

DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION



## **EVERY DAY COUNTS**

**NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT  
SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND ENGAGEMENT  
STRATEGY 2016 - 2018**





## Vision

All young people in the Northern Territory of compulsory school-age attend school, or an approved learning program, every day to improve their education, employment and health outcomes.

## Principles

The initiatives and approaches implemented under *Every Day Counts* are based on five principles:

1. Good school-attendance habits commence in the early years.
2. Children and young people's educational achievements and development are enhanced by parent and carer engagement, and awareness of the importance of school attendance and engagement.
3. Students stay engaged in their education when unauthorised absences are reduced.
4. Supporting disadvantaged children and young people to improve their school attendance and engagement is critical to enhancing their development and improving their educational and life outcomes.
5. Educational outcomes for students are improved when the broader community is engaged to provide coordinated and effective support for school attendance.

## Objectives

The Northern Territory Government delivers a range of services for children, young people and their families to maximise safety, health and wellbeing, and educational outcomes to enable young people to become confident and capable global learners.

Collaboration and alignment of services across government and within the community aims to address barriers to attending school and implement evidence-based strategies to improve school attendance and engagement of students through:

- responding to an evidence base of what negatively affects school attendance and engagement and what works to improve it.
- ensuring initiatives focused on improving school attendance and engagement are tailored to meet the needs of individual students and/or communities.
- aligning and targeting current efforts across all levels of government and in the broader community.
- establishing clear roles and responsibilities with students, families, carers, communities, schools and government agencies to address issues influencing school attendance and engagement.
- improving data sharing across all levels of government and the non-government school sector.



## Factors that influence school attendance

Getting the right start in life is essential for children's later success. It shapes a child's ability to thrive at school, stay healthy and socially connected, and contribute to society socially and economically.

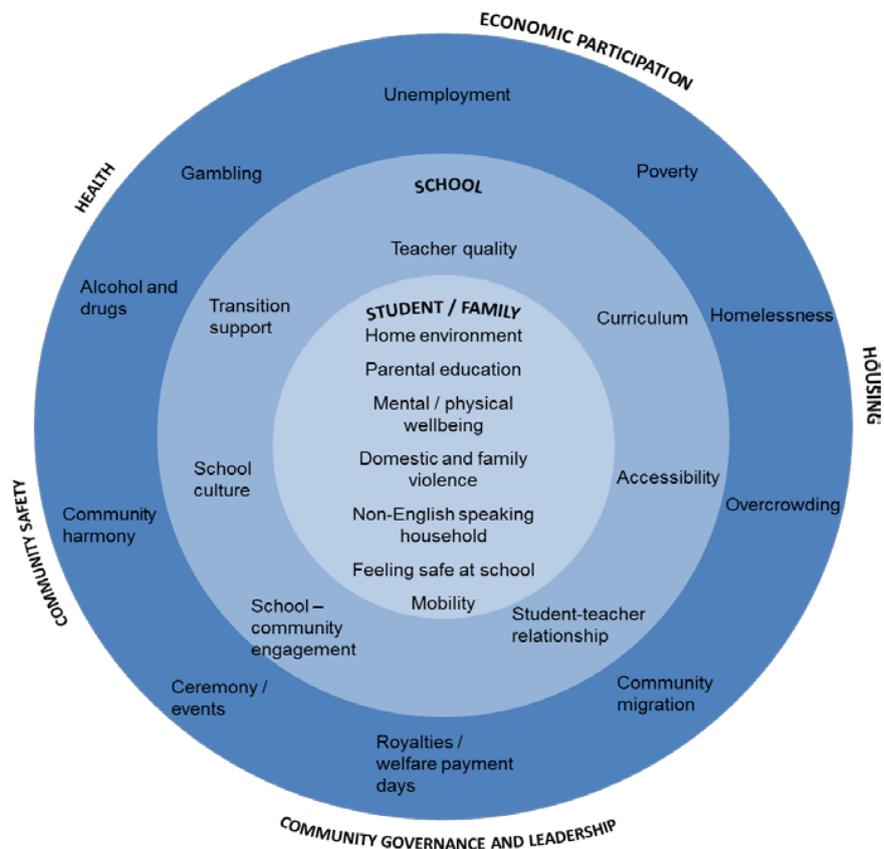
In the early years, it is critical to establish solid patterns of attendance in early childhood education, in order to establish a lifelong engagement within education.

A range of social determinants can affect a child's experiences in their early years of education including:

- parental or carer health and wellbeing;
- home and living environment; and
- parental employment.

