Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System

This document has been prepared in response to the Consultation Paper for the *Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System*.

While a response to each of the questions set out in the Consultation Paper is not provided, overarching statements against each theme is provided.

Key Messages to Expert Panel

Meeting the needs of all students and shaping the nation's future

- To achieve a better and fairer education system in the Northern Territory (NT), schools must reflect the rich cultural, social and linguistic diversity of our learners.

- Equally important is students in the NT being able to access quality education with facilities that are similar to those in the eastern states.

- The NT's context is significantly different from other jurisdictions in Australia, with the schooling system operating in Australia's most challenging socio-economic and geographic context. The NT has the highest concentration of very small schools in remote and very remote areas with a range of complex external factors contributing to the challenges of students engaging in and attending school, educational achievement, school completions and entry into employment.

- The NT's diverse student population includes 14,542 Aboriginal students, and 49% of all students have a language background other than English.

- Statistics from the Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage (ICSEA) for NT government schools, show 71% of all NT government schools fall into the bottom decile of scores for all Australian schools, and of the 100 most disadvantaged schools nationally, 55 are from the NT.

- The average score across NT government schools was 773 in 2022. This compares to a national government school average of 982, illustrating the high level of socio-educational disadvantage in the NT relative to the rest of Australia.

- Providing education to very remote communities across the NT where there is a sparse and highly mobile population can be challenging. The cost of delivery within this context, without economies of scale and with a range of additional direct and indirect costs, is high.

- Education reform should focus on targeted areas for national collaboration to leverage from common efforts that can add most significant value. This could be:
  - teacher attraction
  - teacher quality
  - curriculum resources
  - assessment approaches.

- States and Territories should have the autonomy for flexibility and place-based approaches.

- The NT is progressing an ambitious strategic reform agenda, with priorities generated through consultation with students, parents and communities:

- — [Education NT Strategy](#)
- — [Education Engagement Strategy](#)
- — [Education Leadership Strategy | Department of Education](#).

Chapter 2: Improving student outcomes – including for students most at risk of falling behind

1. What are the most important student outcomes for Australian school students that should be measured in the next NSRA? Should these go beyond academic performance (for example, attendance and engagement)?
2. What are the evidence-based practices that teachers, schools, systems and sectors can put in place to improve student outcomes, particularly for those most at risk of falling behind? Are different approaches required for different at-risk cohorts?
3. How can all students at risk of falling behind be identified early on to enable swift learning interventions?
4. Should the next NSRA add additional priority equity cohorts? For example, should it add children and young people living in out-of-home care and students who speak English as an additional language or dialect? What are the risks and benefits of identifying additional cohorts?
5. What should the specific targets in the next NSRA be? Should the targets be different for primary and secondary schools? If so, how? What changes are required to current measurement frameworks, and what new measures might be required?
6. How can the targets in the next NSRA be structured to ensure that evidence-based approaches underpin a nationally coherent reform agenda while allowing jurisdictions and schools the flexibility to respond to individual student circumstances and needs?
7. How should progress towards any new targets in the next NSRA be reported on?

- **The NT has acknowledged that engagement is one of the most critical areas to be addressed for our context to improve student outcomes.**

- A particular challenge for the NT in improving education outcomes is a lack of engagement, with many Aboriginal students disengaging from school for a variety of social, health and cultural reasons.

- The NT had been seeing a decline in attendance rates, particularly for aboriginal students, over the past 10 years.

- As a result, the NT has embarked on the Education Engagement Strategy 2022-2031 which outlines the government's commitment to work with young people, families and communities to engage every child in learning. The Engagement Strategy identifies four pillars that need to be in place to engage young people in learning: Education is a Partnership with Parents and Community; Right people; Meaningful Learning; and Inclusion and Wellbeing.

- It was developed through extensive consultation to ensure the strategy was shaped by the voices of families, community members, young people and educators across the Territory.

- The strategy identifies key actions at the system, regional and school level so that children and students are motivated, challenged and see value in their education, feel safe and welcome in their learning environment, and have supportive and respectful relationships.

- Young people in the NT start in early learning programs and school education already equipped with deeply established knowledge systems, cultural values and ways of learning that have been shaped by their families and communities.

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

- This strategy aims to grow our connection with young people, families and communities to engage every child in learning.

- Key drivers of student outcomes in the NT will be significantly different to those in other contexts.

- For any initiative, notwithstanding the rigour and relevance of associated evidence, there must be the ability to implement with genuine engagement and partnership with Aboriginal people so that culturally responsive and place-based variations can occur.

- To drive student achievement and outcomes, future reform priorities require greater support, flexibility and tailored responses that will deliver effective on-ground outcomes appropriate to jurisdictional needs.

