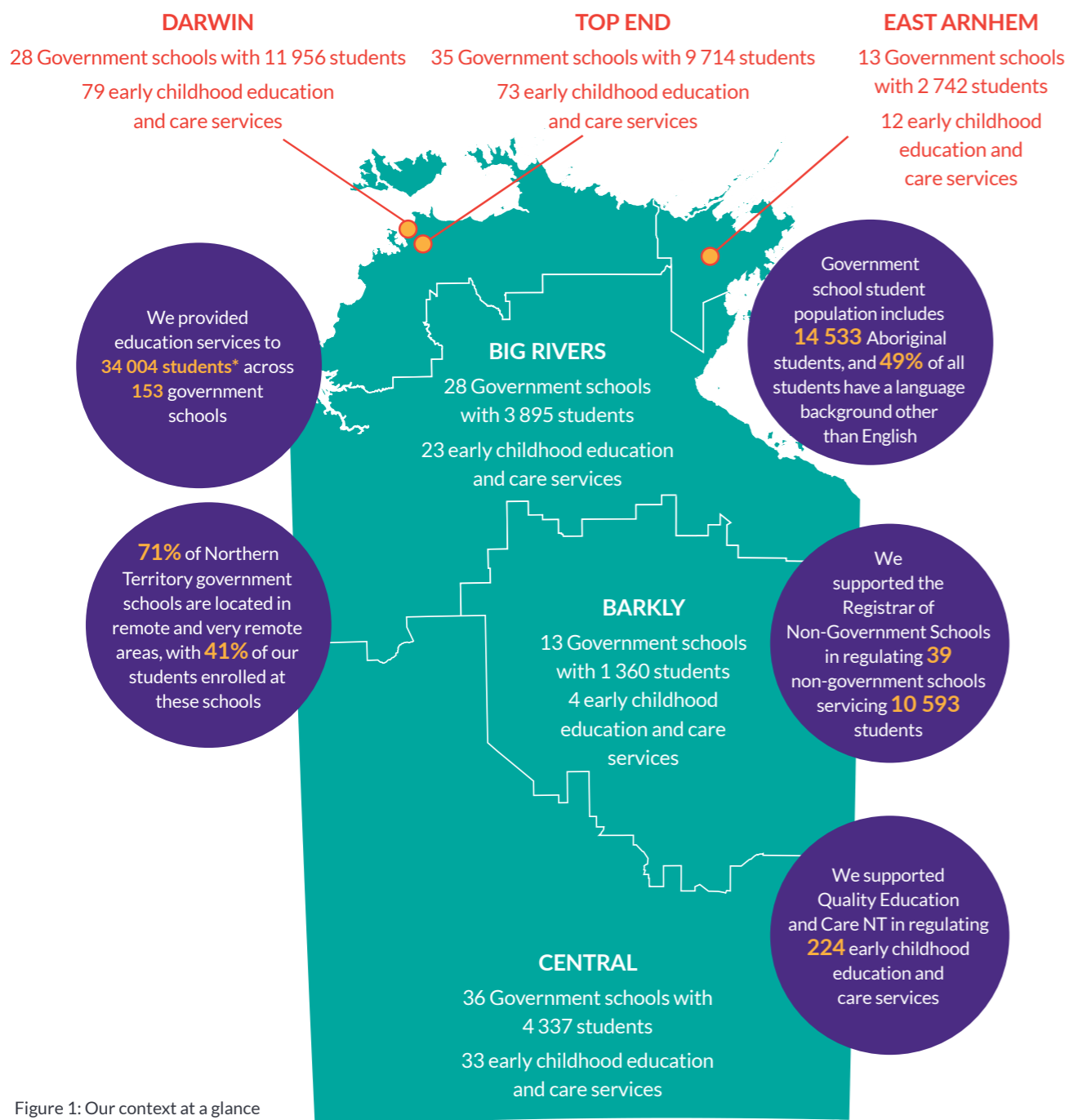
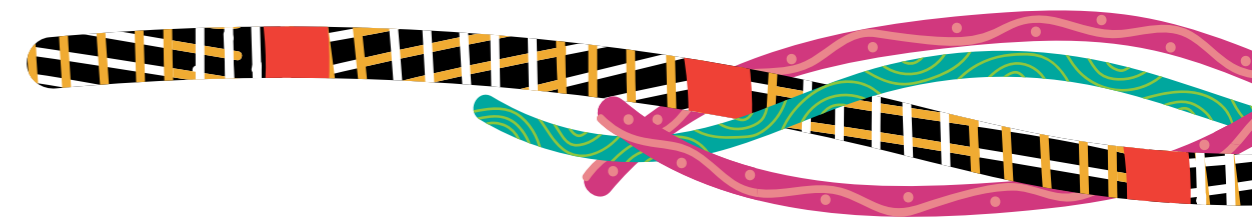


Figure 1: Our context at a glance

\*includes preschool, primary, middle and senior years' students.  
 Notes: 2020 Age Grade Census: The number of schools and early childhood education and care services is current as at Term 2, 2021. Kiana School is included in the number of schools, however is temporarily closed due to no families and students residing in the community.