The interconnected nature of education, and experiences and factors at school and 'beyond the school fence' that can influence school attendance and learning are illustrated in Figure 6.

**Figure 6: Factors influencing school attendance and engagement**





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### **School**

Student learning is influenced by factors such as:

- teacher quality;
- curriculum;
- accessibility of education;
- student-teacher relationship;
- school community engagement;
- school culture; and
- transition support.

### **Parental education**

Students whose parents or carers have lower levels of education and occupational status typically have lower levels of school attendance and engagement.

### **Health and wellbeing**

A child's general health and wellbeing is important in supporting their participation at school.

A sense of safety in the home is a fundamental precursor to a child's ability to attend, learn and successfully engage at school.

Receiving an education, reduces the likelihood of being a smoker, engaging in risky/high-risk alcohol consumption and crime.

### **Parent, carer and family engagement**

When parents, carers and families are active and positive participants in a child's learning, and hold high expectations for that child, the child is more likely to attend and perform better at school.

### **Domestic and family violence**

Domestic and family violence can negatively affect a child's neurological pathways by significantly delaying cognitive development and reducing the capacity to engage in positive learning

The likelihood of a parent or carer being able to support a child to attend school is greatly reduced if they are a victim of domestic and family violence. A parent or carer who is a perpetrator of domestic and family violence is also less likely to be able to support a child to attend school, complete homework or nurture a high level of self-esteem.

### **Housing**

If a child's home environment is unsafe, overcrowded or unstable it can impact on their education.

Overcrowding in particular, affects the ability of children to study and have sufficient sleep, both of which are vital for attending and being engaged in school. Improved levels of home ownership and reduced levels of overcrowding are strongly associated with higher levels of education.

A child's school performance can also be affected by mobility and/or frequent household relocation. This can cause disruption to routine including attending school and access to social networks that support a child's education



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**Non-English-speaking households**

Communication barriers can negatively affect student attendance and engagement.

Establishing and maintaining strong relationships with a child's family positively impacts on their attendance, engagement and outcomes.

**Employment**

Parent and carer occupational status is strongly associated with school attendance and student educational achievement.

If a parent or carer holds full time employment, their child is more likely to attend school every

## Northern Territory context

Northern Territory student characteristics differ vastly from the national average:

- approximately 23 per cent of the Northern Territory's population is aged 15 years or under, compared to approximately 20 per cent nationally<sup>1</sup>,
- About 26.8 per cent of the NT population are Indigenous<sup>4</sup> compared to 2.5 per cent of the Australian population<sup>5</sup>
- approximately 26.7 per cent of Northern Territory Government school students have a language background other than English<sup>4</sup>, compared to approximately 18.2 per cent nationally<sup>5</sup>.

In the Northern Territory:

- 73 per cent of government schools are located in remote and very remote areas with 46.3 per cent of our students enrolled at these schools.<sup>2</sup>;
- over 44 per cent of Northern Territory Government school students are Indigenous<sup>3</sup>;

Source:

1 ABS 3101.0 - Australian Demographic Statistics, Sep 2016 (Table 4 and Table 57) June 2016

2 Department of Education Annual Report, 2015-16

3 Department of Education Enrolment and Attendance data, Term 1 2017

4 ABS 2011 Census (Basic Community Profile), NT

5 ABS 2011 Census (Basic Community Profile), Australia

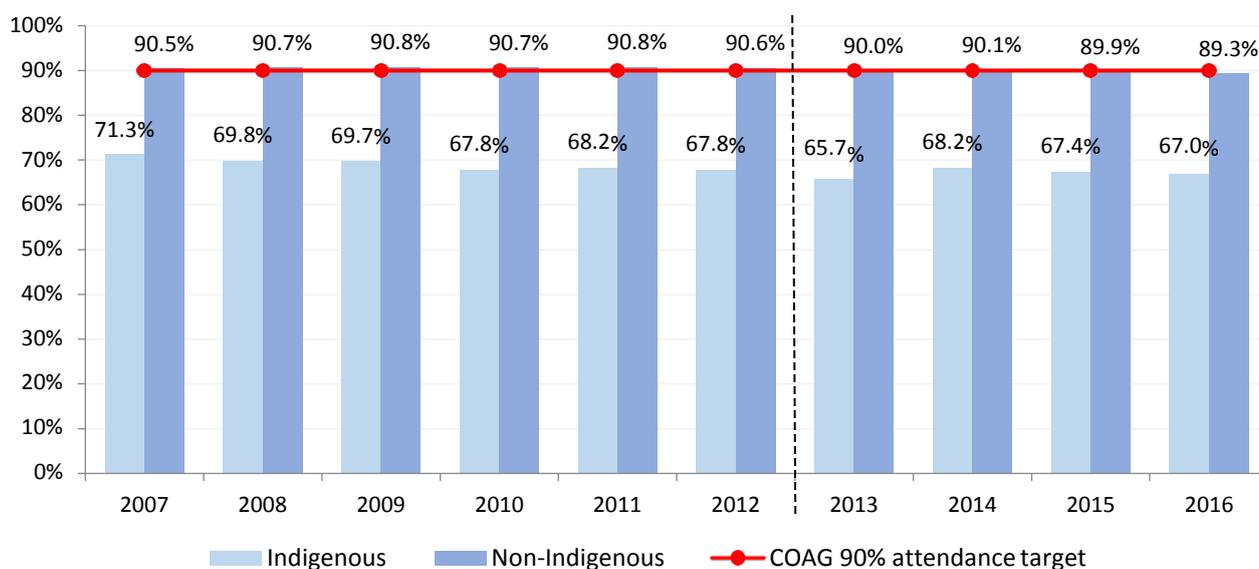
Improving school attendance is a national priority, particularly for Indigenous students.

