



**National Aboriginal and  
Torres Strait Islander  
Education Strategy 2015**



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the first Australians with the oldest continuing cultures in human history. Governments across Australia affirm the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to maintain languages and cultures and acknowledge their deep cultural associations with the land and water.

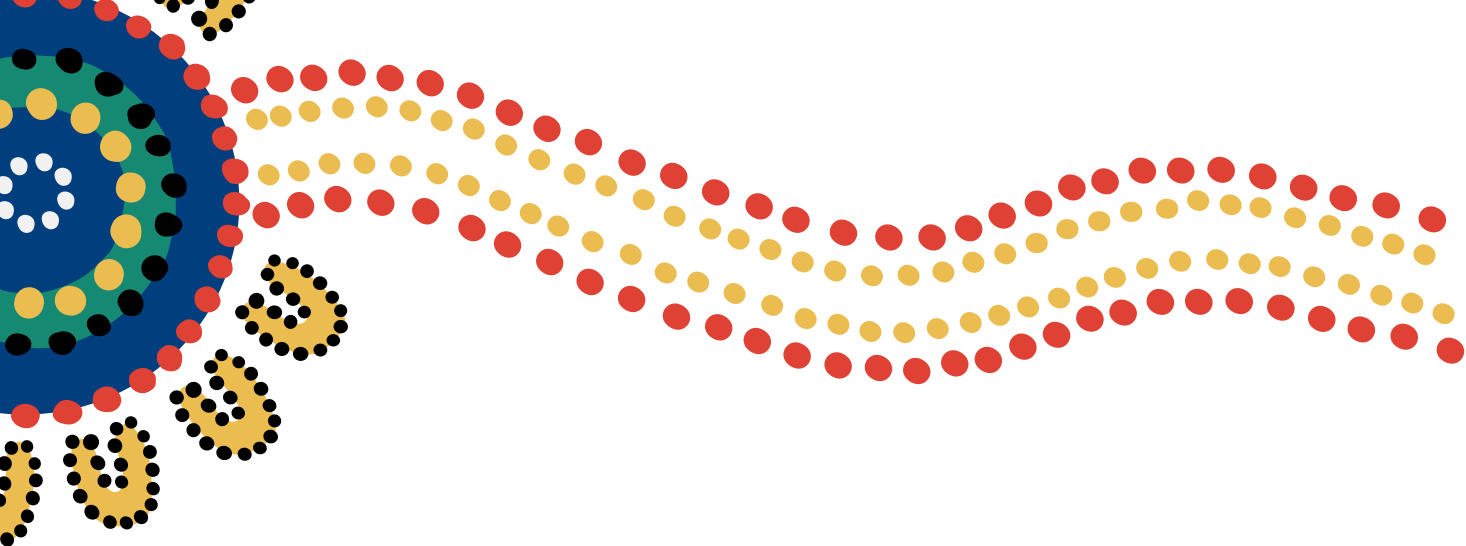
This strategy will guide the education of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people from birth through to further education and employment pathways.

This artwork represents the journey to develop the strategy and the partnerships and relationships that are central to its success.

The horse shoe shapes represent the people who worked together to identify the principles and priorities within the strategy.

The travelling lines represent the journey to develop the strategy and its role in guiding future action.

Artwork by Karen Briggs – a Yorta Yorta woman



## PREFACE

Despite determined effort much more needs to be done to close the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education outcomes. In establishing the Education Council, which comprises government ministers with responsibility for early childhood, school education and higher education, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) determined that a key priority is the advancement of educational standards and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

As Chair of the Education Council in 2015, I am pleased to release the new **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy**.

Ministers are keen for the strategy to build on the actions underway in pursuing COAG's Closing the Gap targets and the evaluation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014.

The strategy is the result of robust discussion, reflection, debate and cooperation and its development has been championed by the Education Council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Group established by the Australian Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs Senior Officials Committee to provide advice on national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy initiatives and directions. The advisory group is chaired by Tony Harrison, Chief Executive of the South Australian Department for Education and Child Development, and comprises representatives from government departments, the non-government school sector and community representatives. I thank the advisory group for its commitment, drive and wisdom through the development process.

Recognising the different roles of governments, the strategy adopts the dual approach of identifying policies and actions that require national collaboration to succeed, while also outlining shared principles that governments commit to when working with communities. The strategy should therefore be considered alongside the approaches of each state, territory and local community, which together map out the ways in which governments, educators, families and communities can work in collaboration to improve outcomes.

The strategy will only succeed with commitment and good will. I urge everyone involved in the education and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to place them at the centre of their work, in order to improve the education and life outcomes of Australia's First Nations peoples.

