Occupational Violence and Aggression in Northern Territory Government Schools

The Positive Behaviour and Occupational Violence in Schools Taskforce Report

24October 2022

The Hon Eva Lawler, MLA
Minister of Education
Northern Territory Government

Dear Minister,

I present to you the report on Occupational Violence and Aggression in Northern Territory Government Schools.

The purpose of this report is to provide recommendations for implementation to assist the NT Department of Education to reduce and eliminate occupational violence and aggression in government schools and to mitigate employee psychological injury.

The report details 17 recommendations, set out under the following four key priority areas:

Priority Area 1 - Build a leading safety culture (including both physical and psychological safety) by establishing agency commitment through policies, practices, and guidance materials.

Priority Area 2 - Develop an analysis and monitoring capability within the agency for incidents of violence and aggression towards school staff.

Priority Area 3 - Ensure an integrated approach to reducing occupational violence and aggression in schools.

Priority Area 4 – Prevent, mitigate and manage psychological injury resulting from incidents of violence and aggression.

I acknowledge that the implementation of these recommendation are a priority for the department to ensure the wellbeing of our valued staff.

Yours sincerely

Chief Executive

26 October 2022

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1   Executive Summary

Educators play a pivotal role in the learning and development of children. School leaders, teachers and by extension, other school staff are responsible for the safety and wellbeing of children and young people through the provision of a safe, supportive, and engaging learning environment. Although the Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Act 2011 (the WHS Act) provides the legal framework to keep school leaders and teachers safe in their workplace, school staff are experiencing alarmingly high levels of violence and aggression in Northern Territory (NT) government schools, compromising their role and their personal physical and psychological safety.

External and internal data relating to incidents of violence and aggression was recently examined. The 2020 Australian Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey found that Principals and school leaders are 5.5 times more likely to be subjected to threats of violence, and 9.4 times more likely to be exposed to physical violence than the general population. NT has the second highest proportion of principals and school leaders in Australian jurisdictions subjected to physical violence (55%) and the third highest proportion of school leaders exposed to threats of violence (47%).

Teachers also experience high levels of occupational violence and aggression. A 2019 survey of Australian school teachers found that 80% of participants experienced some form of teacher targeted bullying and harassment by a student or parent in the 9-12 months prior to the survey (Billet et al., 2019). More seriously, the NT Teachers' Occupational Health and Wellbeing Survey: Data Report 2019, found that 39% of teachers had experienced threats of violence in the year prior to the survey and 42% experienced physical violence. Teachers in special schools and in combined schools, and teachers in government employee housing reported higher rates of threats of violence or physical violence than other teachers.

In April 2021, the Department for Education NT (the department) formed the Positive Behaviour and Occupational Violence in Schools Taskforce (the taskforce). The establishment of the taskforce was a priority action under the Education NT School Leader Wellbeing Action Plan 2021-25 with the purpose to investigate occupational violence and aggression in NT Government schools and make recommendations to eliminate or reduce the incidence and risk of occupational violence and aggression incidents occurring.

Occupational violence and aggression toward school staff is a highly complex issue influenced by multiple factors. While occupational violence and aggression against school staff is generally considered to be caused by children and young people, it can also be caused by parents and carers, family members and the wider community.

Addressing occupational violence and aggression in schools requires a comprehensive response in collaboration with and support of community leaders and members. It is important that department provides appropriate response to school staff following an incident so that school staff receive the support they need, which will contribute to a positive reporting culture.

This report presents 17 recommendations for the reduction and elimination of incidence and risk, and the management and mitigation of employee physical and psychological injury, as a result of violence and aggression in NT schools. The first recommendation is to establish a governance committee within the department, chaired by an Executive, whose responsibility will be to facilitate the implementation of the recommendations. The remaining 16 recommendations have been grouped under 4 Priority Areas as follows:

Priority Area 1: Build a leading safety culture (including both physical and psychological safety) by establishing agency commitment through policies, practices, and guidance materials.

There are seven recommendations under this priority to ensure a clear definition of workplace violence and aggression, best practice policies and procedures, streamlined reporting systems and support for schools identified as having high incidences of aggressive and violent incidents. Accurate reporting of occupational violence and aggression towards employees is needed to understand the risk

factors, extent, pattern and contributing factors of violence and aggression against school staff, enabling specific actions to be undertaken to prevent, mitigate and respond to incidents.

Priority Area 2: Develop an analysis and monitoring capability within the agency for incidents of violence and aggression towards school staff.

There are 3 recommendations under this priority which include the conduct of a gap analysis, a review of the current school process to effect special needs support for students and the development of a system-led case management approach to complex behaviour needs of students.

Priority Area 3: Ensure an integrated approach to reducing occupational violence and aggression in schools.

There are 4 recommendations under this priority which involve the analysis of data that measures student-teacher relationships, the development of a more bespoke training program in the management of student violent and aggressive behaviours, the development of a guide for community engagement for schools to use and the implementation of effective internal and external communication strategies regarding respectful relationships and zero-tolerance to violence and aggression in schools.

Priority Area 4: Prevent, mitigate and manage psychological injury resulting from incidents of violence and aggression.

There are 2 recommendations under this priority which include the establishment of a department-wide critical incident response protocol and the development of a handbook to provide guidance to school leaders and principals at the time of an incident.

Implementation of these recommendation will enable the department to deliver on its commitment to provide improved health and safety in the workplace, for all school staff.

2   Summary of Recommendations

The Taskforce makes 17 recommendations, and to aid implementation, recommendations 2 to 17 have been grouped under 4 priority areas:

1. Establish a governance committee within the Department of Education, chaired by an Executive, whose responsibility is to facilitate the implementation of the recommendations through a tracked implementation plan, assign Director ownership, monitor progress, and provide a monthly written brief on progress status for each recommendation, to the Education Executive Board.

Priority Area 1: Build a leading safety culture (including both physical and psychological safety) by establishing agency commitment through policies, practices, and guidance materials.

2. Adopt the following definition of occupational violence and aggression against school staff, for department wide use:

    'Occupational violence and aggression occur when a person is abused, threatened, or assaulted, or vicariously exposed to abuse, threats or assaults in a situation related to their work. It can occur in person, over the phone or online and be caused by the behaviour of members of a school community such as students, parents and carers and members of the workforce'.

3. Conduct a comprehensive environmental scan of the policies, procedures and systems of comparable large government departments, including departments relating to health and education to identify workable contemporary practices and digital systems that can be used in NT Department of Education to implement these recommendations. The outcome and recommendations to be presented to the Education Executive Board for endorsement.

4. Review and update the existing policies, procedures, and guidelines under Safety Management on occupational violence and aggression against school staff. All program and operational policy initiatives to involve a reference group of teachers/staff who have experienced violence in the workplace (McMahon et al. 2017b) Address any gaps in the policies, and ensure appropriate policies, procedures and guidelines are in place for emerging issues such as inappropriate use of electronic communication and online platforms to bully, harass or otherwise show aggression towards school staff.

5. Clearly define thresholds, processes, and responsibilities for reporting of incidents of occupational violence and aggression against school staff in the Workplace Requirements for Incident Reporting procedure. This includes the reporting of 'notifiable incidents', which is defined under the WHS Act, in addition to incidents that do not meet the threshold of a 'notifiable incident' and incidents categorised as near misses.

6. Update the Work Health and Safety Incident Report form to capture the level, type and severity of occupational violence and aggression, including the details of the child, young person, staff member, parent or carer or community member who caused or initiated the violence and aggression.

7. Undertake a desktop review on whether the different reporting processes and forms for various types of work health and safety incidents can be streamlined to reduce the reporting burden on school staff while still meeting the legal requirements for reporting, including for 'notifiable incidents' and WorkSafe and Quality Education and Care NT.

8. Identify schools with high violence related incidents for focussed support to establish controls at the school and department level to prevent and reduce occupational violence and aggression against school staff and once implemented audit the schools for effectiveness of the controls.

Priority Area 2: Develop an analysis and monitoring capability within the agency for incidents of violence and aggression towards school staff.

9. Conduct a gap analysis into the current prevention, early intervention, and support programs, including allied health support, currently available to students with multiple risk factors and high incidence of violent and aggressive behaviour and best practice strategies for student and family/carer engagement of the cohort and update current practices.

10. Review the process at the school level used to identify special behavioural, social, or academic needs of students, including the formal referral assessment process and the primary, secondary and tertiary prevention supports currently available to students who are either at risk of displaying violent and aggressive behaviour towards school staff or who have already displayed such behaviour. Address any gaps in identified support requirements.

11. Establish a system-led coordinated case management approach, to address complex cases involving a child or young person who is involved in multiple incidents of violence or aggression towards school staff.

Priority Area 3: Ensure an integrated approach to reducing occupational violence and aggression in schools.

12. Analyse the NT school survey, the NT Teachers' Occupational Health and Wellbeing Survey, and any other relevant data to identify any correlations between teacher-student relationships and incidents of violence at sites. Establish regional and school site monitoring for the purpose of action planning to improve relationships and reduce the incidents of violence.

13. Develop a comprehensive and tiered occupational violence and aggression educational training program for all site-based staff that includes personal safety management, classroom prevention strategies and build whole-of-school capacity to reduce and eliminate occupational violence and aggression. Education and training to be delivered in both on-line and in-person modalities, provided as a refresher on a regular basis, and reviewed annually for effectiveness and currency. Consideration should be given to the establishment of professional development endorsement for this program.

14. Develop a department guide for working with communities, which includes templates for sites to implement with their whole school community, to ensure there is a school-led coordinated approach to raising awareness of the impact of violence and aggression and that the behaviour is not tolerated in NT government schools.

15. Develop internal and external communication strategies to improve awareness of the impact of occupational violence and aggression on school staff, highlighting the need for appropriate and respectful behaviour, and promoting zero tolerance towards occupational violence and aggression against school staff.

Priority Area 4: Prevent, mitigate and manage psychological injury resulting from incidents of violence and aggression..

16. Establish a department-wide critical incident response protocol which reflects contemporary practice for the management of trauma and cumulative trauma, which includes response to incidents of occupational violence and aggression and clearly indicates the type and severity of incident that warrants on site or telephone psychological support to the site leader and those involved in an incidence of violence.

17. Develop a handbook that is available on-line, to provide guidance specifically targeted at the management of occupational violence and aggression against school staff. The handbook should outline the legislative requirements, available education and training, roles and responsibilities, incident reporting requirements, student support available, and managing the psychological safety of school staff exposed to incidents.

3   Introduction

3.1   Purpose

In April 2021, the department formed the Positive Behaviour and Occupational Violence in Schools Taskforce (the taskforce). The establishment of the taskforce was a priority action under the Education NT School Leader Wellbeing Action Plan 2021-25. The purpose of the taskforce was to investigate occupational violence and aggression in NT Government schools with the aim to understand and eliminate or reduce the incidence and risk of occupational violence and aggression incidents occurring.

3.2   Scope

The scope of the investigation was limited to occupational violence and aggression towards staff in schools with the taskforce not considering violence and aggression between students, or violence and aggression in the corporate working environment of the department.

In its 12-month investigation, the taskforce's scope of work did not include consideration of the financial or budgetary implications of reducing occupational violence and aggression in NT Government schools, or to analyse the effectiveness of the department's compliance with NT work health and safety legislation.

3.3   Terms of Reference

The terms of reference of the taskforce primarily were to identify solutions to reducing the number of Occupational Violence and Aggression (OVA) incidents in schools long-term by investigating three types of offensive behaviour identified as consistently occurring in schools: adult-on-adult bullying; threats of violence; and actual violence.

More specifically, the terms required the taskforce to:

- examine available data and literature

- undertake a gap analysis

- source additional data where required

- analyse all data and prepare recommendations

- research practices in other sectors such as health where solutions to Occupational Violence and Aggression (OVA) in hospitals are identified

- identify workable solutions in the education context, with a focus on the use of existing resources wherever possible, and new and enhanced opportunities with stakeholders.

The taskforce's full terms of reference can be found at Attachment 1.

3.4   Responsibility for action

The responsibility for the action of the recommendations falls under various divisions within the department, therefore a governance committee is required to facilitate and track the implementation of each recommended action, once endorsed.

3.5 Definition of occupational violence and aggression

From the outset, the taskforce found there was no consistent definition of occupational violence and aggression used across the NT Department of Education. As a result, there was no shared understanding of occupational violence and aggression against school staff among stakeholders. These include department officers, school leaders, teachers, school staff, students, parents and carers, family members and community members. A clear definition is critical to promoting shared responsibility and action, and to implementing the range of strategies and initiatives aimed at preventing, reducing, and responding to occupational violence and aggression in schools. It also defines the parameters for the reporting of incidents of occupational violence and aggression.

The taskforce expanded on WorkSafe Victoria's definition of occupational violence and aggression and used the following working definition for the purpose of this report: 'When a person is abused, threatened, or assaulted or vicariously exposed to abuse, threats or assaults in a situation related to their work. It can occur in person, over the phone, online and be caused by the behaviour of members of a school community such as students, co-workers and parents'.