In mid-2014, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to a target of 90 per cent attendance for Indigenous students in order to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance within five years.

This is an ambitious target which the Northern Territory Government aims to achieve through effective implementation of a range of initiatives.

School attendance is inextricably linked to a number of priorities for the Northern Territory Government. These include improving the social and economic circumstances of people in the Northern Territory, particularly in remote communities, and building a strong society with a robust economy and prosperous outlook. Providing all Northern Territory children with a quality education is a priority in achieving these goals.

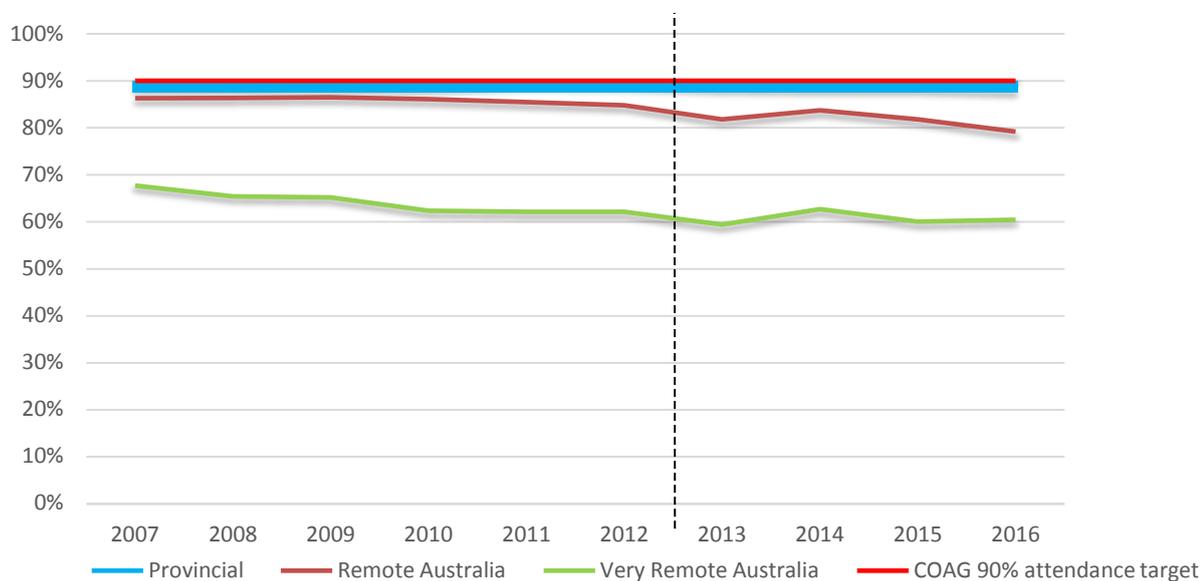
**Figure 1(a): Student attendance rate by Indigenous status (Northern Territory Government schools) 2007–2016**



Source: Department of Education Enrolment and Attendance data.

Note: In 2013 enhancements were introduced to the collection and processing of enrolment and attendance data which resulted in a break in series to previous years. 2013, 2014 and 2015 enrolment and attendance data cannot be compared to previous year's data.

**Figure 1(b): Student attendance rate geolocation (Northern Territory Government schools) 2007–2016**



Source: Department of Education Enrolment and Attendance dataset.

Note: In 2013 enhancements were introduced to the collection and processing of enrolment and attendance data which resulted in a break in series to previous years. 2013, 2014 and 2015 enrolment and attendance data cannot be compared to previous year's data.

