SVA Perspectives: Education

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
November 2019

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Foreword

Social Ventures Australia (SVA) is working towards an Australia where all people and communities thrive.

While there have been positive efforts and investment from governments and the social sector over recent decades, one in four people in Australia experience disadvantage.

SVA is committed to understanding the structural causes behind persistent disadvantage, then finding and supporting the innovative approaches that can create systemic change. Since 2002, we have taken an evidence-informed approach to supporting community service organisations, philanthropists, governments and businesses to make decisions that lead to improved outcomes for people experiencing vulnerability and exclusion. Through our work, we have developed a practical understanding of what it takes to tackle disadvantage.

In 2016 SVA released a series of Perspective Papers in the areas of education, employment, housing and the drivers of better outcomes for First Australian peoples.

In 2018, we undertook research and analysis and collaborated with key stakeholders in the sector to refresh our education paper and explore the specific needs of selected cohorts of children and young people experiencing vulnerability. We are proud to present this series of perspectives on the drivers of better outcomes for children in out-of-home care, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children and young people disengaged from formal schooling.

We hope that these papers spark debate, innovation and collaboration among practitioners, community members, funders and policy makers – towards an Australia where every child, no matter their start or journey in life, is supported to thrive.

Suzie Riddell
CEO
Social Ventures Australia

1. Introduction

SVA's vision in education

SVA shares the vision, articulated in the Melbourne Declaration, of an Australian education system that develops the intellectual, social and moral wellbeing of young people as well as contributing to the economic prosperity and social cohesion of the nation.[1]

Presently, Australian children don't have an equal opportunity to access a high-quality education, with children from disadvantaged backgrounds likely to start behind and be at high risk of falling further behind. SVA has developed an evidence-informed perspective on the actions and drivers required to promote equity and a high-quality education system for all.

This vision includes ensuring that home, community and formal education environments all support learning. It means harnessing the drivers for improving education outcomes, particularly by supporting effective teaching, from ages 0-5, through formal schooling and in the school-to-work transition (including further education). It also means that the overall system – together with the home and community, and formal education environments – supports the learning needs of different cohorts of students.

1. MCEETYA. (2008). Melbourne declaration on educational goals for young Australians. Canberra: Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (Australia).

The education issue

The correlation between success in education and participation and productivity in society is robust.[2] High-quality education and support creates a path to a sustainable, independent and meaningful livelihood for individuals, and has overall economic and non-economic benefits to society.[3] Children who do not receive a good education are at greater risk of later unemployment or lower income, and are more likely to be involved in crime or to become parents who experience disadvantage.[4]

Australian education struggles to provide equal opportunity and quality outcomes for all students. There are significant gaps in the educational outcomes for some children.[5] In global comparisons of 41 of the world's wealthiest countries, Australia is ranked in the bottom third of all three indicators of equality across early childhood, primary and secondary school levels.[6] Educational outcomes in Australia are more strongly influenced by a person's socioeconomic status than in many other countries.[7] Nearly 60 percent of the students experiencing disadvantage in Australia are in schools classed as disadvantaged, well above the OECD average and substantially higher than in any comparable OECD country.[8]

SVA's work in education focuses on children and young people experiencing vulnerability. Vulnerability can be defined in many ways, but at its core it refers to the likelihood of harm from exposure to risk.[9] Vulnerability is a broader term than disadvantage. It includes wider risk factors than just socioeconomic status, such as trauma, mental health, family violence, and disability. The Review of Funding for Schooling Report, colloquially referred to as the Gonski Review, identified some determinants of likely vulnerability and applied a financial loading to each of these including school size and location, socioeconomic background, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background, low English language proficiency and students with disability.[10]

A child's experience is made up of a combination of factors that contributes to their level of vulnerability. Children experiencing vulnerability may face multiple risk factors (circumstances or events that increase the likelihood of poor outcomes), a number of protective factors (attributes or conditions that moderate risk and promote healthy development and wellbeing) or the absence of protective factors to mitigate these risks.[11]

At the start of school, 22 percent of Australian children, approximately 63,000 children, are identified as developmentally vulnerable according to the Australian Early Development Census.[12] This initial gap is rarely caught up, and there is a wide disparity in learning outcomes between the most and the least advantaged students within the same school year (typically five to six years).[13] This group of students is more likely to require additional support to make the best possible learning progress.