# Our context

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

Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (2019)

The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration sets out the commitment of all Australian governments to promote excellence and equity in education. In recent years, there have been highlights and achievements in line with these goals, but there are areas for improvement.



HIGH ATTENDANCE AT BRADSHAW Building relationships between teachers, students and their families has improved engagement at Bradshaw Primary School.

## KEY STRENGTHS

### Families as First Teachers



In 2020, there were 2824 children participating in FaFT (up 76% from 2016) across 55 sites.

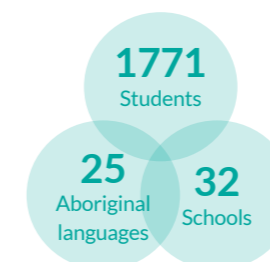
### Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education



RATE program revitalised with pilot commencing in four communities in 2021

### Language and Culture

Indigenous Languages and Cultures Program



### NTCET Completions

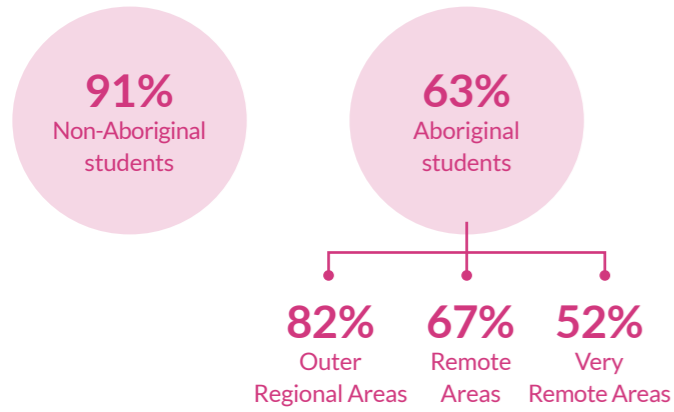
In 2020, **1622** young Territorians completed their NTCET,

including **277** Aboriginal students

Source: NT Department of Education Internal Data

## AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Attendance rate, Years 1-10, 2019

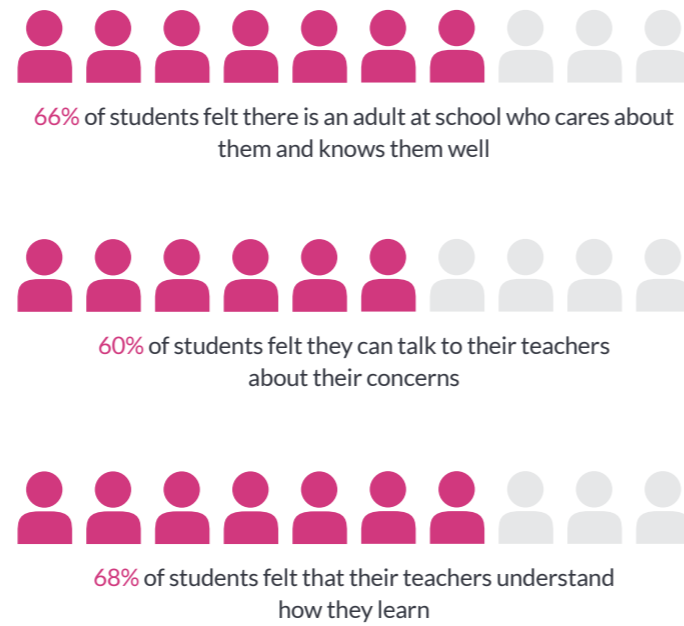


Apparent retention rates, Year 7 to Year 12, 2019



Source: Report on Government Services, 2021.

School survey 2020  
Student positive response rate



Source: NT Department of Education Internal Data.



### CONSULTATION QUESTION

1. Considering the successes that have been achieved over recent years and the current challenges facing education:
  - a) What should we do more of?
  - b) What should we do less of?
  - c) What should we do differently?