- There are many drivers of student outcomes that fall outside the scope of the NSRA, however one key factor in determining future educational success is access to quality early childhood education and care. The Education NT Strategy acknowledges that children learn from birth, and that learning and development through all stages of schooling forms the foundation for the next stage.

- Investment in quality early childhood education and care is critical to children receiving the best start in life by supporting early-intervention and differentiated support for priority groups.

- While target setting can support our collective governments' ambition for progress, targets can be detrimental if they:

  - are unrealistic and not differentiated for context, place and priority groups

  - exacerbate division

  - perpetuate a narrative of failure

  - lead to penalisation.

- Further consideration should be given to ensuring there is Aboriginal voice in such a process, as well as ways to ensure our approach is culturally responsive.

Chapter 3: Improving student mental health and wellbeing

8. What does it look like when a school is supporting student mental health and wellbeing effectively? What is needed from schools, systems, government and the community to deliver this?
9. What evidence-based wellbeing approaches currently being implemented by schools and communities should be considered as part of a national reform agenda?
10. Should a wellbeing target be included in the next NSRA? Could this use existing data collections, or is additional data required?
11. Would there be benefit in surveying students to help understand student perceptions of safety and belonging at school, subjective state of wellbeing, school climate and classroom disruption? Would there be value in incorporating this into existing National Assessment Program surveys such as NAPLAN?
12. To what extent do school leaders and teachers have the skills and training to support students struggling with mental health?
13. What can be done to establish stronger partnerships between schools, Local Health Networks and Primary Health Networks?
14. What can be done to ensure schools can easily refer students to services outside the school gate that they need to support their wellbeing? How can this be done without adding to teacher and leader workload?

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

- We understand from the 2022 NCCD on School Students with Disability, that 8,890 students with disability were enrolled in government schools in the NT. This represents 30.3% of total government school enrolments in the Territory. Aboriginal students are disproportionately represented in the NCCD, with 55% (or 4,888) of students with disability in government schools in the NT being Aboriginal.

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

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

- The role of principals and teachers is to provide inclusive education services that ensure every child and student feels welcome and accepted in their learning environment, and they can learn and achieve regardless of their background or personal circumstances.

- A particular challenge nationally, and particularly in remote locations and across the NT, is the access to specialist services to support children and young people. This includes school counsellors, speech therapists, occupational therapists and social workers.

- Children and young people need wrap-around support through ongoing, joined-up and sustained access to health and wellbeing services.

- Policy and funding design, both at the national and local levels, must allow for multi-disciplinary and coordinated services.

- While a student wellbeing measure can provide valuable comparative information, it should only occur if its primary purpose will give critical information to those most able to support a student, i.e.

at the school-level. A measure, without significant additional investment in programs that can specifically target student mental health and wellbeing, will not result in improved outcomes.

- Investment in programs should be evidence-based, place-based and culturally responsive.

Chapter 4: Our current and future teachers

15. What change(s) would attract more students into the teaching profession?
16. What change(s) would support teachers to remain in the profession?
17. What change(s) would support qualified teachers to return to the profession?
18. What additional reforms are needed to ensure that the schools most in need can support and retain highly effective teachers?
19. What can be done to attract a diverse group of people into the teaching profession to ensure it looks like the broader community?
20. What can be done to attract more First Nations teachers? What can be done to improve the retention of First Nations teachers?
21. What reforms could enable the existing teacher workforce to be deployed more effectively?
22. How can teacher career pathways, such as master teachers and instructional specialists, be improved to attract and retain teachers? How should this interact with HALT certification and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers?
23. Are there examples of resources, such as curriculum materials, being used to improve teacher workload or streamline their administrative tasks?
24. How should digital technology be used to support education delivery, reduce teacher workload and improve teacher effectiveness? What examples are you aware of?
25. Are there benefits for the teaching profession in moving to a national registration system? If so, what are they?

- **Our school leaders and teacher workforce should reflect the community it serves and enable the delivery of a rich and culturally responsive curriculum that engages children and young people with meaningful learning.**

- Teacher and non-teacher workforce diversity is critical to achieving improved outcomes, particularly in regard to the NT's remote context and proportional levels of vulnerability and disadvantage.

- Investment in the local teachers is essential to improve the cultural responsiveness of our schools and ensure greater sustainability of our workforce.

- The Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education (RATE) program provides support for Aboriginal educators through delivery of a targeted suite of professional development opportunities, including: non-accredited training; Vocational Education and Training, and tertiary education qualifications.

- RATE builds capacity of existing Aboriginal educators in remote and very remote education settings at every step of their education careers and creates opportunities for Aboriginal educators who aspire to become qualified teachers.

- Delivery of RATE requires intensive and ongoing support locally to most effectively succeed through a significant and long-term investment.

- Remote teaching is both extremely rewarding, and challenging. These are hard to recruit locations and roles that are suited to the most dynamic and committed teachers in the profession.

