

NTPA Response to Consultation Paper Questions: To inform a Better and Fairer Education System

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)?

- 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. 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.
- Measuring literacy, numeracy and science academic performance are narrow measures that do not capture the goals of the Mparntwe Education Declaration. We need to consider how we measure these goals and how we go beyond academic achievement levels to measure the growth any child makes in their learning and how they achieve the second goal: (2) all young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community.
- We need to identify more appropriate measures for excellence and equity in our education system. Equity can only be achieved when funding matches the needs of our most disadvantaged student and families. Government schools need 100% of the SRS to be able to achieve excellence and equity.
- We need to make all education sectors in every jurisdiction equally accountable through the NSRA rather than just the government sector. One example is ensuring that all sectors are responsible for the provision of an inclusive education system, rather than enabling the selective school approach which has pushed more disadvantaged students into public schools? The level of disadvantaged has increased over time in government schools.
- Attendance is not an acceptable measure for schools when there are many factors beyond the school that contribute to a lack of attendance. 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. Schools already work hard to engage all learners to attend as they know this is the mechanism to get improvement and results for every learner. Using attendance as a 'big stick' measure is counterproductive to success. Greater support needs to be provided by government agencies and NGO's to support a child's family with the complex issues which impact attendance.

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?

- Start by using measures of growth - measuring the value added to a student's learning. Invest in the early years where students who are falling behind are quickly identified and provided the literacy and numeracy intervention to avoid the gap widening over time, which results in students not achieving their full potential, disengaging from learning and being provided limited pathways in their later years of schooling. This includes identifying the social and emotional needs of a child from an early age as this has huge implications on learning, and the support that a family requires.

- Education Systems need greater support from services who can support families to address the 'out of school' factors which impact on a student's learning outcomes. Too often schools are expected to be a 'one stop shop' that can address the child's or family's health, housing, lifestyle, nutrition, physical wellbeing, poverty, violence, mental health and wellbeing needs. Without resourcing, schools cannot provide additional resources to match these areas of need which are greatest in remote areas where socio economic status is low.
3. How can all students at risk of falling behind be identified early on to enable swift learning interventions?
- Improve the support to schools and educators to use meaningful assessment for, as and of learning to identify those most at risk. It is not just one test that identifies a child at risk. Educators and schools use a range of assessments to identify those at risk and this needs to be contextualized to the clientele of the local school.
 - Schools need to be resourced accordingly, to provide small group interventions which address the learning gaps successfully. Often interventions or adjustments to learning are expected to be implemented by a single classroom teacher in any mainstream classroom setting. In government schools, any classroom can have more than 50% of students identified with individual learning plans or have needs that require adjustments. This contributes to teacher workload and burnout.
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?
- Prioritising our aboriginal students who speak an additional language would recognise and value the importance of their cultural and language background.
 - Whole school evidence-based practices and interventions will lift the performance of all students. The NSRA should be a mechanism to reflect growth for every learner who is provided the right support no matter their starting point, rather than focusing on cohorts of learners.
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?
- Targets need to be beyond academic achievement. We need to broaden the scope to measure for example the two educational goals of the Declaration.
 - Measure equity by ensuring public money is spent where there is the greatest need. 100% SRS funding for every school. Make every school, no matter if they are public or private, accountable for their funding through the impact they have.
 - Measure how inclusive a school is – catering to the needs of diverse learners no matter their background, race, abilities, socio economic status, etc. Remove mechanisms that allow private schools to expel students or move students to public schools because they can't cater for the needs of these students. Prevent the privileging of an already privileged cohort in the private sector.
 - There are already measures for the implementation of whole school approaches such as School Wide Positive Behaviour or a pedagogical framework suitable to the stage of learners within schools, which measure fidelity of implementation. Investigate these.
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?
- Learner proficiencies should be considered as a measure to capture a child's 13 years of schooling rather than the end of Year 12 exams or scores. A students' gains made over time in all areas beyond academic results should capture the concept of 'successful lifelong learners.'

Improving student mental health and wellbeing

- This is a growing area of concern for schools to contend with and can often fall back to the teacher to provide the support for mental health and wellbeing, alongside the increasing demand to lift student performance and growth. This contributes to teacher and principal workload and the stress and burden of how to best support every learner. Currently government schools are under resourced to cater for this increasing need.
- To alleviate the burden of this stress on teachers and principals, school will need to be well resourced to provide the interventions that students or their families require. This would include having specialist staff to deliver mental health programs for groups or individuals, and ITE that provides teachers with the skills and knowledge to teach social and emotional proficiencies. The location and clientele of any school requires a tailored approach to address the mental health and wellbeing needs of any school community. For example, a visiting allied health care team who spends time working with students and families rather than telling the school what a child needs and expecting that they add this to their already overcrowded day.
- Measuring the positive supportive culture of a school is very different to measuring the wellbeing of individual students. We need to consider how wellbeing is effectively measured again from a growth stance and to be mindful that wellbeing varies significantly on a daily basis. It is not static but fluid but influenced by many factors beyond the school fence. Perhaps a better suggestion is to measure the implementation of school wide programs and interventions (such as a 3-tiered approach) rather than measure the wellbeing of a child.
- It takes a village to raise a child and this thinking is required if we are to resource this increasing area of need. Any partnerships with organisations, NGO's or agencies must be under the direct supervision of the school, and not work independently then tell the school what to do. Successful partnerships already work together to achieve improved student engagement and therefore outcomes such as Clontarf and STARS.
- Schools are already established community hubs with strong relationships with families and school communities. With the correct resourcing of allied health professionals and support staff, schools are well positioned in a community to provide the mental health and wellbeing support to children, young people and their families. This approach would help to streamline wrap around services to families and children rather than the current disjointed approach which exists in our society.