# Engagement: the motivated learner

*Relationship formation is central to the engagement pathway for students. Without this, excellence in pedagogy, curriculum flexibility, and policy, while necessary, will not be sufficient to re-engage the disengaged or disengaging student.*

Hancock & Zubrick (2015)

## Engagement is a process, not an end in itself

A student's engagement is a process that continues throughout the course of their education journey. What we know from research, and our lived experience, is that our focus needs to be the engagement of every child and student in their learning.

Engagement is characterised by a child or young person's level of motivation. Motivation refers to a student's willingness, desire and need to participate, and be successful in the learning process. Positive motivation is demonstrated when a student is enthusiastic, curious, interested, optimistic and persistent. Negative motivation is shown through anxiety, withdrawing from learning in the face of challenges and, at times, disruptive classroom behaviours.

The first and most important teacher in a child's life is their family. It is through family, from birth, that children are taught their language/s and culture. It is through the eyes of family that babies and young children begin to understand the world around them and their place in it. Learning



**YIRRKALA GRADUATES** Yirrkala Bilingual School students at their graduation in 2020. Eight students finished year 12 and four of them received an ATAR.

from family and community continues through life.

The Education Engagement Framework (Figure 2) describes learning from the point of view of the learner and can be applied generally to

all learning including the learning that children and young people experience in their families and communities. For the purposes of this discussion paper, the focus is on learning provided by the education sectors in the Northern Territory.

The fundamental elements of education can be broken down into where, how and what children and young people learn. The child or young person's motivation to learn can be affected by all three elements.

For the purposes of this discussion paper, the focus is on learning

provided by the education sectors in the Northern Territory.

The Education Engagement Framework describes engagement as a process that accumulates across a child's education into young adulthood. It also describes how children may be disengaged

from learning when the learning environment fails to welcome students, is not respectful or safe and doesn't recognise the value of identity, culture and knowledge that students bring with them to the learning relationship.