The Hon. Kate Jones MP  
Chair, Education Council



## VISION

All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people achieve their full learning potential, are empowered to shape their own futures, and are supported to embrace their culture and identity as Australia's First Nations peoples.

## CONTEXT FOR DEVELOPMENT

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy (the strategy) builds on past commitments in education policy and strategic drivers including:

- » National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) *Closing the gap* targets for early childhood education, school achievement and attainment
- » Council of Australian Governments (COAG) priorities of school attendance and post-school transitions as included in the Education Council's *Terms of reference*
- » State, territory and education sector plans
- » Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians December 2008
- » National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy 1989
- » Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014 and the subsequent evaluation.

Building on the learnings of previous initiatives, the strategy is significantly different from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-14. This strategy sets the principles and priorities that act as a framework to guide jurisdictions in developing and implementing localised policies and actions to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It also outlines the first of a series of national collaborative actions.

School education in Australia is a partnership between government, Catholic and independent sectors. Delivery of the strategy will draw upon the cooperative relationship between the sectors.



# PURPOSE

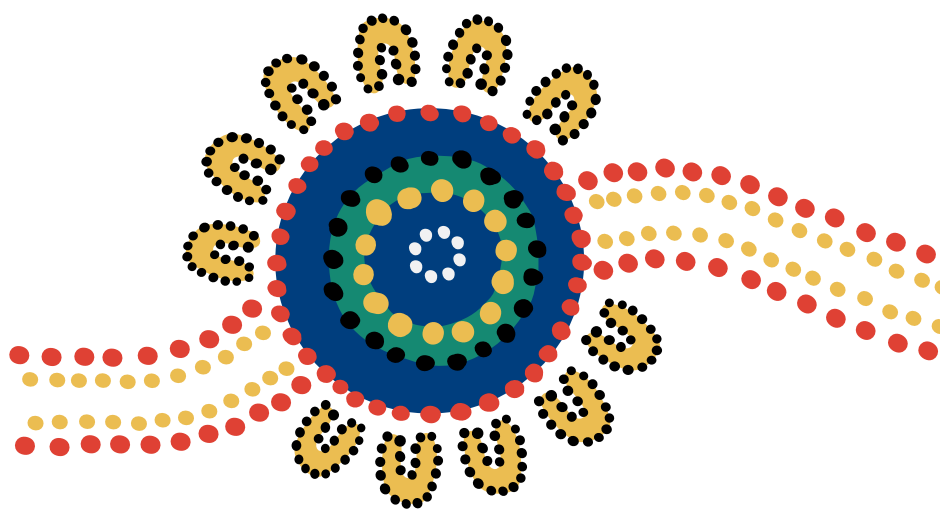
The strategy sets out the commitment of education ministers to the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people by:

- » utilising the strategy's principles and priority areas to inform the development and implementation of both local and systemic-level actions
- » identifying areas where collaborative action between or across governments, in consultation with the non-government sector, is required to complement local efforts.
- » This strategy is a living document. New national collaborative actions may emerge as priorities evolve and work is completed.