In response to the findings and recommendations of the review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory, the Department of Education is implementing the *A Share in the Future – Indigenous Education Strategy 2015–2024*, supported by the Australian Government through the Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment National Partnership.

The Indigenous Education Strategy aims to ensure that all Indigenous students in the Northern Territory are successful and confident in their education journey. It includes a number of specific actions that will support the achievement of outcomes defined in *Every Day Counts*.

*Every Day Counts* complements the Indigenous Education Strategy by focusing whole-of-government effort on addressing issues relating to school attendance for all children and young people in the Northern Territory. This is particularly important given the significant effort needed to achieve the COAG 90 per cent school attendance target for Indigenous students.

Some progress is being made through joint Northern Territory and Australian Government initiatives, such as the School Enrolment and Attendance Measure and the Remote School Attendance Strategy. However, to achieve the COAG target, there needs to be a greater focus on lifting the school attendance and engagement of students.

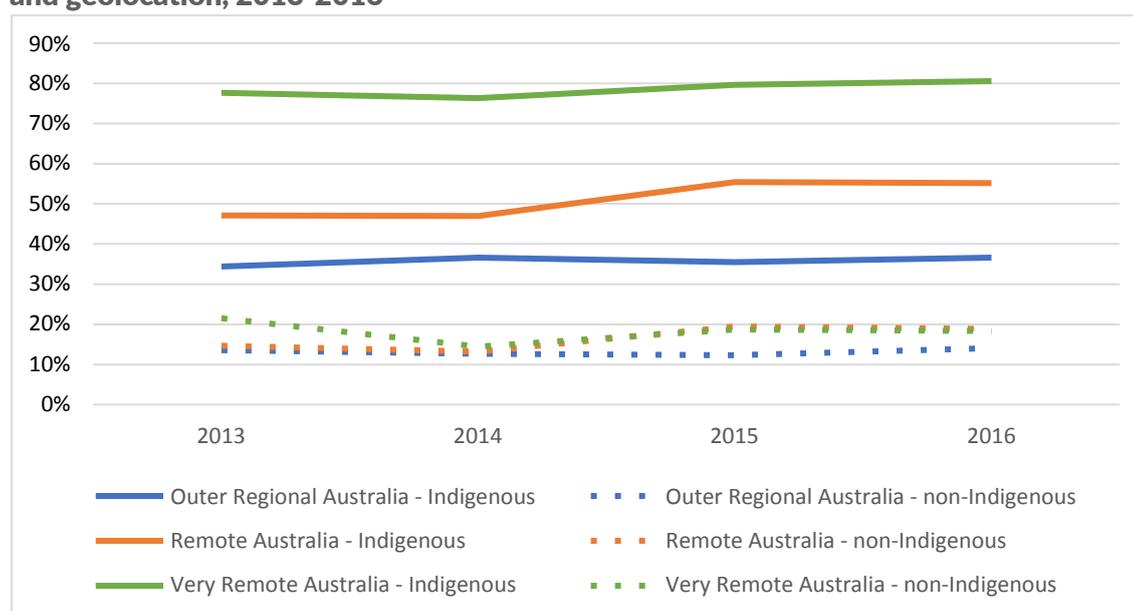
Many factors affect student attendance, requiring Northern Territory Government agencies, businesses, communities, families and carers to work collectively to achieve and sustain significant improvement in student attendance.

## School attendance in the Northern Territory

Despite significant efforts by both the Northern Territory and Australian Governments, school attendance in the Northern Territory, particularly for remote and very remote students, remains critically low.

The review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory found that despite the establishment of major policy frameworks and the development of comprehensive strategies, attendance continues to decline in the Northern Territory. This trend is particularly evident among remote Indigenous students (Figure 2).