Recommendation 2:

Adopt the following definition of occupational violence and aggression against school staff:

Occupational violence and aggression is when a person is abused, threatened or assaulted, or vicariously exposed to abuse, threats or assaults in a situation related to their work. It can occur in person, over the phone or online and be caused by the behaviour of members of a school community such as students, parents and carers and co-workers.

4 Method

4.1 Taskforce Participants

The taskforce was co-chaired by the department's Acting Executive Director Early Years and Education Services and Senior Director, Executive Projects, Agency Operations. Members of the taskforce comprised representatives from: the NT Principals' Association; the NT Council of Government School Organisations; the Teacher Registration Board of the NT; the Australian Education Union – NT branch; school principals; and senior officials from the department.

The complete taskforce membership is provided in Attachment 2.

4.2 A Multi-faceted Approach

The taskforce recognised that occupational violence and aggression in schools is more than an episodic problem. It is a highly complex issue influenced by multiple factors and as such, a multifaceted approach was taken to identify the variety of causation factors likely influencing violence and aggression against school staff.

The inquiry cycle method, detailed below, was used to guide the taskforce.

Assess	Set goals	Plan	Act	Review and adjust
Why?	What?	How?	How well?	And so?
What does the data tell us? What further evidence to we need? How will we let people know? Who needs to participate in this stage?	What are the priorities for improvement? What are the learning needs of staff of the priorities? What are the changes in behaviour we expect to see?	What are the actions, roles, responsibilities, timelines and resources? What will these involve for each party?	When do we expect to see the changes in behaviour occurring? How will be know? How will we ensure that we are on track? What will we do differently if this is not what we expect to see?	How will we know that the work is having an effect on student outcomes? What evidence will we see, hear and read? What do we need to do less of or stop doing?

During phase one and two of the inquiry cycle method, the taskforce undertook the following:

- reviewed literature to identify practices and workable solutions to mitigate occupational violence and aggression incidents in NT Government schools

- analysed relevant data sourced from published reports to understand the frequency and type of violence, the profile of those who initiate the violence and the status level of those targeted, as it occurs across Australia and, in NT Government schools

- reviewed past efforts and current work occurring in the department, including the Framework for Inclusion 2019-29, Education NT Teacher Wellbeing Strategy 2019-22, Education NT Employee Wellbeing Framework, and the Education NT Principal Wellbeing Framework

- reviewed the department's workplace health and safety policies, guidelines and reporting systems which are used to record incidents of violence and aggression towards school staff

- reviewed the department's process for responding to incidents of violence and aggression and managing the wellbeing of school staff directly or indirectly affected by violence and aggression, both at the time of the incident and post the incident

- sourced Department of Education NT data from the internal systems which included reported incidents, notifiable incidents under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011, the number of

suspensions of students relating to violence, and newsflash reports which provide concise information to the department's executive regarding critical incidents of high severity.

5   Legislative obligations for occupational health and safety

The *Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Act 2011* (the WHS Act) provides the framework to secure the health and safety, including psychological safety, of all workers and workplaces in the Northern Territory. The *Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Regulations 2011* are made under the authority of the WHS Act. They specify the ways duties imposed by the WHS Act must be performed or prescribe procedural or administrative matters to support the WHS Act.

The WHS Act requires the department to identify, eliminate or minimise as far as reasonably practicable, risks to the health and safety of workers and other persons entering the department's workplaces.[1] This includes promoting the provision of information, training and instruction or supervision necessary to protect persons from risks in relation to work health and safety,[2] and notifying regulators of 'notifiable incidents'.[3] Death, a serious injury or illness of a person and a dangerous incident are defined under the WHS Act as requiring notification to the regulator.

Some violent and aggressive behaviours towards school staff meet the definition of a '*serious injury or illness*' under the WHS Act and therefore it is a legal requirement for it to be reported as a notifiable incident. Box 1, below, shows the definition of 'notifiable incident', that is '*a serious injury or illness*'. Other notifiable incidents under the WHS Act are '*death*' and '*dangerous incidents*' (which refers to incidents such as chemical spills and collapse of structures); the definition of a *dangerous incident* under the WHS Act, is in Attachment 3.

In 2021, 6 incidents within the department relating to violence and aggression were notifiable incidents.

Box 1: Incident notification of a serious injury or illness under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011

The department is under a legal duty to advise regulators (NT Worksafe) of 'notifiable incidents'.

A notifiable incident includes *a serious injury or illness of a person*.

A serious injury or illness of a person means an injury or illness requiring the person to have:

  (a)   immediate treatment as an in-patient in a hospital.

  (b)   immediate treatment for:

       i.   the amputation of any part of his or her body; or

       ii.   a serious head injury; a serious eye injury; or

       iii.   a serious burn; or

       iv.   the separation of his or her skin from an underlying tissue; or

       v.   a spinal injury; or

       vi.   the loss of a bodily function; or

       vii.   serious lacerations

  (c)   medical treatment within 48 hours of exposure to a substance.

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[1] *Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Act* 2011 (NT) s 19.

[2] *Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Act* 2011 (NT) s 19(3)(f).

[3] *Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Act* 2011 (NT) s 38.

6 The Departments' Safety Management Policy

The Safety Management Policy is the overarching policy for health and safety in the department and outlines the commitment to a safe and healthy working and learning environment. Health and safety includes psychological safety and therefore covers the health and safety of school staff who experience violence and aggression in the workplace. The policy applies to all department workers, school representative body employees, students, visitors, volunteers, contractors, others; and to all school and corporate workplaces and locations wherever the department's work is conducted.

The policy encompasses Safety Management and the Safety Management System – captured in over 50 documents (guidelines, procedures, templates, resource material) related to work health and safety. The documents detail pertinent legal responsibilities outlined in the WHS Act which include information and guidance on responsibilities, reporting and review, consultation, communication, issue resolution, safety committees, induction and training, first aid, emergency management, incident reporting, hazard management, and Think Act, Be SAFE. However, several of the procedures do not provide enough guidance on the management of occupational violence and aggression in the workplace for 'persons in charge' of workplaces and workers to prevent, respond and review incidents of occupational violence against school staff.

A list of the current documents under the policy is provided in Attachment 4.

6.1 Specific responsibilities of 'persons in charge'

The Safety Management policy states that all workers are to ensure, so far as reasonably practical, their health and safety. In addition, 'persons in charge' of workplaces have specific responsibilities, in consultation with workers, to report, to review and record 'incidents', 'injuries' and 'near misses', which are defined as follows:

- An incident is 'any occurrence, which has, or has potential to, cause physical or mental harm, illness, disease, trauma, fatality, property or environmental damage including hazards and near misses'

- An injury is 'physical and or mental harm, hurt or damage'

- A near miss as 'any unplanned incident that occurred at the workplace which although not resulting in any injury and or disease had the potential to do so'.

'Persons in charge' of workplaces are defined in the department's Safety Management Definitions document as *persons with management control of a workplace and have responsibility for the supervision and management of workers, school representative body employees, contractors, visitors, volunteers and other interested parties*. It is noted that the department's Safety Management Definitions document does not describe which key leadership roles are deemed 'persons in charge' and therefore leaders in those roles may be unaware of their legal responsibility under the WHS Act. For example, an Executive Director, Senior Director or Principal has not yet been defined as a 'person in charge'. A 'person in charge' of workplaces have a duty to:

- report on health and safety activities within their workplace to the Director, Quality School Systems and Support; or the Executive Director, Corporate Services

- ensure incident reports are investigated, reviewed and trends, as well as issues, identified and addressed

- complete an annual review of their Workplace Requirements for Safety Management Checklist and all processes, in consultation with workers, at the beginning of each year.

- escalating matters to the Director, Quality School Systems and Support or the Executive Director, Corporate Services, when outside the confines of the workplace.

Workplace Requirements for Hazard Management

The Workplace Requirements for Hazard Management procedures document outlines the legislative requirements of the department and its officers to identify all hazards associated with the business or undertaking, which may affect the health and safety of workers and others, and requirement to manage risks within the workplace, by eliminating them, or applying control measures to reduce their exposure to persons in the workplace.

The document identifies 5 types of hazards, one of which is the psycho-social environment. The types of hazards are:

- physical – includes floors, stairs, work platforms, steps, ladders, fire, falling objects, slippery surfaces, manual tasks (lifting, pulling and pushing), excessively loud or prolonged noise, heat and cold, radiation, poor lighting, ventilation and air quality.

- mechanical and/or electrical – includes electricity, machinery, equipment, pressure vessel, dangerous goods, forklifts, cranes and hoists.

- chemical – includes chemical substances such as acids or poisons and those that could lead to fire or explosion, cleaning agents, dusts and fumes from various processes such as welding.

- biological – includes bacteria, viruses, mould, mildew, insects, vermin and animals.

- psychosocial environment – includes workplace stressors arising from a variety of sources, such as human interaction for example, actual and perceived exposure to workplace bullying, sexual harassment and excessive workloads causing psychological stress.

'Persons in charge' of a workplace are required to plan, develop, implement, communicate, monitor and review processes to manage safety in the workplace, including psychological safety, over which they have management control, in consultation with workers and other relevant parties, including:

- ensuring methods for identifying hazards, assessing risks and determining, implementing and monitoring control measures are established and operating

- utilising the following tools and methods for the management of hazards and risks in the workplace;

  o completing hazard inspection checklists

  o reviewing incident reports

  o completing risk assessments

  o reviewing the workplace risk register

  o completing the action plan.

- consulting and communicating outcomes of all aspects of hazard management to workers and others who are, or likely to be, affected

- raising activities and emerging issues with the Director, Quality School Systems and Support, for schools or the Executive Director, Corporate Services for corporate workplaces for consideration

- identifying skills required and making available necessary instruction, induction, training or supervision

- maintaining adequate records of these activities for review and audit purposes

- monitoring current methods biannually to ensure continued effectiveness

- reviewing processes annually or when a significant change has occurred at the workplace.

Although the procedures are detailed in their requirements, the identification and management of *psychosocial environmental* hazards requires guidance and training as to the current best practice method to address these hazards through planning, developing, implementing, communicating, monitoring and reviewing the processes for audit purposes. It is therefore recommended to:

> *Recommendation 3:*
>
> *Conduct a comprehensive environmental scan of the policies, procedures and systems of comparable large government departments, including departments relating to health and education to identify workable contemporary practices that can be used in NT Department of Education to implement the recommendations, for presentation to the Education Executive Board for endorsement.*

> *Recommendation 4*
>
> *Review and update the existing policies, procedures and guidelines under Safety Management on occupational violence and aggression against school staff. Address any gaps in the policies, and ensure appropriate policies, procedures and guidelines are in place for emerging issues such as inappropriate use of electronic communication and online platforms to bully or harass school staff.*

6.3   Reporting, recording and reviewing incidents

6.3.1   School staff under-report incidents of violence and aggression

Accurate reporting of occupational violence and aggression towards employees is needed to understand the risk factors, extent, pattern and contributing factors of violence and aggression against school staff, enabling the monitoring of trends and the identification of action plans. The literature consistently highlights the challenges of obtaining accurate records due to underreporting or inaccurate reporting of occupational violence and aggression incidents.

Factors contributing to underreporting of occupational violence and aggression in schools include: staff accept that violence is part of the job; staff perception of a lack of management action in responding to incidents of abuse; a lack of clarity about what level of violence or aggression should be reported, the time taken to record an incident (often after hours), and difficulty using the reporting system (The Victorian Auditor-General's Occupational Violence Against Healthcare Workers, 2015, McMahon et al., 2017).

The literature highlights how school leadership also plays an important role in reporting incidents of occupational violence and aggression. For example, in circumstances where school staff felt they were not being supported by their school leaders and as a result felt blamed for the violence experienced, or when school staff felt students involved in incidents were ineffectively being disciplined for their behaviour, these feelings contributed to the underreporting of occupational violence and aggression incidents (McMahon et al., 2017b). School staff who also feared that reporting an incident of abuse

may reflect on their professional ability (Queensland Teachers Union, 2020), or felt embarrassed by the abuse, or were concerned that it may make the school look 'bad' were also reluctant to report incidents of abuse (Hancock-Montgomery, 2019). The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) highlighted that second-hand reporting from school leaders is problematic for obtaining accurate results of the actual prevalence of occupational violence and aggression in schools (AITSL, 2020).

6.3.2   Department requirements for incident reports

The Safety Management policy requires all incidents, except for minor student incidents, to be recorded in the department's internal electronic incident reporting system, including those that meet the classification of a 'notifiable incident'. A 'notifiable incident' must be reported by law to NT Worksafe and Quality Education and Care NT if the incident involves a child in an education and care service which includes long day care, family day care, kindergarten, preschool and outside school hours care services.

The Workplace Requirements for Incident Reporting procedure supplements the Safety Management policy by setting out in greater detail the departmental and legislative obligations for reporting workplace incidents, as well as the investigation of complex or significant incidents.

The reporting of incidents cover:

- everyone who enters a department workplace including department and school representative body employees, students, volunteers, visitors, and contractors

- all locations where we conduct our business

- any property owned by the Department of Education and provided to workers for their use while they are employed.

The department's WHS Incident Report form is the reporting method and the primary source of data for internal reporting of workplace health and safety incidents, including incidents involving violence and aggression. Under the Workplace Requirements for Incident Reporting procedure, all incidents that *'occur, which have, or have potential to, cause physical or mental harm, disease, trauma or fatality'*[4] must be reported using the WHS Incident Report form. The form must be completed for incidents involving departmental employees, school council employees, students, visitors, volunteers and contractors.