# PRINCIPLES

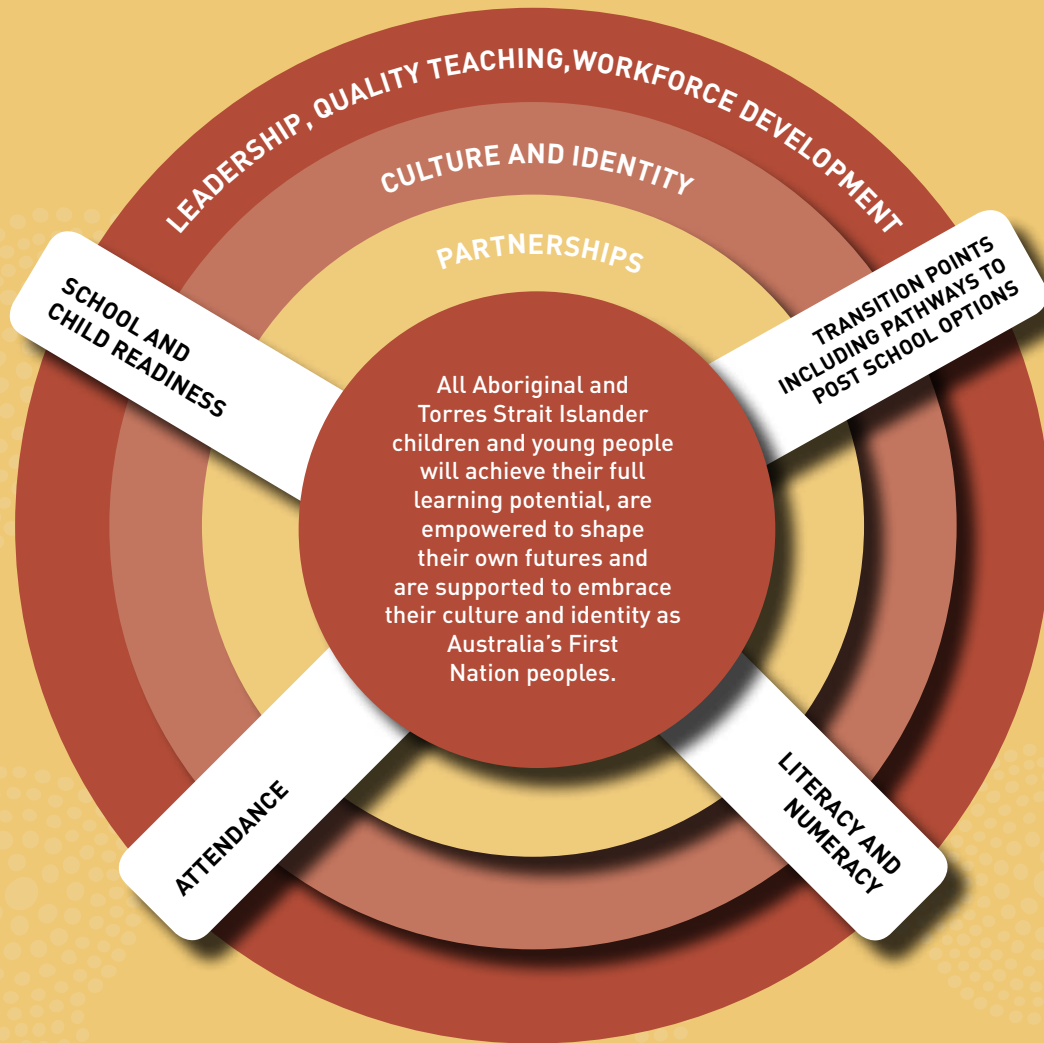
Education ministers agree that the following principles should underpin the approach taken by all education systems and providers to achieve the strategy's vision:

- » **Achieve potential:** High expectations are held for, and by, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people
- » **Equity:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are able to access the same educational opportunities and achieve the same education outcomes as other Australians
- » **Accountability:** Education systems and educators are accountable, transparent and responsive
- » **Cultural recognition:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's histories, values, languages and cultures are acknowledged and respected
- » **Relationships:** Meaningful relationships value community cultural knowledge, wisdom and expertise, and demonstrate trust and respect
- » **Partnerships:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are engaged in decision making, planning, delivery and evaluation of early childhood, schooling and higher education services at local, sector and national levels
- » **Local approaches:** Educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are accelerated through local approaches for unique and diverse communities
- » **Quality:** Policies, practices, programs and partnerships are inclusive of the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families, and are informed by knowledge, evidence and research.



# PRIORITY AREAS

Education ministers commit to having visible plans or approaches for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. Ministers have collectively identified seven priority areas that will inform local approaches, and national collaborative actions to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.



## PRIORITY AREAS EXPLAINED

In advancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education outcomes there are interdependencies and synergies across the seven priority areas.

Effective initiatives in the three priority areas of: *Leadership, quality teaching and workforce development; Culture and Identity and Partnerships*, will assist in advancing outcomes in the four priority areas of: *School and child readiness; Literacy and numeracy; Attendance; Transition points including pathways to postschool options*.

## 1. LEADERSHIP, QUALITY TEACHING AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Action is taken to ensure children and young people are taught by skilled educators who are culturally competent in the local context. Providers, including principals, set high expectations for learning that incorporates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.

Further support for the engagement of children, young people and their families is provided by building a well-qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workforce.

## 2. CULTURE AND IDENTITY

Through the delivery of the Australian Curriculum, education sectors acknowledge, respect and reflect the histories, values, languages and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

All Australian children and young people have the opportunity to learn about the histories and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

## 3. PARTNERSHIPS

Quality partnerships are encouraged between education sectors and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and other stakeholders.

These partnerships are characterised by listening and responding, strong accountability and active engagement, collaborative information sharing and informed decision making.

## 4. ATTENDANCE

Engaging with learning is fundamental in helping all children acquire the skills they need for life. Schools and services work with families and communities on strategies to address barriers to school attendance.