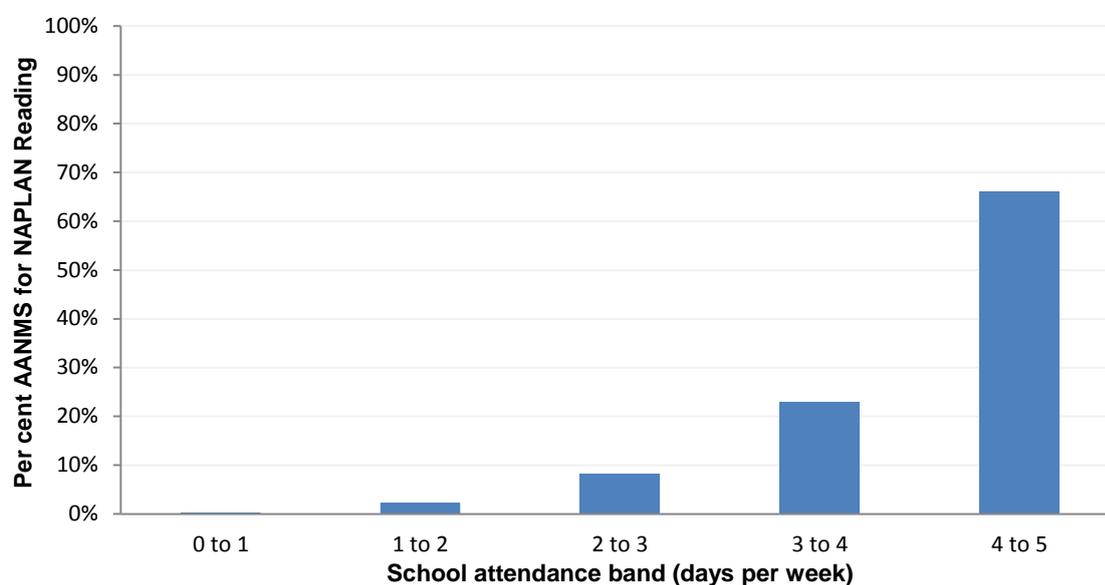
**Figure 2: Proportion of students attending school less than four days a week by Indigenous status and geolocation, 2013-2016**



Source: Department of Education Student Activity dataset.

The evidence shows that few Indigenous students who attend school less than three days per week achieve National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) national minimum standard (NMS) in reading (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Proportion of Indigenous students achieving at or above National Minimum Standard for NAPLAN (reading), by school attendance band 2016**



Source: Department of Education NAPLAN School Summary dataset and Student Activity dataset.

When attendance is above three days per week, student achievement improves substantially. Further student improvement is evident when a child attends and is engaged in school four or more days per week.

Data shows that when Northern Territory Indigenous students attend over four days per week, that over 60% of these students achieve or exceed national minimum standard across NAPLAN testing.

Findings of the review of Indigenous education highlight the consequences of poor school attendance and a lack of engagement in early childhood education for Northern Territory children, among other factors – particularly in remote and very remote Indigenous communities:

- over 37 per cent of Northern Territory children are developmentally vulnerable on one or more Australian Early Development Census domains, compared with 22 per cent nationally<sup>2</sup>;
- by Year 3, Indigenous students who attend very remote schools in the Northern Territory are two years of schooling behind Indigenous students in very remote schools in the rest of Australia<sup>3</sup>; and
- by Year 9, the gap in writing is about five years of schooling<sup>3</sup> and only about 10 per cent of Year 9 students in very remote schools achieve or exceed national minimum standard in NAPLAN writing<sup>4</sup>.

Source:

<sup>2</sup> AEDC 2015

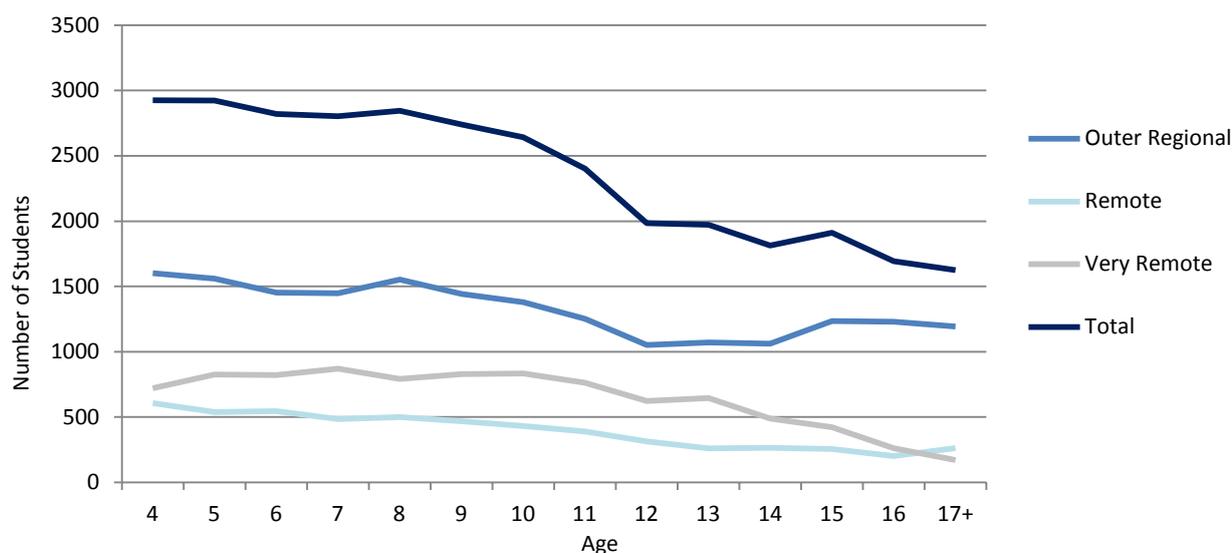
<sup>3</sup> *Review of Indigenous Education in the NT*