However, neither the Workplace Requirements for Incident Reporting procedure, nor the Incident Report form give clear guidance on the reporting of incidents, injuries and 'near misses' that are not classified as 'notifiable incidents'. For example, if a student's attempt to punch a teacher is unsuccessful, i.e. the student's fist fails to make actual contact with the teacher, the current procedure does not assist in determining whether this is classified as a 'near miss' and therefore should be reported in the Work Health and Safety Incident Report form.

The information required on the Safety Incident Report form which is to be completed by a person involved in the incident or another person on their behalf, only requires the following:

- person/s involved in the incident, i.e. department employees, school council employees, students, pre-service teachers, visitors/volunteers or contractor and details of the employee involved
- date and time of the incident

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[4] Definition of 'incident' under the Workplace Requirements for Incidents Reporting procedure.

- where the incident occurred

- whether an injury occurred, i.e. yes or no

- description of the incident.

The form does not specifically request information about the type of incident (whether it is occupational violence and aggression towards school staff or a building hazard), severity of injury (immediate threat to life, hospitalisation required but no danger to life, dangerous situation of hazard including personal threats, near miss, minor injury or illness) or the child, young person, staff member, parent or carer or community member who caused or initiated the incident, injury or 'near miss'. Currently, this information is only available if the person completing the form includes it in the description. Therefore, school staff may be required to complete multiple reports for one incident depending on the type and/or severity of the incident, and whether a report complies with the legal obligations for external reporting.

The current Work Health and Safety Incident Report form is in Attachment 5.

6.3.3   Establishing a positive reporting culture

To overcome some of the challenges to accurate reporting, the Australian Capital Territory Education Directorate established an occupational violence and complex case management team to create a positive reporting culture, which ensured that occupational violence and aggression were recorded and responded to in a manner that supported both staff and students (AITSL, n.d.). One of the case studies concluded that a positive reporting culture in schools empowered staff to confidently speak up without fear of reprisal and had the effect of providing clear guidance of what behaviours should be reported. It also built trust among school staff that there would be an appropriate response from corporate and school leaders about responding to incidents of abuse (AITSL, n.d.). To further guide what behaviours should be reported, another tool used by McMahon et al., (2014) was to develop a clear numbering scale for the level of abuse directed at school staff. For example, 1 –verbal threats; 2 –damage to personal property; 3 –physical attacks, including objects being thrown at school staff.

Policies and procedures relating to occupational violence and aggression need to be clear and consistently enforced across all schools. Policies should clearly identify unacceptable and offensive behaviours, the processes for reporting incidents of occupational violence and aggression, and expectations for staff training (Griffiths, Morphet & Innes, 2015). Further, policies and procedures must allow school staff to safely report incidents of workplace bullying while protecting them from retaliation (McMahon et al., 2017b).

The lack of clear guidance in the department as to how to report incidents, injuries and 'near misses' of physical violence and aggression, together with a form that does not gather important data, is likely to lead to both significant underreporting and incomplete information which limits the action that can be taken to mitigate physical and psychological injury occurring, or a repeat of the injury or incident that has occurred.

Therefore, the following four recommendations are made:

Recommendation 5:

Clearly define thresholds, processes, and responsibilities for reporting of incidents of occupational violence and aggression against school staff in the Workplace Requirements for Incident Reporting procedure. This includes the reporting of 'notifiable incidents', which is defined under the WHS Act, in addition to incidents that do not meet the threshold of a 'notifiable incident' and incidents categorised as near misses.

Recommendation 6:

Update the Work Health and Safety Incident Report form to capture the level, type and severity of occupational violence and aggression, including the details of the child, young person, staff member, parent or carer or community member who caused or initiated the violence and aggression.

Recommendation 7:

Undertake a desktop review on whether the different reporting processes and forms for various types of work health and safety incidents can be streamlined to reduce the reporting burden on school staff while still meeting the legal requirements for reporting, including for 'notifiable incidents' and WorkSafe and Quality Education and Care NT.

Recommendation 8:

Identify schools with high violence related incidents for focussed support to establish controls at the school and department level to prevent and reduce occupational violence and aggression against school staff and once implemented audit the schools for effectiveness of the controls.

7   NT schools have high rates of violence and aggression

Although the department currently has a safety management system based on the requirements of the legislation, leaders and teachers in NT schools continue to experience violence and aggression at alarmingly high rates.

NT has the second highest proportion of school leaders subjected to physical violence (55%) and the third highest proportion subjected to threats of violence (47%) of all Australian jurisdictions (The 2020 Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey).

Further, in the NT, 39% of teachers experienced threats of violence and 42% of teachers reported exposure to physical violence in a 12-month period (The NT Teachers' Occupational Health and Wellbeing Survey 2019).

In 2020, despite an understanding of under reporting, there were 304 incidents of occupational violence and aggression against school staff reported in the Work Health and Safety Incident Reporting system. This equates to nearly half of all incidents reported in the Work Health and Safety Incident Reporting system. Incidents range from verbal abuse with no injury, to physical assault causing multiple injuries, stress, depression and anxiety.

7.1   Violence and aggression towards Leaders

Since 2011, researchers at the Australian Catholic University and Deakin University have conducted an annual occupational health, safety and wellbeing survey of government and non-government school leaders in all states and territories, titled the Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey.

In 2020, there were 2,248 survey participants from government and non-government schools, of which approximately 90% held positions of principal, deputy/assistant principal or head teacher, and 2% were from the NT.

In 2020, 83% of school leaders surveyed were subjected to at least one form of offensive behaviour in the 12 months prior to the survey.[5] Figure 1 shows that while the proportion of school leaders exposed to threats and physical violence in 2020 decreased from the previous year, the rates were higher than in the first half of the decade. The 2020 Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey (Riley et al, 2021) found:

- 43% of school leaders surveyed were subjected to threats of violence. This compares with 52% in 2019 and 38% in 2011. School leaders were 5.5 times more likely to be subjected to threats of violence than the general population

- 37% of participants were exposed to physical violence. This compares with 42% in 2019 and 27% in 2011. School leaders were 9.4 times more likely to be subjected to physical violence than the general public.

Figure 2, below, shows that the percentage of school leaders in the NT who have been exposed to offensive behaviour by parents and students in 2020, is generally higher than most other jurisdictions. The data details that NT recorded the third highest proportion of school leaders subjected to threats of violence (47%) and the second highest proportion subjected to physical violence (55%).

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[5] Offensive behaviour is defined in the survey as sexual harassment, threats of violence, physical violence, bullying, unpleasant teasing, conflicts and quarrels, gossip and slander and cyber bullying.

|	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT
Threats of violence	43	30	44	46	45	57	55	47
Physical violence	38	21	38	43	42	38	57	55
Bullying	25	14	19	15	20	24	21	26

Source: Australian Catholic University. (2021, March 16). Global pandemic heaps more stress on stretched principals. Retrieved 3 November 2021, from https://www.acu.edu.au/about-acu/news/2021/march/global-pandemic-heaps-more-stress-on-stretched-principals.

Although school leaders across Australia can be considered a homogenous group, and therefore the results from the Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey can be considered as representative of school leaders, NT school leaders do have results that evidence higher than average rates of violence and aggression when compared to their interstate counterparts.

At the request of the Australian Primary Principals Association, Deakin University undertook a specific data analysis of the Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey from 2011 to 2019 to focus on school leaders' experiences of offensive behaviour for school leaders of government primary schools for each state and territory. *The Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey 2019 – Analysis for Government Primary Schools in the Northern Territory* published the findings which identified that:

- About one-third of NT Government primary school leaders are likely to have experienced bullying at work within a 12-month period. This is consistent with the national average and approximately 4 times higher than the general population.

- 60% of NT Government primary school leaders are likely to have received threats of violence within a 12-month period. This is approximately 15 percentage points higher than the national average for government primary school leaders, and more than 19 percentage points higher than all school leaders surveyed across Australia. NT Government primary school leaders are approximately 7 times more likely to receive threats of violence than the general public.

- 58% of NT Government primary school leaders are likely to have experienced physical violence in a 12-month period. This is 21.6 percentage points higher than the national average for government primary school leaders and 26.3 percentage points higher than the national average for all Australian school leaders. NT Government primary school leaders are approximately 14 times more likely to experience physical violence than the general public.

- In terms of geolocation, NT Government primary school leaders experience higher levels of bullying in outer regional areas (38.3%) compared with remote and very remote areas (30.9). In contrast, NT Government primary school leaders in remote and very remote areas reported higher rates of physical violence (61.8%) compared with outer regional areas (53.3%).

- Principals in the NT appear to be the main target of parental threats of violence or parental physical violence rather than deputies/assistant principals. However, student threats of violence or student physical violence are similar for all NT Government primary school leaders (refer to Figure 3).

Figure 3: Percentage of NT Government primary school leaders surveyed subjected to offensive behaviour by parents and students (%)
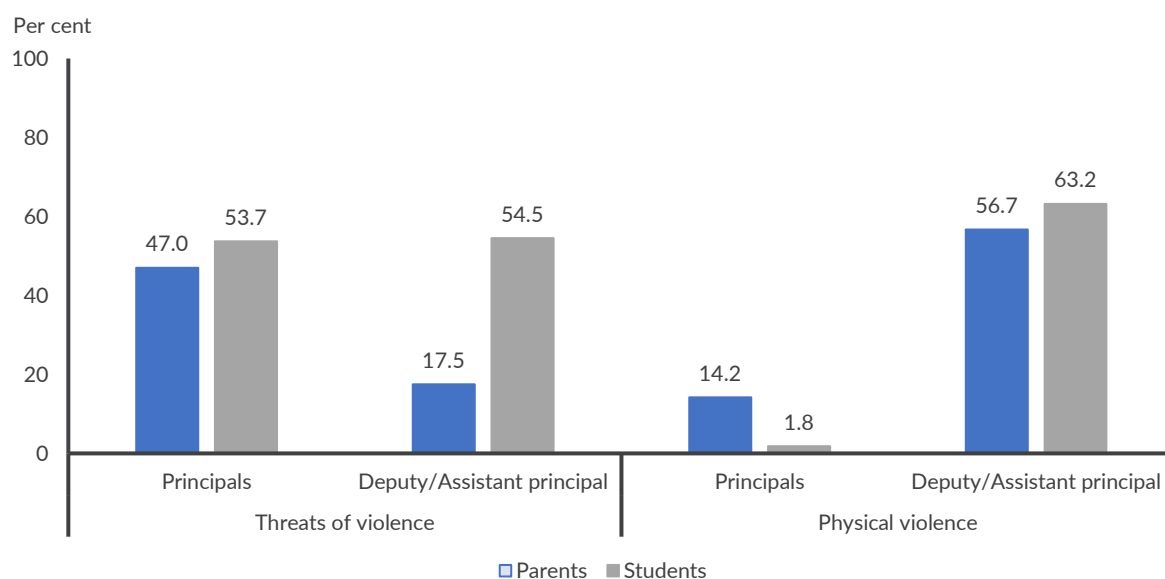
Source: Riley, P., Rahimi, M., Arnold, B., England, G. & Vinnicombe, L. (n.d.). *The Australian Principal Occupational Health, and Wellbeing Survey, 2019 – Analysis for Government Primary Schools in the Northern Territory*. Research for Educational Impact, Deakin University.

Violence and aggression towards school leaders requires a particular focus, as leaders are a 'person in charge' of a workplace which requires them to undertake specific actions under the WHS Act and the department's policy and procedures on health and safety. However, the leader is also in the dual position of experiencing the violence and aggression themselves, which may require personal psychological support.

7.2 Teachers and Special Education Teachers experience violence and aggression from students

In 2019, the department engaged the Institute for Positive Psychology and Education, Australian Catholic University to conduct a study of all government school-based NT teachers' occupational health, safety and wellbeing.

The study included a survey in relation to: demands at work; work organisation and job contents; interpersonal relations and leadership; job satisfaction and values at work; health and wellbeing; and experiences with offensive behaviour from students, parents or other school staff. The survey found that, in the 12 months prior to the survey (Riley et al., 2019):

- 39% of teachers were exposed to threats of violence. Teachers at special schools (63%), teachers who teach in very remote schools (55%) and teachers who teach at combined schools (52%) reported higher rates of threats of violence. Students accounted for the majority of physical violence and aggression towards school staff

- 42% of teachers reported exposure to physical violence. Teachers in special schools (75%), teachers who teach in very remote schools (50%) and teachers who teach at combined schools (50%) reported higher rates of exposure to physical violence.

- 33% of teachers reported experiencing bullying. 14% of teachers surveyed experienced bullying from colleagues, 13% from their manager, 10% from students and 5% from parents.

The prevalence of violent threats and behaviours is lower for teachers (39%) than principals (42%). Violence is more often directed towards senior teachers, rather than teachers in junior positions. This

may be because senior teachers, as part of their role, often handle the most difficult behavioural management issues. Violence is almost entirely caused or initiated by students, however principals report a higher rate of violent behaviour from parents (refer to Figure 4) with about one in 3 principals surveyed experiencing threats of violence from parents.