- The NT has the highest level of HALTs. HALTs can provide crucial role within a school to support quality teaching.

- According to the '*Positive Behaviour and Occupational Violence in Schools Taskforce Report*' the 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%). Violence significantly affects students and teaching staff feeling unsafe to attend

school or the workplace. Furthermore, threats of violence or physical violence, including break-ins (school and government employee housing), affects the school's ability to recruit and retain staff. In October 2022, the department launched its '*Positive Behaviour and Occupational Violence in Schools Taskforce Report'* to provide recommendations to assist the department with reducing and eliminating occupational violence and aggression in schools and to mitigate employee psychological injury.

Chapter 4: Collecting data to inform decision-making and boost student outcomes

26. What types of data are of most value to you and how accessible are these for you?
27. Is there any data not currently collected and reported on that is vital to understanding education in Australia? Why is this data important?
28. Should data measurement and reporting on outcomes of students with disability be a priority under the next NSRA? If so, how can this data be most efficiently collected?
29. Is there a need to establish a report which tracks progress on the targets and reforms in the next NSRA? Should it report at a jurisdictional and a national level? What should be included in the report?
30. Is there data collected by schools, systems, sectors or jurisdictions that could be made more available to inform policy design and implementation? What systems would be necessary to make this data available safely and efficiently?
31. The Productivity Commission and AERO have identified the need for longitudinal data to identify the actual students at risk of falling behind based on their performance (and not on equity groups alone) and to monitor these students' progress over time. Should this be the key data reform for the next NSRA?
32. Should an independent body be responsible for collecting and holding data? What rules should be in place to govern the sharing of data through this body?
33. Is there data being collected that is no longer required?
34. How could the national USI support improved outcomes for students?

- **Through our Education NT system, the NT recognises the need to develop systems so that quality data follows each child as part of a tailored education experience as students move geographically, through stages of schooling, and across flexible education settings.**

- However, small jurisdictions, without the economies of scale, are challenged to effectively develop and maintain the systems to collect, maintain and utilise student data and information. This requires significant capital investment for IT systems and ongoing staffing to support implementation.

- The priority first needs to be to have data and information to best support an improved experience for individual children and young people in the classroom, as opposed to system-level reporting.

- Data sovereignty is an issue of particular importance to our students and families – with considerable consultation needed to determine the appropriateness of further data collection and information sharing, particularly for Aboriginal families.

- A national USI would be an advantage for a small system, like the NT. For a jurisdiction with high mobility between sectors and inter-state, greater ability to share information for the benefit of improving education delivery for individual students would be valued.

- With the USI, there are opportunities for more two-way data sharing and data-linkage, for example, with the Australian Government's Abstudy, program, to better track NT students studying inter-state.

Chapter 6: Funding and accountability

35. Are there other objectives for funding accountability and transparency we have missed?
36. How can governments make better use of the information already collected and/or published to achieve the objectives?
37. What other funding accountability and transparency information regarding schools (both your school and the education system more generally) would be useful?
38. What are the priority gaps in the current funding transparency and accountability arrangements from your perspective?

- **Funding to schools must be fairer so that all students can experience a quality education no matter where they live.**

- Given the higher needs of many NT students, the NT spends more on education, in dollar per student terms, than any other jurisdiction. For example, the NT Government contributed $20,543 per full time equivalent (FTE) student in 2020-21, compared with Victoria contributing the least, at $16,792 per FTE student.

- Flexibility in how funding is administered is needed so that there is opportunities for place-based innovation.

- Funding models must support service integration and place-based approaches.

- Terms and conditions of funding should not create a barrier to developing place-based solutions to achieving outcomes, particularly those that are community led.

- Future reforms should not result in more reporting requirements that result in additional workload to schools and instead allow school leaders and teachers to focus on student outcomes. This is particularly problematic in small schools.

- States and territories should not be penalised financially if targets are not met, particularly when targets are ambitious and are focused on improving the outcomes of the most socially disadvantaged children and young people. Penalties will exacerbate disadvantage and widen the gap further.

- The NT Government has recognised the need to reform its current funding model.

- The NT accepted all recommendations of an independent review by Deloitte Economics into effective enrolment, including the intent to change the funding methodology to be based on enrolment, rather than effective enrolment.

- It is expected an enrolment-based methodology for school funding will:

  - simplify the methodology

  - be fairer across the NT

  - provide schools with the confidence to employ more permanent staff, which is important as continuity of staffing is a key enabler to student engagement and learning outcomes.

- The recommendations from the effective enrolment review forms part of a broader school funding reform package, which would also include recommendations from other reviews currently underway. This includes, reviewing the current secondary education provision and creating a funding model to better support students with a disability.

- These reviews are expected to be completed later this year, and once completed, the department will look at all recommendations from the multiple reviews together to develop the school funding reform program.