<sup>4</sup> *NAPLAN National Report, 2016*

Research shows that student enrolment declines dramatically in the middle years, particularly Indigenous student enrolments in very remote areas.

Nationally, student school attendance follows a similar pattern, with average annual school attendance declining between Years 7 and 9, with a more significant decline seen in very remote areas.

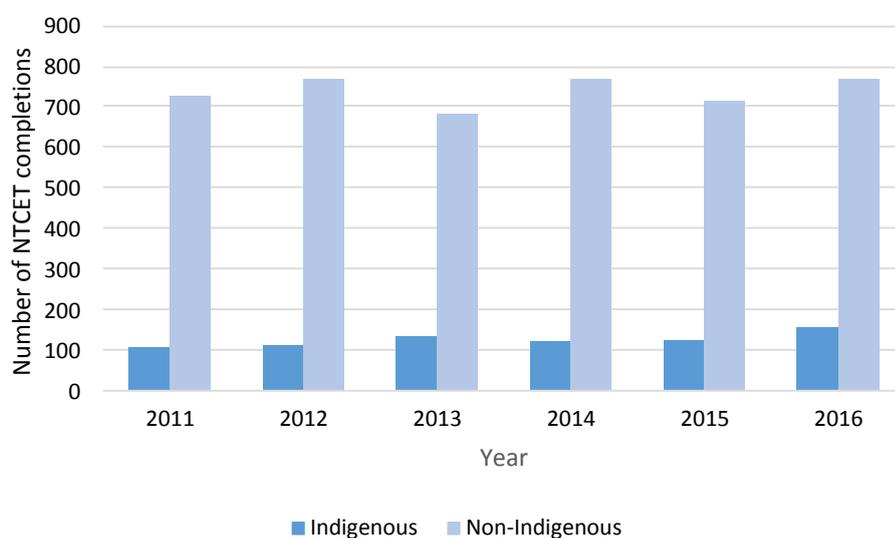
**Figure 4: Northern Territory government school student enrolments by age and location 2016**



Source: Department of Education, Age Grade Census 2016.

Declining middle-years enrolments affect Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training (NTCET) completions over time (Figure 5). Since the introduction of the NTCET in 2011, there has been an increase in the numbers of Indigenous students in NT Government schools completing their NTCET; from 106 in 2011 to 155 in 2015.

**Figure 5: Number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous student NTCET completions**



Source: Schools Online.

## Priority areas

Students who attend school regularly and are engaged in their learning are more likely to achieve good educational outcomes, and increase their wellbeing, career and life options.

To achieve significant and sustained improvement in school attendance and engagement, the *Every Day Counts* strategy will focus on three priority areas:

### Safe and Healthy Communities

- Strong communities that support young people to attend school every day

### Strong Families

- Families and carers who support the early learning and development of their children and ensure they attend school every day

### Quality Early Childhood Services and Schools

- Engaging learning environments that create opportunities for all young people to thrive

The *Every Day Counts* Strategy will:

- support children to engage in schooling by strengthening partnerships with families and carers,
- provide services that reduce the barriers of attending school
- implement early intervention when an attendance issue is first identified;
- prevent prolonged disengagement from education to ensure students have continuity in their education; and
- provide evidence-based and tailored approaches to engage and re-engage students in their education, and mitigate risks of further disengagement.

## Safe and Healthy Communities

Communities play an important role in supporting the development and wellbeing of children.

To improve the education outcomes of all young Territorians, communities need to clearly understand the benefits of children attending school every day.