Figure 4: Percentages of NT teachers and principals subjected to threats of violence or physical violence (%)

	Threats of violence			Physical violence		
	Parents	Students	Overall	Parents	Students	Overall
Teachers	5	38	39	2	41	42
Principals	32	43	53	9	47	49

Source: Riley, P., See, S-M., Heaser, H., Marsh, H., Parker, P., Kent, T., Craven, R., & Brockman, R. (2019). *The Northern Territory Teachers' Occupational Health and Wellbeing Survey 2019 Data*. Sydney: Institute for Positive Psychology and Education, Australian Catholic University.

7.3 Teachers are also exposed to bullying and harassment from students and parents

In 2018, La Trobe University undertook a survey to gather evidence of the experiences of the 560 Australian teachers who have been subjected to bullying or harassment by students and/or their parents over a 12-month period (2017-18). The survey reported 560 teachers participated.

The key findings from the survey were reported by Billet, Fogelgarn & Burns (2019) as follows:

- 80% of respondents experienced some form of bullying or harassment by students or parents in the 12 months prior to the survey.

- Less than 2% of respondents believed teacher targeted bullying and harassment by students or parents may not be a problem for teachers in Australian schools.

- Teacher targeted bullying and harassment by parents was most common for teachers working in primary schools, with 63% of primary school teachers having experienced bullying or harassment from a parent in the 12 months prior to the survey.

- Student enacted bullying and harassment was most common for middle and secondary teachers. 78% of middle or secondary teachers were exposed to bullying or harassment by a student in the 12 months prior to the survey.

7.4 Higher risk of being targeted for violence and aggression in teacher housing

The issue of teacher housing break-ins was raised as an area of concern by the taskforce, and for this reason, a targeted analysis of aggressive and violent behaviour was completed using newsflash data. A newsflash provides critical and concise information to the department's executive team and the Minister for Education about an incident relating to a departmental service, function, student or staff member. It includes critical incidents that have occurred within a school, service or community, significant damage to department, school or service premises, any significant issue involving staff, instances where NT Police or ambulance services are involved and school/teacher housing break-ins or vandalism.

In 2020, there were 52 newsflashes related to teacher housing break-ins (36) or attempted break-ins (16). Of the 36 reported newsflashes of teacher housing break-ins in 2020:

- 31 (86.1%) occurred while teachers were away from their communities on leave and 5 occurred while teachers were at home

- 16 (44%) occurred in East Arnhem region, 14 (38.9%) in Central region, 5 (13.9%) in Barkly region and one (2.8%) was in Top End region.

The main reasons reported for teacher housing break-ins were *'intention of causing property damage'* and *'intention of stealing'* (primarily stealing food items). The main points of entry for teacher housing break-ins were back doors by breaking or cutting through the security screen of (10) followed by breaking windows/ secure panels (8) and entry through laundry area windows (6).

Teachers in departmental houses, in remote areas are therefore more at risk of experiencing violence and aggression than those not in those areas.

The department's legal requirement to ensure schools are safe places of work also extends to ensuring government assigned housing for remote staff is also safe. The WHS Act states that *if:*

- *a worker occupies accommodation that is owned by, or under the management or control of, the person conducting the business or undertaking; and*

- *the occupancy is necessary for the purposes of the worker's engagement because other accommodation is not reasonably available;*

- *the person conducting the business or undertaking must, so far as is reasonably practicable, maintain the premises so that the worker occupying the premises is not exposed to risks to health and safety.*

The Government Employee Housing (GEH) for Remote Staff program provides housing for eligible department staff, including teachers, in remote locations. The GEH for Remote Staff policy sets out the eligibility criteria for GEH accommodation, while the GEH for Remote Staff guidelines and procedures outline details about the responsibilities associated with administering the GEH program, which is managed jointly by the department and the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities (TFHC).

The policy states that TFHC must provide property management, including timely management of repairs and maintenance, while it is the responsibility of staff living in GEH to report GEH theft or vandalism to police. The GEH for Remote Staff Program does not provide details about the support school staff ought to expect from the department when incidents, such as break-ins, occur in GEH. It is the responsibility of the department to provide the employee support to those involved in the incident.

The current practice is that all break-ins or vandalism at schools or government assigned housing for staff are reported to the Executive via newsflash and to School Operations where the information is then recorded.

7.5   Ranking of school staff sense of safety at school

The annual NT School Survey provides important information about different aspects of school life from the perspective of students, parents and carers and school staff, including student and staff wellbeing, teacher-student relationships, quality teaching and learning and the learning environment. This survey is an important mechanism for school and system improvement planning and to monitor the effect of education programs.

In 2021, 2,859 school staff participated in the NT School Survey, which equates to a response rate of 51%. Of particular concern is the rating of *'student behaviour is well managed at this school'* which indicated a score of 34 on a ranking scale of 1-38. Figure 5 below shows the response rate to relevant specific questions:

Figure 5: School staff positive response rate, 2021 NT School Survey (%)

	NT all	Ranking[1]
I feel safe at this school	85	12
This school cares about my wellbeing	79	21
Students are taught how to manage their emotions	79	22
Student behaviour is well managed at this school	70	34

- (1) Ranking of staff survey questions from highest positive rate (1) to lowest response rate (38).

8 Who displays violent and aggressive behaviours towards school staff?

8.1 Department of Education suspension data

Student suspension data was analysed to determine any patterns related to occupational violence or aggression directed at school staff. Student suspensions that were classified as *'incidental/accidental physical assault on staff'*, *'intentional physical assault on staff'*, *'threatened physical assault on staff'* or *'verbal abuse of school staff'* were included in this data. It should be noted that suspension data does not capture all occupational violence and aggression directed at school staff. In addition, care should be taken in interpreting recent numbers of suspension incidents due to the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on student attendance.

In 2021, there were 465 suspensions related to physical assault or verbal abuse towards school staff involving 339 students The most common reason for suspension was verbal abuse of staff (63.7%) followed by intentional physical assault on staff (25.4%).

8.1.1.1 Aboriginal Students

Aboriginal students are over-represented in student suspensions. Aboriginal students make up approximately 43% of government school enrolments, however this student group consistently accounted for over 60% of suspension incidents and number of students suspended annually. In 2021, 209 Aboriginal students were suspended at least once during the year in relation to 280 incidents of physical violence or verbal abuse towards school staff. Aboriginal students were 2.1 times more likely to be suspended due to physical violence or verbal abuse towards school staff than non-Aboriginal students in 2021. Figure 6 below details number of suspensions by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

Figure 6: Student suspensions incidents by Aboriginal status*

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Number of incidents					
Aboriginal	426	323	303	273	280
Non-Aboriginal	229	205	168	178	185
All students	655	529	471	451	465
Distinct student count					
Aboriginal	306	255	230	206	209
Non-Aboriginal	162	138	125	121	130
All students	468	393	355	327	339
Rate per 1,000 students					
Aboriginal	20.4	17.9	15.8	14.2	14.4
Non-Aboriginal	8.5	7.2	6.5	6.2	6.8
All students	13.7	11.8	10.5	9.6	10.1

*'Unknown' Aboriginal status is included in non-Aboriginal figures.
Source: Department of Education.

8.1.1.2 The middle years of schooling

Most suspensions relate to students in the middle years of schooling, that is years 7 to 9, and account for nearly two-thirds of total suspension incidents. Figure 7 below details student suspensions related to physical violence and verbal abuse by year level and Aboriginal status.

Figure 7: Student suspension incidents by grade and Aboriginal status

Number of incidents
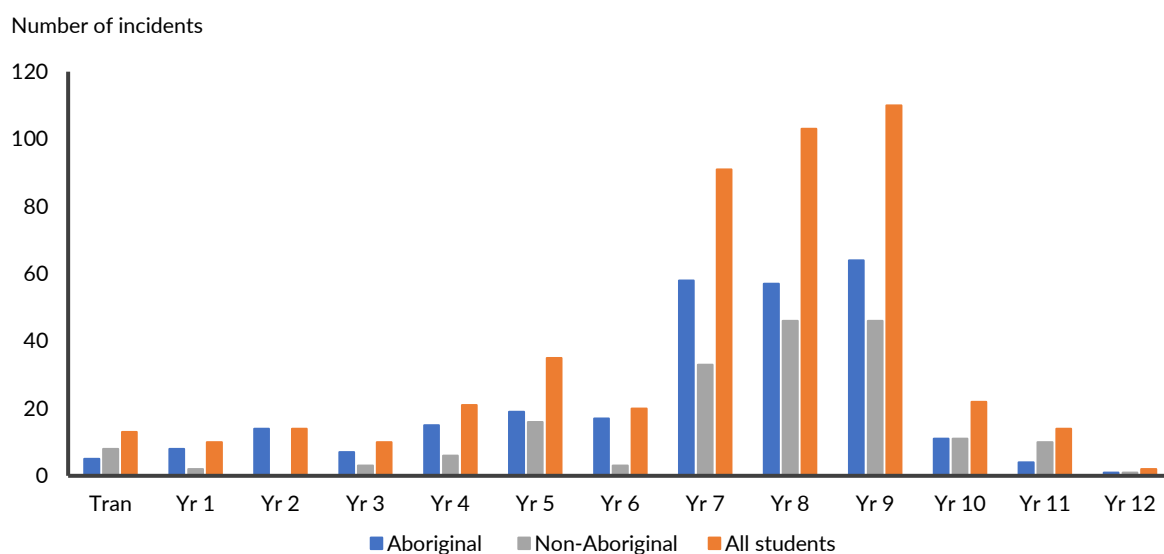
Source: Department of Education.

8.1.1.3   Students with disabilities

Students with disabilities are also disproportionately suspended from government schools in the NT. Students with disabilities make up approximately 30% of government school enrolments, but they make up about 66% of total suspensions, due to physical violence or verbal abuse against school staff. Across all year levels, students with a disability have higher rates of suspensions than students with no disability. Figure 8 details the number of suspension incidents for physical violence or verbal abuse against school staff by disability and Aboriginal status.

Figure 8: Student suspension incidents by disability and Aboriginal status

	Incident count	Distinct students
Students with disability		
Aboriginal	190	129
Non-Aboriginal	119	79
Total	309	208
Students with no disability		
Aboriginal	73	64
Non-Aboriginal	60	46
Total	133	110

(1) Figures do not include students with 'unknown' disability.
Source: Department of Education.

8.1.1.4   Male students

Figures 9 and 10 below show the combined effect of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal students with disability, gender and year level on suspension rates. Male students with a disability in year 9 had the

highest rates of suspensions with nearly one in 10 students suspended at least once for physical violence or verbal abuse toward school staff in 2021.

Figure 9: Male student rate (per 1,000 relevant population), by disability and Aboriginal status, 2021

Rate per 1,000 relevant population
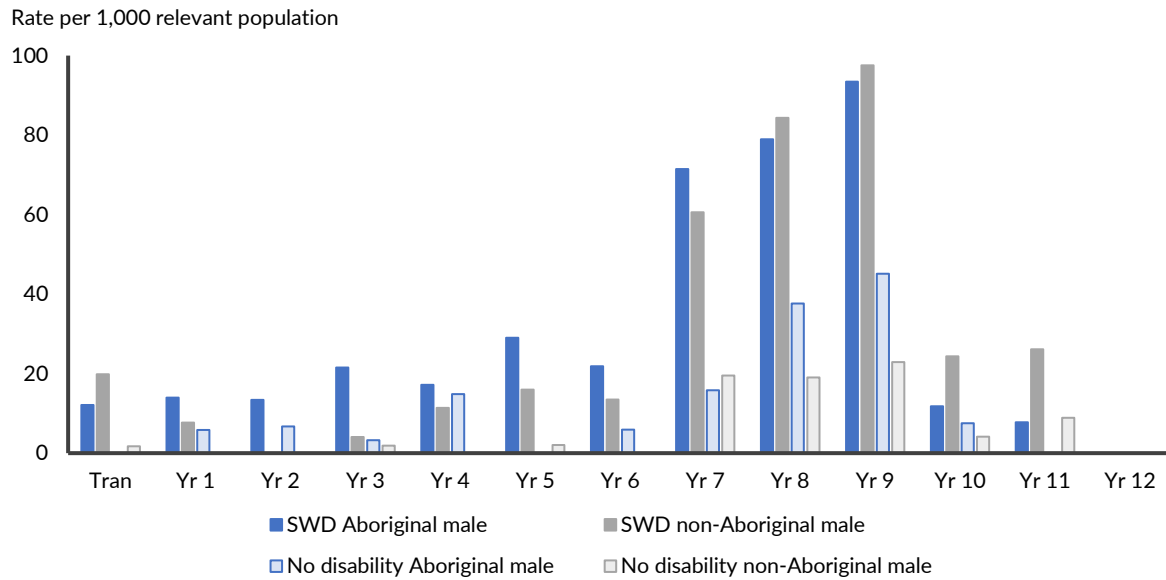
Source: Department of Education.