Our current and future teachers

- The demands and workload of teaching have increased yet the remuneration and respect for the position has not been commensurate.
- Teachers' willingness to stay in the profession is impacted by the unrealistic demands of parents and society expectations that allow them to treat teachers with demands and disrespect, the increasing levels of abuse and violence and their lack of authority to address inappropriate behaviours. The focus for any educator or school leader is to always build positive relationships with the parent community, however when demands are unrealistic or their behaviour is disrespectful, too often leaders and educators do not feel supported by the system.
- According to the NT '*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.
- The next NSRA must identify and implement a nationally consistent agenda for addressing occupational violence, reducing workload and providing appropriate resources that allow school leaders to effectively lead school communities; for eg administrative staff availability and capability, efficient business systems and WHS processes to deal with violent and aggressive incidents.
- ITE courses fail to prepare teachers to manage violent and disrespectful behaviours whether displayed by students or parents; or to understand the craft of teaching or evidence-based pedagogical approaches that will best suit their learners. They are underprepared to manage the diverse and complex needs of learners in their classrooms especially when they are growing concentrations of students with additional needs in government schools.
- Teachers require ongoing support throughout their career. Mentoring is only possible in well-resourced schools who have the additional staff with expertise and funding. Teacher shortages have increased the number of teachers who teach beyond their area of expertise or subject area. This is a real challenge in 'hard to fill' schools where there are large numbers of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, or remote or regional schools.
- Teachers require time to invest in their learning throughout the day, not tacked on at the end of a busy day when they are exhausted. Too often our system is restricted to how much release time a teacher has to invest in their own learning as this is dictated by an EBA agreement, rather than evidence-based approaches to what works best for what career stage a teacher is at. Individualise the support for every teacher so that they can continue to make the progress required in their professionally journey, just like other professionals do, and provide them the time to do this.
- The increasing evidence of declining levels of principal and teacher wellbeing must be addressed through the next NSRA. Schools require additional resourcing and funding to support the wellbeing needs of its staff, without it contributing to workload. Currently it is the current staff or school leader who are required to implement approaches to address staff wellbeing.
- Government Education systems have not taken advantage of IT systems to improve teacher or principal workload. Schools are still forced to use old fashioned marking and recording systems which are burdensome and time consuming. Any IT system should be able to reduce teacher workload through streamlined processes but this is not evident in government schools, especially those who are remote or lack resourcing to do so.



- Reporting to parents is one of the most burdensome tasks for teachers and contributes negatively to the stress, wellbeing and workload of all in a school. Parents do not value the reports in current form nor are they consistent across jurisdictions. We need to adopt new ways of sharing the learning that takes place for a child, rather than an old-fashioned A-E grade system presented every 6 months.
- It is imperative that we move to a National Teacher Registration body to streamline the movement of teachers across Australia. This is often a barrier to teachers wanting to explore different educational settings across the country, and extending their learning, skills and knowledge of teaching in a variety of settings.
- The pathways for teachers need to be made transparent early in their careers, and what knowledge skills and experience they require to take any pathway in education such as either a specialist, a leader or to support the learning of others.

Collecting data to inform decision-making and boost student outcomes

- NAPLAN is not an appropriate measure for indigenous learners. We need to identify more culturally appropriate measures of growth in learning. NAPLAN has become more purposeful for systems rather than schools and teachers. Any data used needs to be used purposefully by teachers and schools to track and monitor the growth of the individual students. The time and energy that currently is expended by teachers and school leaders to administer NAPLAN tests could be better spent of more purposeful testing that suits the cohort of learners. NAPLAN presents a challenge for older students who hold no value or purpose for this testing. Test refusal is common for Year 9 students or they do not perform to their achievement level possible.
- NAPLAN is time consuming and stressful for schools to administer and NT schools are challenged by the online testing as internet connectivity and access to quality devices are ongoing issues for remote schools and those schools who cannot afford the latest technology. Schools should not be disadvantaged because of the lack of technology or access to Wi-Fi, but sadly this is the case.
- If NAPLAN continues as the preferred metric for the NSRA, then data and information must be used more purposefully at the school level, for student learning and intervention. The MYSCHOOL website is detrimental to government schools who educate the vast majority of children from low socio-economic backgrounds with concentrated levels of disadvantage and high need.
- Measuring literacy, numeracy and science academic performance are narrow measures that do not align with the goals of the Mparntwe Education Declaration. We need to consider how we measure these goals- how to go beyond academic achievement levels to measuring the growth any child makes in their learning, such as the micro credentials and recognising the interpersonal skills and knowledge that are learnt which meet the goal of being confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners and active and informed members of the community.
- 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, as a small jurisdiction, without the economies of scale, the NT is 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.
- 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. This should include any data collected for NCCD purposes.

Funding transparency and accountability

- Funding to schools must be equitable and fair so that all students can experience a quality education no matter where they live.
- Flexibility in how funding is administered is needed so that there are opportunities for place-based innovation.
- Funding models must support service integration and place-based approaches.
- A review of federal school classification, which is used to identify grants or subsidies is required for NT schools. For example, Gunbalanya School located in West Arnhem Land, is not classified to attract the HECS-HELP subsidy for teachers.
- Terms and conditions of funding should not create a barrier to developing place-based solutions to achieving outcomes, particularly those that are community led, or where our most vulnerable or disadvantaged children live.
- 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 and remote schools.