## 5. TRANSITION POINTS INCLUDING PATHWAYS TO POST-SCHOOL OPTIONS

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are supported at critical stages of their education to improve engagement, retention and attainment and develop the skills to participate fully in schooling, society and work.

## 6. SCHOOL AND CHILD READINESS

High quality, culturally inclusive early childhood education services and schools work with families and communities to set a strong foundation for early learning, including a child's transition to school.

## 7. LITERACY AND NUMERACY

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's English literacy and numeracy proficiencies are developed by applying proven, culturally inclusive, responsive and personalised approaches to learning, such as English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) in order to improve their educational attainment, life choices and options.

# PRIORITIES FOR NATIONAL COLLABORATION

In addition to identifying principles and priority areas to underpin localised approaches, the strategy also outlines actions that substantially benefit from or require national collaboration. Within this context, education ministers have agreed to work together on national actions that help achieve the strategy's vision where:

- » projects have benefits beyond the boundaries of a single jurisdiction
- » aligned efforts across levels of government, organisations and services improve system effectiveness or achieve results more efficiently
- » coordinated cross-jurisdictional policy and practice supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's access to education services.

Education ministers have agreed that the following five national collaborative actions are the first to be implemented for this strategy, to help engage children and young people, raise standards and ensure meaningful pathways beyond school for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. These include actions to improve school attendance and post school transitions as requested by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

## ATTENDANCE AND ENGAGEMENT

Engaging with learning is critical to students achieving their individual potential. A better understanding of the complex factors influencing attendance – including identifying strategies to better engage students – will assist in supporting student attendance and engagement. The Education Council will work collaboratively through senior officials to further the work on school attendance already agreed through COAG. In particular:

- » analyse new attendance data available in late 2015 disaggregated by Indigenous and non-Indigenous status
- » provide advice by end 2016, building on previous initiatives including work on transience and mobility.

To build on existing efforts, senior officials will analyse available reports to consider the impact of jurisdictional attendance strategies and provide advice to Council on factors affecting success. This analysis will consider best practice identified by geo-location. The initial report will be delivered mid-2016.

To further inform and refine policy responses, senior officials will provide a report by March 2016 to the Education Council on an analysis of existing jurisdictional/sector data collections to determine commonality and differences in recording and reporting authorised absence. This report will include recommendations for future analysis of the reasons for authorised absences/non-attendance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.





## TRANSITION POINTS INCLUDING PATHWAYS TO POST-SCHOOL OPTIONS

By the end of 2016 senior officials will provide the Education Council with advice on:

- » supporting the engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' pathways to tertiary education through high-quality vocational learning and vocational education and training (VET), including preparing students for work, work experience and structured work placements
- » the promotion and encouragement of high quality career education and advice to equip Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with the skills and knowledge to make effective decisions about subject choice and post-school destinations.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD TRANSITIONS

COAG has determined that a priority action is to streamline the transition of children from early learning to school. In delivering on this commitment senior officials will:

- » analyse (or commission analysis of) Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data to identify potential areas for intervention to minimise developmental vulnerabilities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in their transition from early childhood to school education
- » consider specific measures to enhance the engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in early childhood education and care.

A work plan will be developed and will consider examples of effective practice. A report on this action will be provided to Education Council by the end of 2016.

## WORKFORCE

The Australian Government, on behalf of the Education Council, will task The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) with leading the:

- » development of assessment criteria (for providers and panels) for Graduate Teacher Standards 1.4 (strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students) and 2.4 (understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians)
- » provision of advice to Initial Teacher Education assessment panels on how to assess competence against Graduate Teacher Standards 1.4 and 2.4.

Advice on these actions will be provided to the Education Council in 2016.

## AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

To help improve the accessibility of the Australian Curriculum to students and their families, the Education Council will request that Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) uses the guidance provided by this strategy to consider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.

The Education Council will request that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Group facilitates:

- » by the end of 2016, sharing of possible ways to implement the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority, including providing advice to senior officials on ways to support future development of ACARA's illustrations of practice
- » by the end of 2017, sharing of approaches to developing and implementing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Indigenous languages curricula, consistent with ACARA's framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

These five national collaborative actions are not an exhaustive list and in time, new priorities will emerge that will be addressed by ministers through new collective actions. For example, to further strengthen post-school pathways, future actions may be developed to improve student transitions to higher education and training (inclusive of universities). Another area for future activity may include supporting student transitions between stages of schooling such as between primary and secondary and the transition from Year 10 into senior secondary.

# STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION AND REPORTING

National collaborative actions will be driven by the Australian Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs Senior Officials Committee (AEEYSOC) on behalf of the Education Council. AEEYSOC will oversee these actions, including work programs for their delivery in conjunction with working groups and ministerial committees and authorities.