Figure 10: Female student rate (per 1,000 relevant population), by disability and Aboriginal status, 2021
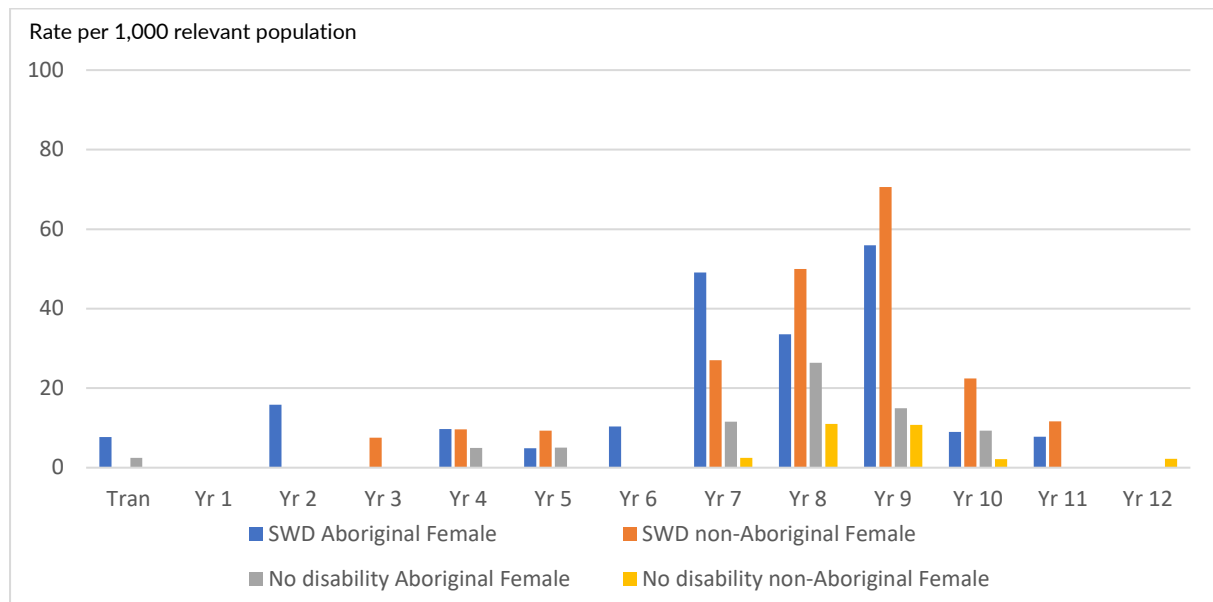
In summary, in 2021:

- students in middle years of schooling (years 7 to 9) were 7 times more likely to be suspended than students in other year levels

- students with a disability were 4.8 times more likely to be suspended than students with no disability

- male students were 2.3 times more likely to be suspended than female students

- Aboriginal students were 2.1 times more likely to be suspended than non-Aboriginal students

- male students in years 8 and 9 with a disability recorded the highest rate of suspensions, with a rate of approximately nearly one in 10 students suspended for physical violence or verbal abuse towards school staff.

8.2   Support for students with behavioural needs

While the data identified the main profile of those who initiate or cause violence and aggression towards school staff, it does not provide any insight into the understanding of the causal factors of occupational violence and aggression in NT Government schools. The McMahon et al. (2017b) study on teachers who experience violence suggest that teachers should be included in any discussion about disciplinary strategies that are to be included within operational policies. The study went on to further recommend the need for increased availability of supports and services for students to protect teachers from bullying incidents.

One multi-tiered approach is the 'three-tiered models of prevention' approach. This model includes the full scope of supports to prevent the development of learning and behavioural challenges before they become pronounced and involves responding more effectively to learning and behavioural problems that occur (Lane et al., 2010).

A key component to this model is the early identification of students with learning and behavioural issues so they can be provided with appropriate supports. Students who have been involved in multiple cases of violence and aggression towards school staff warrant focussed attention. The three-tiered model of prevention comprises the following; first, a primary prevention program implemented school wide, where all students are supported behaviourally, socially and academically; second, secondary prevention programs are offered to small groups of students with similar needs and third; tertiary prevention is offered for intensive and individualised support. This level supports students who experience multiple risk factors (Lane et al., 2010). As such, the following recommendations are made:

Recommendation 9:

Conduct a gap analysis into the current prevention, early intervention and support programs, including allied health support, currently available to students with multiple risk factors and high incidence of violent and aggressive behaviour and best practice strategies for student and family/carer engagement of the cohort and update current practices.

Recommendation 10:

Review the process at the school level used to identify special behavioural, social or academic needs of students, including the formal referral assessment process and the primary, secondary and tertiary prevention supports currently available to students who are either at risk of displaying violent and aggressive behaviour towards school staff or who have already displayed such behaviour. Address any gaps in identified support requirements.

Recommendation 11:

Establish a system-led coordinated case management approach, to address complex cases involving a child or young person who is involved in multiple incidents of violence or aggression towards school staff.

9 Conduct Codes provide behaviour expectations

9.1 Requirement for ethical conduct

The main code of conduct in relation to occupational violence and aggression against school staff is the Code of Conduct for Education Sites and Workplace Participants. Other key documents that articulate the expected behaviours of all stakeholders, including school staff, school representative body members, parents and carers, students and community members, include: the NT Public Service Code of Conduct, the NT Teacher Registration Board Code of Ethics, the department Family Engagement Charter and individual schools' Code of Behaviour for Students. The principle in each of the codes is consistent in that physical violence, aggression and verbal abuse is not acceptable, and that teachers have a responsibility, and role, to engage students in positive learning experiences, relationships and behaviours.

9.1.1 Code of Conduct for the Northern Territory Public Sector (NTPS)

The Code of Conduct for the NTPS stipulates the minimum standards of conduct expected of all public sector officers. The Code applies to all public sector officers performing official duties and responsibilities including, but not limited to, representing the Northern Territory Government at conferences, training events, on business trips and attending work-related social events. The code also applies to the personal conduct of public sector officers, insofar as it affects, or has a relevant connection to, the performance of their duties.

The code establishes 9 pillars of conduct standards: professional and courteous behaviour; public comment; handling of official information; conflict of interest; use of public resources; outside employment; acceptance of gifts including professional; criminal offences; and disclosure of wrongdoing.

9.1.2 Code of Conduct for Education Sites and Workplace Participants

The department's Code of Conduct for Education Sites and Workplace Participants policy requires that schools develop and implement a code of conduct clarifying standards of expected behaviours from school staff, parents, visitors, volunteers (school representative bodies) and service providers in schools. It describes the unacceptable and offensive behaviours that are not accepted in NT education settings (refer to Figure 12), including:

- behaving in ways that are intimidating, humiliating, aggressive or abusive

- behaving in ways that endanger the health, safety or wellbeing of others

- harassing, victimising or discriminating against others.

9.1.3 Code of Ethics for Northern Territory Teachers

The Teacher Registration Board of the Northern Territory has established a Code of Ethics which outlines the professional conduct and behaviour required of approved teachers in the NT. It describes five values which underpin the profession: integrity, respect, justice, empathy, and dignity.

Under the Code of Ethics, the ethical responsibility of teachers in the NT include:

- create learning experiences which engage, inspire, motivate, delight, affirm and challenge of learners

- act with professionalism and integrity, and with care, compassion and empathy

- be truthful, honest and trustworthy

- demonstrate dignity in relationships with others

9.1.4 Family Engagement Charter

The department has a Family Engagement Charter that sets out the relationships and expectations between schools, parents and carers, and families. The Charter underpins the relationship and expectations of how schools and families partner in a child's education. The charter identifies 4 key areas:

- Partnering – when families and schools are partners in learning, children's social and academic outcomes improve significantly.

- Sharing and supporting – reciprocal support for children's learning at home is evident when learning is not limited to the classroom.

- Communicating – communication between home and school is effective, regular and two-way.

- Respecting – Everyone understands and respects each other's role in a child's life and encourages achievement.

9.1.5 Australian Student Wellbeing Framework

The Australian Student Wellbeing Framework (the framework) was endorsed by federal, state and territory ministers for education and released on 19 October 2018.

The framework supports the *Education Act 2015* (NT), which seeks to ensure schools are safe and supportive learning environments that provide all children and young people access to education programs that are appropriate and responsive to their individual needs and abilities.

The Department of Education is committed to implementing the framework through a whole-school approach to student wellbeing and positive behaviour.

The need for a whole-school approach to student wellbeing and positive behaviour is recognised in:

- the National School Improvement Tool – a culture that promotes learning

- the Framework for Inclusion 2019-29 – promotes an environment in NT Government schools that is inclusive, fair and focused on delivering learning to meet individual need

- A Share in the Future: Indigenous Education Strategy 2015-2024 – Element 4 Engagement: Goal 4.4 Schools provide a whole-system approach to behaviour management and wellbeing.

9.1.6 Student Wellbeing and Positive Behaviour policy

The Student Wellbeing and Positive Behaviour Policy requires each school to develop and implement a whole school approach to student wellbeing and behaviour. This policy recognises the roles and responsibilities of senior corporate staff, the school representative body, principals, teachers and other staff in developing a whole-school approach to student wellbeing and positive behaviour.

Under the Student Wellbeing and Positive Behaviour policy, all NT Government schools are to develop a whole-school approach to student wellbeing and positive behaviour that, among other things, enables all members of the school community to be active participants in the creation of a school culture that values wellbeing, diversity and inclusion, cultivates positive, caring and respectful relationships and consolidates a tiered response to intervention.

The whole school approach should include:

- school vision and values

- clearly communicated expected behaviours through a code of behaviour

- responses to positive behaviours and behaviours of concern

- defined roles, rights and responsibilities of staff, students, families and the school community

- teaching social and emotional learning strategies

- teaching bullying and cyberbullying prevention

- teaching and classroom behaviour support strategies

- processes for developing, implementing and reviewing support plans, for example, educational adjustment plans, individual behaviour plans, transition from school plans, risk assessment plans and safety plans.

These codes fulfil the initial steps required in addressing unacceptable behaviours and promoting respectful relationships, that is, to set expectations against which the behaviour can be measured. The rates of aggression and violence, however, indicate that the communication and implementation of the codes have not been effectively refreshed and implemented. Schools that have comprehensive violence and prevention plans in place, in addition to having teams in place to design and implement those plans, reported enhanced safety as well as improved academic outcomes. It also had the effect of reducing disciplinary actions and suspensions, improved staff morale and an improved school climate more conducive to learning. (Dwyer & Osher, 2000).

9.1.7 Safe at School Campaign

The recent Safe at School campaign has been developed in conjunction with both students and parents/carers and is focussed on the prevention of occupational violence and aggression in NT government schools towards school staff, students and the broader community.

The effective communication strategy, including positive media relationships, of this campaign will be critical in providing the consistent messaging to target behavioural change to respectful relationships and promote a zero-tolerance position to violence and aggression in government schools.

10 Prevention of Violence and Aggression in Schools

10.1.1 Training in response management for school staff

Training school staff, particularly new teachers, to respond to incidents of violence and aggression is frequently reported in the literature as a measure for teachers to remain as safe as possible, both physically and psychologically.

Topics for training typically include:

- Situational awareness and risk assessment training for recognising and identifying potentially violent situations.

- Conflict management for de-escalation strategies and communication strategies to defuse or prevent potentially violent situations.

- Physical self-defence techniques training, including restraint methods.

- Occupational violence and aggression-related departmental policy and procedures education for staff, including reporting systems.

- Psychological first aid training (psychoeducation regarding trauma) to understand how to support staff wellbeing.

Remote locations have been identified as requiring a focus. The study by A Willis & Grainger (2020) linked the lack of adequate specified training for new teachers in remote locations to possibly contributing to staff leaving. Therefore, they suggested that comprehensive research-based trauma-informed training that also covers working in isolated contexts and with First Nations communities.

It is noted that the department provides a range of face-to-face and online training to support school staff including: induction training on safety management; and training to assess, manage and respond to risk behaviours, including verbal de-escalation, prevention and early intervention and resources to support school staff wellbeing. It is further noted that this training is significantly under-utilised. In 2021, XX attended training on...

10.1.2 Develop positive teacher-student relationships

Although the department's own programs on occupational violence and aggression address the response required for incidents of aggression, effective preventative programs also include the development of positive respectful teacher-student relationships in the classroom.

Such relationships are important in mitigating occupational violence and aggression towards school staff. Jiménez et al. (2021) state that *"students who report better relationships with teachers show higher self-esteem and...fewer depressive and problem behaviours, such as peer aggression.* Other studies have supported this, showing that *"teacher-student relationships that are distant and conflictive contribute to higher levels of school violence..."* The act of showing respect is a contributor to positive teacher-to-student and student-to-student relationships and the quality of such relationships has implications for both student discipline and behaviour and academic performance (Thompson, 2018).

Jiménez et al. (2019) identified that teachers who have a positive and broad awareness of the academic competence of their students, promote healthy relational models for their students, engage in their practice and show support toward their students generates a positive classroom climate. Students perceive support from others and participate in their learning, which can eliminate or reduce the levels of violence and aggression in the school. To identify the effectiveness of student-teacher relationships the following is recommended:

10.1.3 Classroom management

Teachers also play a role in reducing occupational violence and aggression through teaching practices, such as clearly stating classroom and school rules, being consistent about modelling and rewarding positive behaviour, and building on student strengths rather than focussing on weaknesses or using punitive teaching methods (Espelage et al., 2013).