### Children are supported to attend school every day

- promote the benefits of education
- raise awareness within the community that it is a requirement for all children of compulsory school age to attend school
- encourage community and cultural events outside of school hours to limit the impact on school attendance
- work in partnership with the business sector to limit services for school aged children during school hours
- provide transport services that support students to attend school every day
- ensure important information is available in a parent and child's language of proficiency

### Good health and wellbeing supports engagement in learning

- promote and support the health and wellbeing of all Territorians from birth to adulthood through a range of programs and specialist services
- provide and promote annual health assessments for all school-aged children in remote and very remote schools to support their readiness for learning

### Safe communities build positive behaviours and an environment for learning

- develop and implement community programs support a collaborative approach to improving student attendance
- provide specialist support services and programs for victims of domestic and family violence
- foster healthy relationships and support positive and effective parenting
- provide specialist individual and group psychological services for detainees and other intervention services

### Housing options support the wellbeing and participation of students at school

- support eligible families with very young and school-aged children to access appropriate housing
- enhance housing programs and services to support families to live in safe, secure and healthy homes
- deliver housing and housing upgrades in remote communities

## Strong Families

Families play a critical role in nurturing a child's learning. Children are more likely to succeed with their learning when parental aspirations and expectations encourage them to achieve.

Engaging and helping families to nurture a habit of regular attendance will assist in improving student outcomes.

This strategy aims to work with students, parents and the community to support student engagement by reducing barriers that may contribute to attendance or behavioural issues.

Concurrently, it will support student engagement and the delivery of quality programs to provide a solid platform for inclusive educational provision.

It will also provide quality and integrated services for families to enable more parents and carers to participate in the workforce.

**Quality service system supports children from birth to eight years, and their families and carers**

- deliver a range of integrated services and programs that prioritise the needs of families and assist with the healthy development and early learning of young children prior to starting school
- expand the delivery of integrated child and family services across the Northern Territory that support transition to school and strengthen parent and carer engagement in learning
- work with young parents to encourage and support completion of their own secondary education

**Healthy thriving children and resilient families nurture a habit of regular school attendance and children attend school every day**

- promote the benefits of schooling and ensure families understand the requirement for all children of compulsory school age to attend school
- establish transition pathways and parent/carer engagement in early childhood education and care programs to ensure children are well prepared to commence schooling
- develop and implement procedures in all schools for preventing, monitoring and addressing non-attendance
- work collaboratively with families to ensure all children of compulsory school age attend school or an approved learning program
- provide a case management approach to support children who do not attend school on a regular basis

## Quality Early Childhood Services and Schools

Quality learning environments are:

- engaging, inclusive and safe;
- accommodate different learning needs; and
- recognise and respond to the diverse needs of students

This strategy will support the behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement of students and provide quality early childhood, education and training opportunities and pathways.

It will work with parents and carers, the community, the Australian Government and other organisations to foster student learning by tailoring approaches to engage and re-engage students in their education and mitigate the risk of disengagement.

It will also use our formal enforcement powers, as appropriate, to ensure students re-engage in education and training.

### Children and young people go to school every day

- establish local strategies for preventing, monitoring and addressing non-attendance
- provide professional learning and resources to support school staff implement effective strategies for engaging with families, carers and the community regarding attendance
- conduct coordinated operations across government such as anti-truancy operations.
- where collaborative efforts and strategies to engage students in school have been unsuccessful, take formal action within legislative provisions for non-compliance

### Children, young people and their families and carers are engaged in learning

- expand the delivery of the Families as First Teachers program, fostering positive relationships with children and their families so that they are connected to learning
- deliver quality evidence based learning programs that are meaningful and differentiated, and respond to the diverse needs of students of different ages, developmental stages, cultures and abilities to enable students to be successful learners
- work in partnership with organisations to deliver flexible education, programs and support services for students not engaged in full time school or students at risk of low attendance
- identify and provide opportunities for positive role models to engage with and influence students, mentoring and development opportunities such as leadership programs
- deliver alternative education programs

**Young people and their families and carers are supported to transition between the different stages of schooling and into new schooling options**

- implement effective strategies to support students transitioning between different learning levels, schools and training and pathways programs, including from remote to urban or regional secondary schools
- work with families and carers to ensure students are prepared for, and enrolled in, appropriate secondary schooling options, and provide transition support to students attending secondary schooling away from home
- establish boarding facilities to support access to quality education for students from remote locations

**Positive student behaviour and wellbeing is supported**

- establish and implement initiatives for early identification of and supportive intervention for students at risk of non-attendance.
- implement a school wide positive behaviour framework to provide a consistent approach to behaviour and wellbeing in schools that provides social and emotional learning curriculum and resilience program materials, and school-wide monitoring and data collection system

## Outcomes

The *Every Day Counts* strategy aims to achieve outcomes in six areas. Progress in these areas will be measured and monitored against performance indicators and targets.