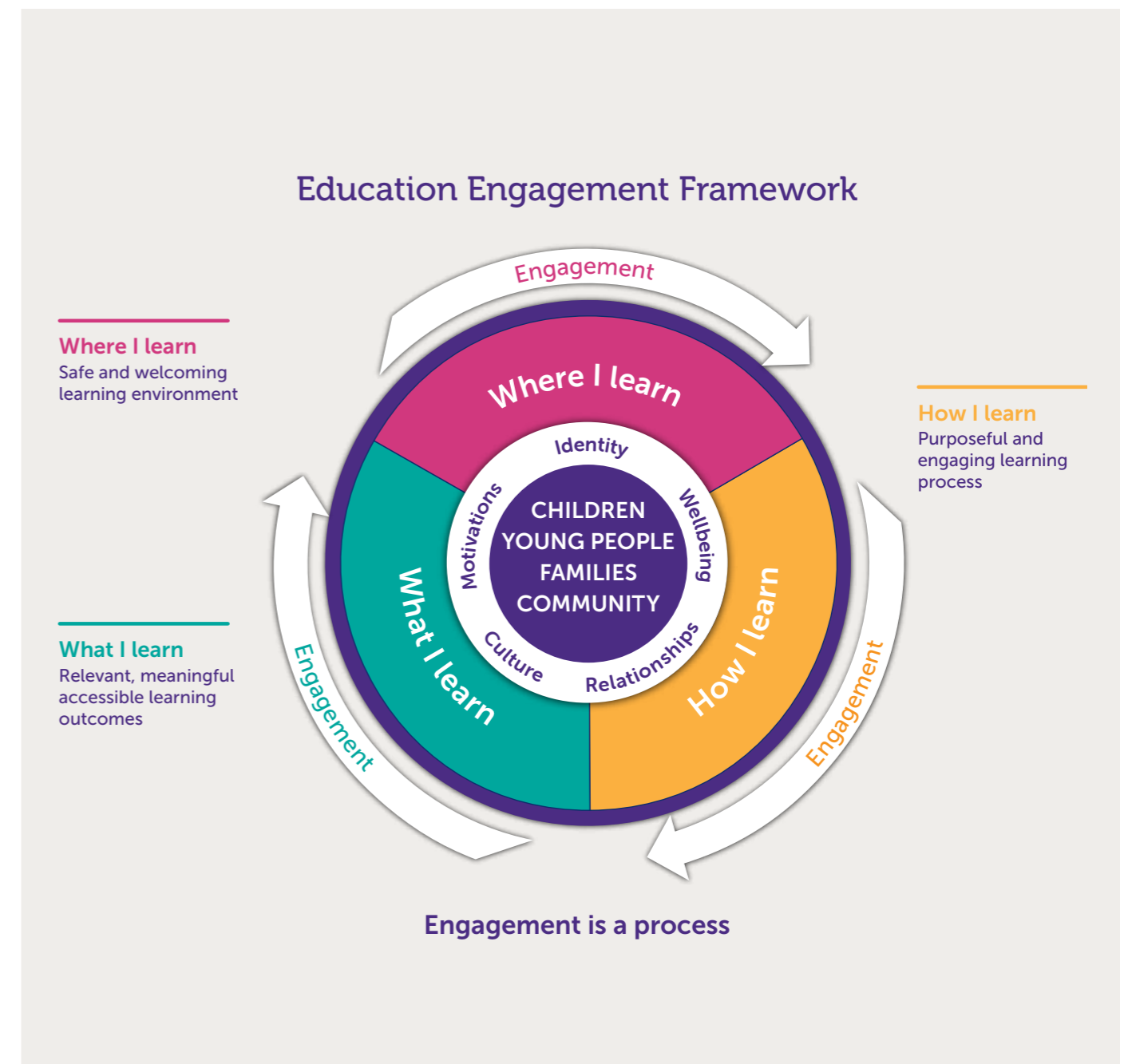


Figure 2: Education Engagement Framework



## Where I learn

**Where I learn** is the place where learning occurs. For young children this includes early childhood programs such as Families as First Teachers and preschool.

For older learners, this includes school, alternative education programs, Learning on Country classes and vocational and transition to work programs. In a traditional school the place that children learn is the classroom, library, playground, on excursions, the sporting oval or any other part of the school. Learning might also occur in a child care setting or playgroup.

Children and students engage in learning when the place in which they learn feels safe, welcoming and they are listened to and respected.



## How I learn

**How I learn** means who I learn from, including teachers, assistant teachers, peers, Aboriginal assistants, language teachers and others involved in the learning process.

The quality of students' relationships with teachers and peers is fundamental for improving student engagement and outcomes. Children engage in learning when they have positive and respectful relationships with their teachers and peers. Studies show that the best teacher-student relationships form when the teacher gives strong guidance, has high expectations for the learner, shows clear purpose, demonstrates concern and respect for the student and the needs of others, and demonstrates a desire to work as a team.

TOP: MILINGIMBI MINI-RANGERS  
Bekiny Preschoolers at Milingimbi School have a mini-rangers program that adventure out every Tuesday for some 'Learning on Country', gaining knowledge about bush foods, medicines, plants and animals.

ABOVE: SAMANTHA WATSON FURTHERING HER STUDIES  
Assistant preschool teacher Samantha Watson wants to become a qualified teacher through the Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education program.

Peer relationships with other children and adolescents are important to development and learning. Relationships extend beyond close friendship to relations with school colleagues in general. Positive peer relations facilitate engagement as students feel a sense of belonging, learn together, develop attachment, see success and have positive feelings, which are essential for student motivation.

The third element of relationships is parents, families and school engagement. This recognises the importance of families in a student's learning, motivation, development and wellbeing. Strong family and school engagement ensures local cultural practices, family background and identity are embedded in all aspects of the school, so that the school meets the cultural and educational aspirations of families.

How I learn also refers to ways of learning, such as learning by experience, learning in groups or learning by myself. How I learn refers to the language used in the learning process. Engagement in the learning process is strongest when learning goals are explicit and the process of learning is purposeful and intentional, and tailored to the learner's preferences and what the learner knows, understands and can do.

## What I learn

**What I learn** refers to the learning content or curriculum from which children gain knowledge and understanding and grow socially, emotionally and cognitively. For learning to engage children, the learning needs to be of interest, relevant, accessible and meaningful to the learner.

The Northern Territory's unique environment and history has created a tapestry of languages, culture, arts and natural sciences that should be protected, preserved, celebrated and passed on to each generation.

The teaching and learning of languages and cultures is fundamental to engaging children and young people in their learning and shapes their sense of identity. This is a necessary basis for social and economic participation and allows children and young people to 'walk in two worlds'.

### Cultural responsiveness and inclusivity

*We...call on the Australian Government and people to recognise our rights... to be educated in our own languages and in our own culture and history...*

*The Barunga Statement (1988)*

Children come to education with a rich bank of knowledge and understanding acquired during their first years of learning through their families and communities. This can create an advantage for children whose cultural background aligns to the cultural premises embedded in the standard Australian Curriculum. In order to give all children and young people an equal advantage to engage in learning it is paramount



that education programs recognise, respect and embed students' cultural understandings and knowledge across the school, including through the learning program.