Aspects of the classroom environment, such as creating a positive classroom setting and establishing patterns and expectations of students (ideally early in the school year), can play a role in deterring violence and aggression. The literature outlines how setting expectations involves clearly and consistently giving feedback to students on behavioural standards, coupled with helping them manage their anger when resolving conflicts (Henry et al., 2000).

Henry et al. (2000) found that a child displaying aggressive behaviour in the classroom can be influenced by the moral climate of the classroom. Therefore, effective classroom strategies to eliminate or reduce occupational violence and aggression ought to: consider the physical layout of the classroom; promote a sense of belonging; establish clear and understandable rules; engage students in their learning; and appropriately manage misbehaviour (Espelage et al., 2013). Regarding engaging students, Espelage et al. (2013) stated that pedagogy designed to engage all students may lead students to becoming more engaged with their learning and less likely engaged in violent behaviours.

A case study found that teachers prioritise the needs of their students above curriculum, for example, addressing students who were hungry, who had limited sleep overnight or who were dealing with other stresses were prioritised (Willis & Grainger, 2020). Classroom management therefore should include an understanding of the broader needs of the child. For example, Willis & Grainger (2020) suggest that providing reliable access to medical professionals (for example, paediatricians, hearing specialists, occupational therapists and mental health services) for students, particularly remote students, was found to reduce violence and aggression. Teachers, therefore, have a role in promoting access to health professionals for students, especially those at risk. The recent changes to Medicare resulting in allowing telehealth access to health services, have made it easier for teachers to promote health care services to parents and carers, for their children. Support and training for teachers may be required to assist them in identifying the individual needs of a child.

There is a broad array of programs that are effective in addressing a range of social and emotional factors assumed to cause aggressive behaviour. Wilson & Lipsey, (2007) identified the most common forms as cognitively oriented programs, behavioural programs, social skills training and counselling/therapy. Jacobs & De Wet, (2018) suggest developing occupational violence and aggression programs, that is imbedding programs within the curriculum that educate students about occupational violence and aggression, including bullying programs and conflict resolution programs. These could be implemented in large group settings, within the classroom and across the whole school.

10.2 Education and Training for School Leaders

10.2.1.1 Establish a school climate of safety

A school's climate has been identified by Billet et al., (2020) as being an important component in the prevention of aggressive behaviours in schools. The school climate refers to the school's atmosphere or life of the school, and is characterised by Cohen et al. (2009) as *'the norms, goals, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices...'* The philosophy is that youth who are actively involved, and feel good at school, are less likely to engage in violent behaviour. Consequently, Karcher (2004) argues that the primary focus for reducing school-based violence should be through promoting active engagement in schools and positive feelings about school. This is supported by a Zaykowski & DeCamp (2012) study, which found that a positive school climate, specifically the social cohesion of schools, reduced the incidence of serious violence in schools, including victimisation of teachers by students.

Departmental and school leaders can influence the level of violence against school staff because they help shape school climate and set the safety culture. Espelage et al. (2013) stated that departmental and school leaders should take all necessary steps to respond privately and publicly in a supportive manner to the school staff who are directly or indirectly affected by occupational violence and aggression in schools and should address larger school and community needs when violence is targeted toward educators.

> *Recommendation 13:*
>
> *Develop a comprehensive and tiered occupational violence and aggression educational training program for all site-based staff that includes personal safety management, classroom prevention strategies and build whole-of-school capacity to reduce and eliminate occupational violence and aggression. Education and training to be delivered in both on-line and in-person modalities, provided as a refresher on a regular basis, and reviewed annually for effectiveness and currency. Consideration should be given to the establishment of professional development endorsement for this program.*

10.2.1.2 Establish community-level engagement to reduce violence

Prevention and intervention strategies to eliminate or reduce occupational violence and aggression against school staff extend beyond school staff, students, parents, carers and families, to community members and organisations.

Espelage et al. (2013) point to community leaders and organisations having a responsibility to engage young people in positive activities. They found that when young people are actively involved in the community and contribute to the advancement of their own neighbourhood cultures, practices and belief systems, their sense of personal value and self-worth may be enhanced. The result is that when young people are involved in local problem solving and decision making, they are often less likely to engage in violent behaviour which is partly contributed to having a greater sense of wellbeing and self-efficacy.

As an added benefit, Bennet & Fraser, (2000) showed that community-based efforts improved public safety by developing and implementing intervention strategies that acknowledge multiple determinants of violence among young people. More generally, community networks that support economic development, employment programs and parent training may strengthen communities and reduce violence among young people (Espelage et al., 2013).

Many studies have demonstrated the effect of parental involvement on all aspects of a child's social, emotional and academic development (Castro et al., 2015). Wilder (2014) found the relationship

between parental involvement and academic achievement was strongest if parental involvement is defined as parental expectations for academic achievement. Leone et al. (2000) recommended developing a respectful school community and embracing diversity, including more functional partnerships with parents, to meet the educational needs of students at risk of school violence.

Community members and organisations are important stakeholders. Community networks that support economic development, employment programs and parent training may strengthen communities and eliminate or reduce violence among young people.

The long-term success of any strategy to eliminate or reduce occupational violence and aggression requires commitment and support among the whole school community, including administrators, school staff, students, parents and carers, families, community members, allied health services and non-government organisations.

To develop and promote an integrated approach, the following two recommendations are made:

Recommendation 14:

Develop a department guide for working with communities, which includes templates for sites to implement with their whole school community, to ensure there is a school-led coordinated approach to raising awareness of the impact of violence and aggression and that the behaviour is not tolerated in NT government schools

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Recommendation 15:

Develop internal and external communication strategies to improve awareness of the impact of occupational violence and aggression on school staff, highlighting the need for appropriate and respectful behaviour, and promoting zero tolerance towards occupational violence and aggression against school staff

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11 Staff Wellbeing and Psychological Safety

The wellbeing of employees, including teachers, school leaders and principals is covered under wellbeing frameworks, action plans and strategies. These documents clearly represent the department's commitment and vision for the wellbeing of all employees.

11.1 The Employee Wellbeing framework

The department's Employee Wellbeing Framework consists of multiple interconnecting components which are integral to enhancing and maintaining health and wellbeing. These are:

- flourishing workforce, including principals, teachers and support staff

- 5 dimensions of wellbeing to support a holistic approach to employee wellbeing – physical, social, emotional, spiritual and mental

- core focus areas for building an organisational culture that support wellbeing – growing wellbeing capability, building a wellbeing culture and supporting mental health and wellbeing

- 3 key agents of wellbeing which share equal responsibility to support wellbeing for all – the individual, the collective (colleagues and peers) and the department (policy, programs and systems).

11.1.1 Teacher Wellbeing Strategy 2019-22

The Education NT Teacher Wellbeing Strategy 2019-22 outlines priority areas and actions to improve teacher wellbeing, which were informed by the NT Teachers' Occupational Health and Wellbeing Survey: 2019 Data Report and direct engagement with teachers.

The Teacher Wellbeing Strategy identifies 3 priority areas and actions for each priority area.

- Support for success – actions focus on developing an early career teacher program, providing wellbeing conversations for teachers and trialling a range of ways for connecting teachers across the NT to create communities of like-minded educators.

- Optimise time to teach – actions focus on reducing non-teaching and learning workload, improving reporting to parents and replacing the reporting to parents system.

- Promote a safe and respectful workplace – actions focus on supporting a positive school community, strengthening relationships between teachers and students and engaging with other jurisdictions to seek partnerships in a nationwide respectful relationships community education campaign that supports positive and respectful behaviours towards teachers.

11.1.2 Principal Wellbeing Framework

The Principal Wellbeing Framework identifies five wellbeing dimensions for supporting a holistic approach to principal wellbeing including: physical; mental; social; emotional; and spiritual. There are three encircling wellbeing enablers - building a wellbeing culture, growing wellbeing capability and supporting mental health and wellbeing.

The Principal Wellbeing Framework identifies future directions for each stage of the 5-step process for implementation, including:

- Engage – principal case studies sharing approaches to wellbeing and professional development opportunities

- Needs assessment – annual principal wellbeing survey, individual wellbeing assessment tools and human resources data

- Wellbeing planning – principal wellbeing workshops/training, online resources to guide wellbeing planning and information to facilitate coaching and mentoring

- Action – resourcing for wellbeing, leadership and executive coaching and information and resourcing regarding available counselling services

- Review – guiding information and process on how to evaluate individual wellbeing activities and system level evaluation process and measures.

11.2 The School Leader Wellbeing Action Plan 2021-2025

The School Leader Wellbeing Action Plan is contained within the Principal Wellbeing Framework and consists of 9 actions under the following 3 priority areas:

1. Optimise time for instructional leadership

2. Promote a culture of care, wellbeing and safety

3. Enhance professional support.

Documents in relation to the department's Education NT Employee Wellbeing Framework, Education NT Teacher Wellbeing Strategy 2019-22, Education NT Principal and School Leader Wellbeing Framework and Action Plan and can be found in Attachments 6a to 6d.

11.3 The management of critical incidents involving violence and aggression

One of the key components of teacher, school leader and principal well-being is the management of their psychological safety at the time of a critical incident. Such incidents occur as a result of an incident involving violent of aggressive behaviour, but can also be the result of the cumulation of several or many incidents of such behaviour.

11.3.1 The current Critical Incident Response Guideline

The current Critical Incident Response Guideline provides information about managing critical incidents which occur at government schools and at corporate locations. A critical incident may occur on or off site and may include death, suicide or injury of a current or former student, staff member or member of the school community. Although it is the intention of the guideline to include preschools and early childhood services and out of hours school care (OHSC) services on school sites, the guidelines do not specifically include these services. The guideline sets out a 4 phase management approach for critical incidents (prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery), which covers critical occupational violence and aggression incidents.

The current Critical Incident Response Guideline defines a critical incident as:

> *'a sudden, unpredicted event that poses significant risk of traumatic effects. Incidents may occur on or off site; cause sudden and/or significant disruption to the operation of one or more schools and their community; have potential to affect a large number of students and staff and/or the community; require a significant and coordinated response; and attract media attention or a public profile for the school and/or department'.*

The guideline provides examples of critical incidents such as death; suicide; serious assault of a child, staff member or member of the school community; severe verbal or psychological aggression; and witnessing a serious accident or incidence of violence. The guideline states:

- the department will prioritise a rapid response to critical incidents with appropriate support functions, recognising that every incident is unique and requires a tailored response

- the practical and efficient management of critical incidents is vital to the safety and wellbeing of students, staff and the school community. It is essential to recognise and support those suffering trauma and distress as a result of a critical incident

- principals are responsible for monitoring student and school staff wellbeing following a critical incident and request, or provide ongoing wellbeing support, as required

- the department's Senior Director School Improvement and Leadership has responsibility for ongoing wellbeing and support for the school principal, as required

- the department's Director Quality School Systems and Support has responsibility for ongoing wellbeing and support for school and regional staff.

11.4 On-site attendance at incidents involving violence and aggression

In 2021, of the incidents that were reported through the safety management system, it is unclear how many involved attendance by a trauma trained psychologist on-site. The other incidents were either provided with telephone support or were not provided with any specialist support at all.

The lack of support at the time of an incident can have a negative impact on employee wellbeing. A survey of teachers undertaken by McMahon et al. (2017b) revealed that a lack of administrator support negatively affects teachers at the individual level through affecting how teachers feel; at the interpersonal level by affecting how they address issues related to students, parents, carers and family members that instigate occupational violence and aggression incidents ; and at the organisational level by affecting how they relate to school systems and policies. This lack of support often led to an environment of repeated misbehaviour from students, and teachers feeling blamed and unsafe, all of which affected the staff wellbeing.

Further, teachers who experience violence and aggression are likely to have low levels of life and job satisfaction, suffer psychological implications such as emotional exhaustion or post-traumatic stress disorder and negatively affect classroom learning dynamics, which can have long-term effects on their wellbeing and mental health and on student wellbeing and mental health. Several studies report that violence in schools affects the personal and professional lives of teachers (Wilson, Douglas & Lyon, 2011; McMahon et al., 2017b; Benoit & Philippot, 2007).

Principals also require support at the time of incidents. Riley et al., (2020) reported in the Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey, that principals and school leaders who received the least professional support reported the greatest challenges in maintaining their mental health

11.5 Psychological injury as a result of violence or aggression in the workplace

The experience of violence and aggression in the workplace places teachers, school leaders and principals in a position of psychological compromise and threatens their psychological safety. In accordance with the WHS Act, the department therefore has a legal obligation to prevent such incidents and provide a response that includes early intervention, support and recovery, enabling the worker to remain in their role, or return to work as soon as possible.

Gallagher Bassett, the department's insurer for workers compensation, provided the workers compensation data for 2020 in relation to violence and aggression. Gallagher Bassett utilised Safe Work Australia's definition of occupational violence for the retrieval of the data, that is – '*the acute, intentional and targeted actions of another person, or persons directed towards a worker*'. Based on this

definition, Gallagher Bassett excluded incidences where a worker had been accidentally hit and claims for perceived or actual bullying and harassment within the workplace.