### Early Years

- increased provision of integrated programs and services to support early childhood learning and development; enhance parenting skills and improve health, hygiene, nutrition; and family function
- expansion of programs that support from birth to school age that establishes patterns of attendance and provides a positive transition to school
- increased enrolment and attendance of children attending preschool
- decrease in the proportion of remote and very remote Indigenous children who are developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains of the Australian Early Development Census

### School Attendance

- increased attendance of all children of compulsory school age either attending school or an approved learning program
- increased school attendance and engagement of remote Indigenous students, particularly secondary school students
- decrease number of truancy notices issued
- decrease number of court cases relating to non-attendance

### School Engagement

- increase in the number of students completing the Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training, vocational education and training
- increase in the number of students completing alternative education programs
- increase in number of students completing Year 10

### Transitions

- increasing support to transition between the different stages of schooling
- increase the provision of education choices for students who move from their home communities

### Data

- increased data integrity and quality
- decrease in the number of dual enrolments
- increased sharing of relevant data between government agencies to inform policy and practice

## Monitoring performance

Activity under *Every Day Counts* will be monitored on a six-monthly basis, including against activity milestones, individual measure of performance targets and overarching strategy performance measures.

Performance targets	2014 baseline	2018 target	
Number of operational Families as First Teachers program sites	11	37	
Proportion of children enrolled in preschool the year before full time schooling for 600 hours per year			
Non-Indigenous students	94%	95%	
Indigenous students	97%	97%	
Rate of Indigenous students attending 90 per cent	66.6%	90%	
Proportion of students attending school four days or more per week			
Non-Indigenous students	88%	91%	
Indigenous students	37%	57%	
Indigenous students in remote and very remote schools	28.4%	33.7%	
Proportion of students transitioning into senior secondary from middle school <sup>1</sup>	93%	95%	
Performance indicators	2014 baseline	2015	2016
Number of children participating in the Families as First Teachers program <sup>2</sup>	1 141	1066	1607
Number of parents/carers participating in the Families as First Teachers program <sup>2</sup>	1 069	1217	1521
Proportion of students transitioning into middle school from primary school	81%		
Number of compulsory conferences conducted	2 627	2774	1822
Number of attendance plans implemented	1 890	2409	1680
Number of compliance notices issued	945	656	707
Number of infringement notices issued	144	224	365
Number of cases referred to Chief Executive Department of Education for approval to prosecute	4		
Number of student incidents that resulted in a suspension <sup>3</sup>	2 843	3181	3223
Number of health checks for children aged 5– 14 years in remote and very remote locations <sup>6</sup>	2 072	1 997	2 596
Number of young people who completed an early intervention youth boot camp <sup>7</sup>	57	89	
Number of young people who completed a sentenced youth boot camp <sup>4</sup>	-	-	
Number of upgrades to public housing in remote locations <sup>5</sup>	63	503**	
Number of new or replacement public houses in remote locations <sup>5</sup>	35	104*	

- Notes:
1. Based on the apparent retention of Year 10 students from Year 7 (three years prior).
  2. This baseline is indicative only as the dataset is undergoing further cleansing and verification. 2015 data is only reported from Semester 2 onwards as a new data capture and reporting system was implemented in Semester 2 2015 resulting in a more robust dataset.
  3. This data set is based on the number of student incidents that resulted in a suspension, not the total number of students suspended. Students may have been suspended multiple times.
  4. This program had not commenced in 2014. The Sentenced Youth Boot Camp trial begins in August 2016.

5. NT Department of Housing Annual Report. Baseline is 2014-15 financial year data.
  - \* 74 complete, 30 underway
  - \*\* 316 complete, 187 underway
6. Department of Health, Healthy School Aged Kids program.
7. NT Correctional Services Annual Report 2015-16.

## Accountability

*Every Day Counts* outlines the principles, priority areas and strategies for implementation by Northern Territory Government agencies to achieve the objectives and targets of this strategy.

*Every Day Counts* will be underpinned by an implementation plan, defining roles and responsibilities across government, providing the basis for joint responsibility for outcomes for children and young people.

The Department of Education will work with Northern Territory Government agencies in the implementation and evaluation of initiatives and key actions that support the strategies of *Every Day Counts*.

The Department of Education will be responsible for establishing governance arrangements that will ensure progress against this strategy is reported to members of the Social Responsibility Standing Committee of the Northern Territory Coordination Committee.

Implementation and progress against performance measures and targets will be monitored every six months. To ensure successful implementation and to achieve the objectives and targets of the strategy, performance will be audited annually to assess risks to implementation and to ensure risk mitigation strategies are implemented and effort refocused.

The Northern Territory Government recognises that a long-term focus on improving school attendance is needed. In 2018, a review of this strategy will be undertaken to inform the future direction of the school attendance strategy.