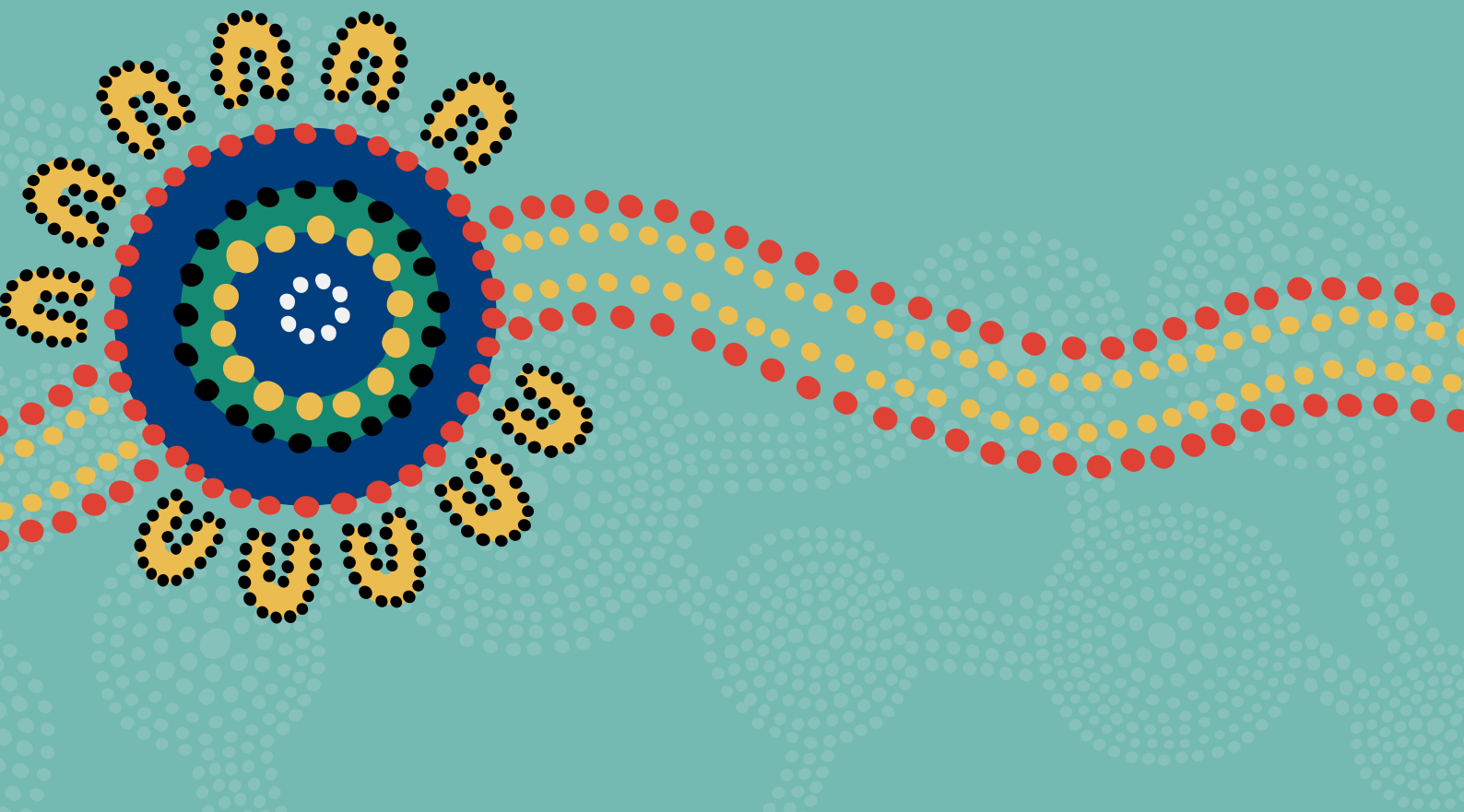
The Education Council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Group will provide advice to AEEYSOC as they monitor the national collaborative actions and consider proposals for future actions.

National reports such as *Closing the gap*, Australian National Report on Schooling, Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage, and the Report on Government Services provide information to track progress on educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

Reporting under this strategy will focus on the national collaborative actions in order to avoid duplication of other national, systemic and local reporting arrangements.

The importance of community voice in this process is recognised.

This strategy will be reviewed in 2018, which is a significant year in measuring progress against COAG's *Closing the gap* targets. An evaluation will consider the effectiveness of the strategy as a framework.







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