Gallagher Bassett reported that in 2020, there were 13 workers compensation claims attributable to occupational violence. Three incidents occurred when employees attempted to calm students who were in a heightened emotional state and the remaining 10 incidents were direct assaults by students. Of the 13 claims, 4 related to special schools.

Psychological injury, however, is not always readily identified, and is not always compensable, and therefore the number of workers compensation cases provides only a subset of the psychological injury likely to be experienced by employees as a result an incident or an accumulation of incidents of violence and aggression. To go some way in mitigating unreported psychological injury Riley et al., (2020) suggest that an annual school staff wellbeing survey can issue a pop-up alert (a notification), only to the person completing the survey, when responses to the survey indicate a risk of self-harm, poor quality of life and/or poor occupational health. The alert is designed to encourage the individual staff member to utilise an employee assistance program and/or local health support services. The alert is not visible to others, and given the surveys are anonymous, an individual cannot be identified.

11.6 Teachers at higher risk of psychological injury

Willis & Grainger, (2020) identified teachers in remote areas have been identified as being at higher risk of psychological compromise, evidenced by higher levels of sick leave and limited access to health professionals. Support for isolated teachers can involve access to reliable online services, access to relief teachers to enable staff who are sick, (including mentally distressed) not feel burdened when no replacement is available for them to take time off.

Further, Willis & Grainger (2020) stated the importance of wellbeing leave for remote staff, enabling them additional access to paid leave for mental health maintenance.

11.7 The Australian guidelines for the prevention and treatment of Acute Stress Disorder and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has been found to be associated with high service use, greater individual disability than other mental or physical disorders, and have higher healthcare costs than depression and anxiety (Phoenix, Australia, 2020).

It is therefore important from both a broad and department perspective that contemporary best practice for the management of trauma, which include incidents of violence and aggression in the workplace, is implemented in line with the Australian guidelines for the prevention and treatment of Acute Stress Disorder (ASD) and PTSD.

Risks associated with all incidents of violence and aggression at schools require triage and a determination of the appropriate response, including system wrap around support for school staff who have been affected by the incident and which support school leaders' and staff mental wellbeing and recovery.

After trauma exposure, staff should be provided with information, emotional support, and practical assistance. In schools this applies to those exposed to the trauma and to the leaders who are managing those exposed. Such support can be readily provided by on-site attendance by a trauma trained clinician.

Within the first three months following trauma, for those who have trauma symptoms, a stepped/collaborative care model should be provided, in which individuals receive evidence-based care commensurate with the severity and complexity of their need. This psychological care is provided by a psychologist or mental health clinician specifically trained in trauma response interventions.

Where psychological support is outsourced from the department, clear expectations of service should be provided in a formal contract, which includes a formal report of services provided at each incident and procedures regarding the closure of support. An internal contract manager should be assigned to monitor the service against agreed deliverables.

The following recommendations are made:

Recommendation 16:

Establish a department-wide critical incident response protocol which reflects contemporary practice for the management of trauma and cumulative trauma, which includes response to incidents of occupational violence and aggression and clearly indicates the type and severity of incident that warrants on site or telephone psychological support to the site leader and those involved in an incidence of violence.

Recommendation 17:

Develop a handbook that is available on-line, to provide guidance specifically targeted at the management of occupational violence and aggression against school staff. The handbook should outline the legislative requirements, available education and training, roles and responsibilities, incident reporting requirements, student support available, and managing the psychological safety of school staff exposed to incidents.

12 Attachments

Attachment 1:   Terms of Reference

Attachment 2:   Taskforce Participants

Attachment 3:   Definition of a 'notifiable' incident

Attachment 4:   Documents of the Safety Management System

Attachment 5:   Incident Report Form

Attachment 6a: The Employee Wellbeing Framework

Attachment 6b: The Teacher Wellbeing Strategy 2019-22

Attachment 6c: The Employee Wellbeing Framework

Attachment 6d: The Employee Wellbeing Framework

Attachment 1: The Terms of Reference

12.1.1 Background and purpose

On 14 March 2021, the Northern Territory (NT) Principals' Association (NTPA) issued a media release in response to the release of 2020 data for the Australian Principal Occupational, Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey. In the media release, the NTPA made recommendations to improve the occupational health, safety and wellbeing of school leaders in the NT, including an independent taskforce to investigate offensive behaviours occurring in schools.

Further, on 2 March 2021, the NT News published a story under the heading 'Teacher Assault Surge'. The story indicated that the numbers of teachers being hit at work had increased from 246 in 2016-17 to 369 in 2019-20. The Australian Education Union – NT President, Mr Jarvis Ryan, is quoted as saying that the vast majority of the incidents involved students assaulting teachers in the classroom.

The Department of Education has had a Work Health and Safety team and a Work Health and Safety Committee/Safety Management Committee in place for many years. The NTPA proposal for a taskforce would be a useful addition to complement that work. In particular, the draft Safety Management Committee of 2021 Workplan references occupational violence and aggression (OVA) and includes a performance measure of a 20% reduction in OVA incidents reported in schools audited in the next 12 months.

12.1.2 Scope and deliverables

Using the inquiry cycle set out below as a guide, the taskforce will identify solutions to reducing the number of OVA incidents in schools long-term. The taskforce will focus on the first 3 steps in the inquiry cycle, i.e. assess the issue, set goals and plan proposed solutions.

Assess	Set goals	Plan	Act	Review and adjust
Why?	What?	How?	How well?	And so?
What does the data tell us?	What are the priorities for improvement?	What are the actions, roles, responsibilities, timelines and resources?	When do we expect to see the changes in behaviour occurring?	How will we know that the work is having an effect on student outcomes?
What further evidence to we need?	What are the learning needs of staff of the priorities?	What will these involve for each party?	How will be know?	What evidence will we see, hear and read?
How will we let people know?	What are the changes in behaviour we expect to see?		How will we ensure that we are on track?	What do we need to do less of or stop doing?
Who needs to participate in this stage?			What will we do differently if this is not what we expect to see?	

The taskforce will investigate 3 types of offensive behaviour identified as consistently occurring in schools: adult-on-adult bullying; threats of violence; and actual violence. Data analysis will identify who is perpetrating or receiving occupational violence and may include, but not limited to, student to teacher, parent to teacher, teacher to student, student to student, visitor/volunteer to teacher, parent to administrative staff and teacher to school leader.

More specifically, the taskforce will:

- examine available data and literature

- undertake a gap analysis

- source additional data where required

- analyse all data and prepare recommendations

- research practices in other sectors such as health where solutions to OVA in hospitals are identified

- identify workable solutions in the education context, with a focus on the use of existing resources wherever possible, and new and enhanced opportunities with stakeholders.

The taskforce will be time limited using the following timeline:

- August 2021 – stand up

- November 2021 – taskforce to deliver findings and recommended solutions.

12.1.3 Membership

The taskforce will comprise of up to 7 members, with participation invited from the following:

- Australian Education Union – Northern Territory branch

- Northern Territory Council of Government School Organisations

- Northern Territory Principals' Association

- Professional Teachers' Association of the Northern Territory

- Teacher Registration Board of the NT

- Executive Director, Early Years and Education Services – Department of Education

- Senior Director Executive Projects, Agency Operations – Department of Education

The taskforce will be provided access to a range of departmental experts in an advisory capacity. Department of Education advisers could include:

- Work Health and Safety

- Teach NT (with responsibility for implementing the principal and teacher wellbeing strategies)

- Youth Engagement and Partnerships (with responsibility for Parent Charter)

- a data specialist

- Positive Learning Centre

- special schools

- Australian Special Education Principals Association, via NTPA

- Student Wellbeing and Inclusion (student wellbeing and positive behaviour strategies)

- Quality School Systems and Support

- School Improvement and Leadership

- Communications and Media

- Aboriginal Workforce Development.

The taskforce will be co-chaired by the Senior Director Executive Projects, Agency Operations (responsible for health and safety as well as interagency partnerships with the Department of Corporate and Digital Development – workforce relations and development) and the Executive

Director Early Years and Education Services (responsible for professional expertise provided to schools in relation to behaviour and wellbeing).

12.1.4 Meetings

The taskforce to meet fortnightly either face to face or through video conferencing using either Microsoft Teams or Skype. Note that the Zoom platform is not recommended for use by the NT Government.

Quorum: A minimum of 55% of members present in person or by proxy establishes a quorum. A quorum must be in place to pass any decision. The chair or deputy chair must be present for each meeting. If a quorum is not established at the start of a meeting, the meeting should not proceed but should be reconvened at another time.

12.1.5 Administration

Secretariat support will be provided by Early Years and Education Services, which will ensure:

- the agenda has clear structure and purpose

- papers are circulated as soon as possible prior to meetings

- actions and decisions are circulated as soon as possible following meetings.

12.1.6 Conflicts of interest

Members are required to declare any real or perceived conflicts of interest that may apply to specific matters on the meeting agenda. Details of any conflicts of interest declared by the co-chairs and other members and actions taken, will be appropriately recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

12.1.7 Monitoring and reporting

The taskforce will be accountable, and provide advice/recommendations, to the Department of Education Safety Management Committee.

12.1.8 Review

The terms of reference should be reviewed as often as necessary to ensure they remain relevant.

The taskforce will disband on completion of the project.

Attachment 2: Taskforce Membership

- Tony Considine, Acting Executive Director, Early Years and Education Services, Department of Education (co-chair)

- Leanne Cull, Senior Director, Executive Projects, Agency Operations, Department of Education (co-chair)

- Lorraine Hodgson, President, Teacher Registration Board of the Northern Territory

- Maree Garrigan, Director, Teacher Registration Board of the Northern Territory

- Robyn Thorpe, President, Northern Territory Principals' Association

- Jo Poulter, Executive Officer, Northern Territory Principals' Association

- Jarvis Ryan, President, Australian Education Union Northern Territory branch

- Adam Lampe, Secretary, Australian Education Union Northern Territory branch

- Mick McCarthy, Special Projects Officer, Australian Education Union Northern Territory branch

- Michelle Parker, Executive Officer, Northern Territory Council of Government School Organisations

- Ambrose Nicholls-Skene, President, Professional Teachers' Association of the Northern Territory

- Trish Noy, Principal, Mutitjulu School

Attachment 3: Definition of a 'notifiable incident'

The department is under a legal duty to advise regulators (NT Worksafe) of 'notifiable incidents'.

A notifiable incident means:

(a) the death of a person; or

(b) a serious injury or illness of a person; or

(c) a dangerous incident.

A serious injury or illness of a person means an injury or illness requiring the person to have:

(a) immediate treatment as an in-patient in a hospital;

(b) immediate treatment for:

    i. the amputation of any part of his or her body; or

    ii. a serious head injury; a serious eye injury; or

    iii. a serious burn; or

    iv. the separation of his or her skin from an underlying tissue; or

    v. a spinal injury; or

    vi. the loss of a bodily function; or

    vii. serious lacerations

(c) medical treatment within 48 hours of exposure to a substance.

A dangerous incident means an incident in relation to a workplace that exposes a worker or any other person to a serious risk to the person's health or safety emanating from an immediate or imminent exposure to:

(a) an uncontrolled escape, spillage or leakage of a substance; or

(b) an uncontrolled implosion, explosion or fire; or

(c) an uncontrolled escape of gas or steam; or

(d) an uncontrolled escape of a pressurised substance; or

(e) electric shock; or

(f) the fall or release from a height of any plant, substance or thing; or

(g) the collapse, overturning, failure or malfunction of, or damage to, any plant that is required to be authorised for use in accordance with the WHS Regulations; or

(h) the collapse or partial collapse of a structure; or

(i) the collapse or failure of an excavation or of any shoring supporting an excavation; or

(j) the inrush of water, mud or gas in workings, in an underground excavation or tunnel; or

(k) the interruption of the main system of ventilation in an underground excavation or tunnel; or

(l) any other event prescribed by the WHS Regulations;

(m) but does not include an incident of a prescribed kind.