'Language is an essential part of, and intrinsically linked to, Indigenous peoples' ways of life, culture and identities. Languages embody many Indigenous values and concepts and contain Indigenous peoples' histories and development' (United Nations, 2012). The maintenance of connections to family, community, language and country forms the basis of an Aboriginal student's identity. A strong cultural identity is a foundation for improving engagement in learning.

The responsiveness and inclusiveness of our education services to the culture of the community and student is an important way that programs can be contextualised to create greater relevance and meaning, and build on existing student knowledge and perspectives for greater success in learning.

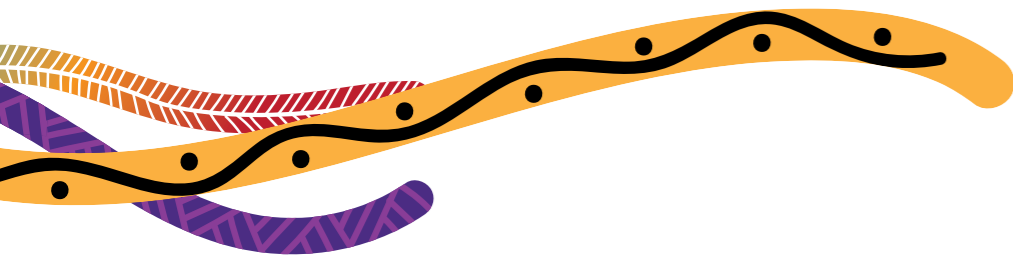
Australian teaching standards require teachers to know their students and how they learn. They also require teachers to focus on strategies for teaching students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds. This includes

strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with understanding and respect for the knowledge and perspectives they bring.

The Australian Curriculum can be adapted and adjusted to accommodate a students' knowledge, understanding and how they learn. For students with disabilities, this might include the use of technology, or other adjustments required by the learner to help them learn. Schools and teachers are required to support and respect the culture of students for whom English is an additional language.

## CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

2. What more can schools and early years programs do to engage and motivate children and young people to learn?
3. What more could the education system or our schools do to create culturally responsive and inclusive learning environments?



## Barriers to engagement

*There is a commitment to ‘...recognise the individual needs of all young Australians, identify barriers to be addressed and empower learners to overcome barriers.’*

*Goal 1 – The Australian education system promotes excellence and equity.*

*Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (2019)*

Education has a role to play to support families and children and address any barriers raised by the school or system that may hinder a child or student to engage in learning. The focus of the Education Engagement Strategy is to identify these barriers and address them.

Student wellbeing is a foundation for engagement. Wellbeing includes physical, mental and emotional health. It can refer to a child’s basic needs such as food, shelter and safety, as well as the mental health of the young person and their social competence and confidence. Poor student wellbeing can be a barrier to engagement in learning.

Early childhood services and schools address student wellbeing needs in a range of ways. Physical wellbeing needs are met through nutrition programs, the provision of educational resources such as uniforms and books, and access to transport to school. To support physical health, emotional and psychological wellbeing, schools and the education system offer access to a range of therapeutic and support services such as hearing and speech

specialists and counselling. Supporting early childhood development has grown in focus over recent years with some schools moving to integrated education, health and social services.

The mobility of families has an impact on attendance and student outcomes. Research has found that the mobility of families has an impact on attendance and student outcomes, and that attendance rates are distinctly lower for students who are mobile. Further, the study found that highly mobile students (those with at least five enrolments) were around two years behind students with a single enrolment.

There is complexity in the lives of many families in the Northern Territory, including mental health issues, poverty, poor housing and family functioning that can affect how children and young people participate in, and engage with learning.

Education is an active partner in whole of government strategies to help families access the broader services and support they need.

### CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

4. What can the education system, schools and early years programs and services do to better support the wellbeing and engagement of children, young people and families?
5. What more can the education system do with our partners in health, police, housing and child protection and family support services?



## Have your say

We want to know what schools, early years programs and services, and the department can do to engage all children and young people in learning.



### HAVE YOUR SAY

Interested individuals, service providers and other stakeholders are invited to participate in this consultation, which will inform development of the Education Engagement Strategy.

There are a number of ways you can contribute to the consultation.

The Have Your Say website ([haveyoursay.nt.gov.au/education-engagement-strategy](http://haveyoursay.nt.gov.au/education-engagement-strategy)) is an opportunity for you to:

1. Email a submission
2. Complete the online submission form, or share your story – by uploading a video or picture. Submissions are welcomed by individuals and groups
3. Attend a public meeting. To find out details of when and where the public meetings will be held, please visit the Have Your Say website, or email [engagementstrat.doe@education.nt.gov.au](mailto:engagementstrat.doe@education.nt.gov.au)





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