Attachment 4: Documents of the Safety Management System

Safety management

- Policy
- Policy statement
- Department's requirements for safety management
- Workplace Safety Management Planning tool
- Safety management chart
- Safety management poster
- Safety Management Checklist for Principals terms 1 and 3
- Safety Management Checklist for Corporate Managers Quarters 1 and 3

Safety management system – responsibilities, reporting, review

- Workers
- Legislative compliance register
- Officers
- Document and data control review spreadsheet
- Workplace Requirements for Responsibilities, Resources, Reporting and Review

Safety management system – consultation, communication, issue resolution

- NT Worksafe consultation and communication information
- NT Worksafe dispute resolution
- Safety issue resolution flowchart
- Safety issue notification form
- Work group and Health and Safety Representative
- Workplace Requirements for Consultation, Communication and Issue Resolution

Safety management system – safety committees

- NT Worksafe Worker representation and participation guide
- Regional safety committees
- Workplace requirements for safety committees
- Safety committees

Safety management system – induction and training

- Contractors
- WHS online training modules
- Workplace Requirements for Safety Induction and Training
- Induction and training matrix
- Induction and training matrix worksheet
- Induction and training register
- Safety induction checklist for workers
- Workplace sign in-sign out register
- Induction presentations

Safety management system – first aid

- First Aid
- Workplace Requirements for First Aid
- NT Worksafe First aid in the workplace – Code of Practice
- First aid treatment register
- Workplace first aid resource assessment template
- First aid and floor warden – poster
- First aid and floor warden – poster with pictures

Safety management system – emergency management

- Emergency Management Framework
- Wokplace Requirements for Emergency Planning in Corporate Offices
- Personal emergency evacuation plan
- Evacuation observers checklist
- Bomb threat
- WIP (Warden Intercom Point) Cards
- What to do if an earthquake strikes

Safety management system – incident reporting

- Incident Reporting to NT Work Worksafe
- Incident Reporting to Quality Education and Care NT
- Workplace Requirements for Incident Reporting
- Online incident report form
- Recording and reporting student injuries

Safety management system – hazard management

- Infection control
- Science
- Protective clothing
- Workplace Requirements for Hazard Management
- Electrical safety
- Confined spaces
- Remote or isolated work
- Hazardous chemicals
- Hazardous manual tasks
- Slips, trips and falls
- Noise
- Hazard management and risk assessment
- Hazard inspection checklists
- Plant and equipment
- Asbestos fact sheet
- Fact sheets
- Maintenance officers Job Safety Analysis

Thick Act Be SAFE

- Poster series

Useful Information

- Legislation
- Entry Permit Holders (Unions)
- Safety Management Definitions

Attachment 5: The Incident Report Form

Department of Education
Work Health and Safety
Incident Report Form

Northern Territory Government

PART A - INCIDENT DETAILS

1. Details of person involved

Person Type | Select... ˅

2. Details of incident

Date of Incident:

Time Of Incident: *(eg 22:00)*

Where did the Incident Occur:

e.g. Playground, Classroom

Workplace: School/Corporate:
- ○ School
- ○ Corporate
- ○ Other location

Description of Incident:

(Please provide detailed description of incident, with consideration given to the activity being undertaken, what happened and why)

3. Did an injury, illness, trauma occur

Did an injury occur
- ○ Yes
- ○ No

4. Witness details (if applicable)

Name of Witness	Contact Phone Number	Person Type
		Select... ˅

▣ Add more witnesses

5. Supporting Attachments

📎 Click here to attach a file

6. Submit

Please select one option: | Select... ˅

*Submit to the workplace delegate responsible for reviewing the incident and managing further action if required.*
(The workplace delegate is the Principal/Director/General Manager or a senior staff member nominated by the Principal/Director/General Manager)

Workplace delegate:

Submitted By:

Date Submitted:

Save as draft	Submit	Close

Attachment 6a: The Employee Wellbeing Framework
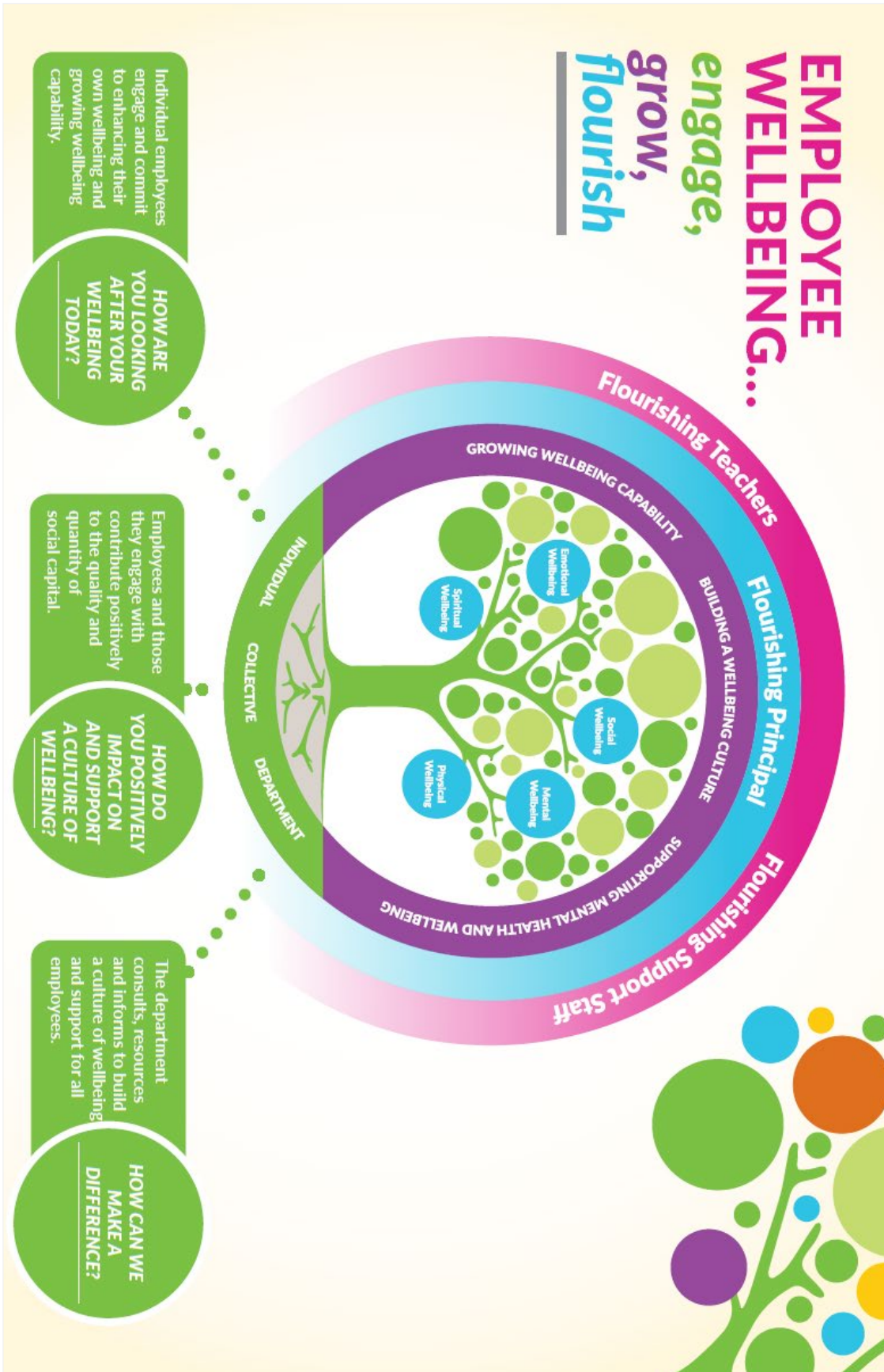
Attachment 6b: Teacher Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2022

EDUCATION NT
ENGAGE GROW ACHIEVE

TEACHER WELLBEING STRATEGY 2019-22

OUR PRIORITY AREAS AND SUCCESS INDICATORS

1 SUPPORT FOR SUCCESS
Success indicator: our teachers are supported across the profession and connected with their colleagues.

2 OPTIMISE TIME TO TEACH
Success indicator: our teachers are enabled to focus on their primary task of teaching and learning.

3 PROMOTE A SAFE AND RESPECTFUL WORKPLACE
Success indicator: our school communities are places where respectful relationships thrive.

www.education.nt.gov.au

1 SUPPORT FOR SUCCESS

PRIORITY ACTIONS

1.1 DEVELOP AN EARLY CAREER TEACHER PROGRAM
We will develop and implement a comprehensive and formalised early career teacher program (1-5 years) that includes induction, mentoring and coaching practices.

Additional key beneficiaries:

1.2 PROVIDE WELLBEING CONVERSATIONS FOR TEACHERS
We will trial and measure the impact of providing wellbeing conversations for classroom teachers. These reflective and restorative conversations will focus on wellbeing, emotional needs and goal setting; and, will be conducted by skilled professionals.

Additional key beneficiaries:

1.3 CONNECT FOR GROWTH
We will research and trial a range of ways for connecting teachers across the NT including face-to-face and technology based options to create communities of like-minded educators.

Additional key beneficiaries:

2 OPTIMISE TIME TO TEACH

PRIORITY ACTIONS

2.1 REDUCE NON-TEACHING AND LEARNING WORKLOAD
We will consult directly with teachers to identify key tasks impacting on their ability to focus on teaching and learning and act to streamline, change or remove red tape. This work will be done in consultation with school practitioners to ensure workload implications are included in any changes to process.

Additional key beneficiaries:

2.2 IMPROVE REPORTING TO PARENTS
We will upgrade the current reporting to parents system to improve the experience for teachers by reducing administration time.

Additional key beneficiaries:

2.3 REPLACE THE REPORTING TO PARENTS SYSTEM
We will explore future enterprise solutions to replace the current system for reporting to parents, encompassing other student administration functions.

Additional key beneficiaries:

3 PROMOTE A SAFE AND RESPECTFUL WORKPLACE

PRIORITY ACTIONS

3.1 SUPPORT A POSITIVE SCHOOL COMMUNITY
We will develop and introduce a system-wide Code of conduct for parents, carers and school visitors, backed by department policy to build a culture underpinned by respectful behaviours.

Additional key beneficiaries:

3.2 STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS
We will explore options to build and strengthen relationships between teachers and students with a focus on providing supports for student behaviours in schools.

Additional key beneficiaries:

3.3 ENGAGE THE NATION
We will take the NT teacher voice forward to engage with other education jurisdictions to seek partnership in a nation-wide respectful relationships community education campaign that supports positive and respectful behaviours towards teachers.

Additional key beneficiaries:

LEGEND:

SHORT-TERM (LESS THAN 12 MONTHS)
MID-TERM (BETWEEN 12 AND 24 MONTHS)
LONG-TERM (LONGER THAN 24 MONTHS)

SCHOOL LEADERS
STUDENTS
COLLEAGUES
SCHOOL COMMUNITY
BROADER COMMUNITY
TEACHING PROFESSION

NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT

Attachment 6c: Principal and School Leader Wellbeing Framework

Attachment 6d: School Leader Wellbeing Action Plan 2021-2025

Education NT

SCHOOL LEADER WELLBEING ACTION PLAN 2021–25

OUR PRIORITY AREAS AND SUCCESS INDICATORS

1 OPTIMISE TIME FOR INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP
Success indicator: our leaders have more time to focus on their core business of school leadership.

2 PROMOTE A CULTURE OF CARE, WELLBEING AND SAFETY
Success indicator: our schools are respectful and safe places.

3 ENHANCE PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT
Success indicator: Our school leaders are supported, connected and can flourish in their role.

School leaders refers to principal and assistant principal classifications.
Principal refers only to principal classifications.

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1 OPTIMISE TIME FOR INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

PRIORITY ACTIONS

1.1 DEVELOP A POLICY AND ADVISORY LIBRARY
We will develop a policy and advisory library to enhance the accessibility and searchability of policies to optimise school leader time.
Additional key beneficiaries:

1.2 MAXIMISE SCHOOL LEADER TIME
We will keep school leader wellbeing and workload as key considerations in planning and implementing our work across the system. We will act to protect and prioritise time for instructional leadership and school improvement.
Additional key beneficiaries:

1.3 INVESTIGATE PRINCIPAL WORKLOAD
We will investigate principal workload to identify additional burden of compliance and administrative tasks that impact principals' ability to focus on school improvement and instructional leadership. We will make recommendations for action.
Additional key beneficiaries:

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2 PROMOTE A CULTURE OF CARE, WELLBEING AND SAFETY

PRIORITY ACTIONS

2.1 BUILD STRONG EDUCATION COMMUNITIES
We will create a territory-wide community education campaign to build strong education communities where all members are respected, valued and safe. We will do this by promoting expected, positive and safe behaviours in schools.
Additional key beneficiaries:

2.2 ENHANCE SKILLS AND CAPABILITY
We will offer targeted professional learning for school leaders to equip them with skills to respond to conflicts and challenges in the workplace and protect their own wellbeing.
Additional key beneficiaries:

2.3 FORM A TASKFORCE TO INVESTIGATE OCCUPATIONAL VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSION
We will establish a taskforce to investigate occupational violence and aggression in territory schools to understand, reduce and prevent their occurrence.
Additional key beneficiaries:

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3 ENHANCE PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

PRIORITY ACTIONS

3.1 ENRICH MENTORING AND PEER SUPPORT
We will strengthen the networks of principals by trialling targeted mentoring and peer support initiatives.
Additional key beneficiaries:

3.2 PROVIDE WELLBEING CONVERSATIONS
We will trial and measure the impact of providing proactive and preventative wellbeing conversations for school leaders. These reflective conversations will focus on the organisational, emotional and educational aspects of the school leader role.
Additional key beneficiaries:

3.3 STRENGTHEN CRITICAL INCIDENT SUPPORT
We will review our critical incident support processes and make recommendations to strengthen system-wide support for principals.
Additional key beneficiaries:

LEGEND:

SHORT-TERM (LESS THAN 12 MONTHS)

MID-TERM (BETWEEN 12 AND 24 MONTHS)

LONG-TERM (MORE THAN 24 MONTHS)

TEACHERS
STUDENTS
COLLEAGUES
SCHOOL COMMUNITY
BROADER COMMUNITY
THE PROFESSION

ntpa NORTHERN TERRITORY PRINCIPALS' ASSOCIATION

EDUCATION NT ENGAGE GROW ACHIEVE

NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT

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