Education alone cannot address all the risk and protective factors associated with vulnerability. However, we contend that high-quality education and support maximises the chance for young children experiencing vulnerability to develop the skills to participate fully in society. It can also empower them to enjoy better health, wellbeing, earning potential and an increased life-expectancy.

2. Gonski, D., Boston, K., Greiner, K., Lawrence, C., Scales, B., & Tannock, P. (2011). Review of funding for schooling: Final report. Canberra: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.
3. Lamb, S., & Huo, S. (2017). Counting the costs of lost opportunity in Australian education. Melbourne: Mitchell Institute.
4. McLachlan, R., Gilfillan, G., & Gordon, J. (2013). Deep and persistent disadvantage in Australia. Canberra: Productivity Commission; Prichard, J., & Payne, J. (2005). Alcohol, drugs and crime: a study of juveniles in detention (Vol. 67). Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.
5. Gonski, D., Arcus, T., Boston, K., Gould, V., Johnson, W., O'Brien, L., Perry, L.P & Roberts, M. (2018). Through growth to achievement: Report of the review to achieve educational excellence in Australian schools. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
6. Chzhen, Y., Rees, G., Gromada, A., Cuesta, J., & Bruckauf, Z. (2018). An Unfair Start: Inequality in Children's Education in Rich Countries. Innocenti Report Card 15. UNICEF.
7. OECD. (2018). Education at a Glance 2018: OECD Indicators. Paris: OECD Publishing.
8. OECD. (2018). Education at a Glance 2018: OECD Indicators. Paris: OECD Publishing.
9. Commissioner for Children and Young People. (2018). It's like a big circle trap: Discussion paper on children and young people's vulnerability. Perth: Western Australia Commissioner for Children and Young People.
10. Gonski, D., Boston, K., Greiner, K., Lawrence, C., Scales, B., & Tannock, P. (2011). Review of funding for schooling: Final report. Canberra: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.
11. Commissioner for Children and Young People. (2018). It's like a big circle trap: Discussion paper on children and young people's vulnerability. Perth: Western Australia Commissioner for Children and Young People.
12. Department of Education and Training (2016). Australian Early Development Census National Report 2015: A snapshot of early childhood development in Australia. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
13. Gonski, D., Arcus, T., Boston, K., Gould, V., Johnson, W., O'Brien, L., Perry, L.P & Roberts, M. (2018). Through growth to achievement: Report of the review to achieve educational excellence in Australian schools. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

Project approach

In 2016, SVA released an Education Perspectives Paper which described the actions required to enable equal opportunity and high-quality education for all children. With a focus on determining the key drivers of better educational outcomes, it is used by philanthropists, system leaders, educators and education organisations seeking to positively impact the lives of children. In 2018, SVA embarked on a project to refresh the Education Perspectives Paper, responding to the need to better explore the specific educational needs of selected cohorts of students experiencing vulnerability.

This paper is one in a three-part series that supplements the original SVA Education Perspectives Paper. The series focuses on the educational needs of three cohorts of children: children in out-of-home care, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children and young people disengaged from formal education. By looking at the challenges and opportunities through a cohort lens, we can better understand the key issues impacting the education journey for that cohort of children and identify targeted actions to improve their educational outcomes.

This paper

This paper considers what is required to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are experiencing vulnerability. There are factors experienced specifically by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children that may impact their educational experience, such as cultural identity and cultural connection. These factors may have a protective impact, or in their absence, a negative impact. Some factors may be related to broader issues concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia such as the impact of colonisation, dispossession and cultural dislocation, and dislocation of families through removal.[14]

In order to provide a useful perspective on the educational journey and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, SVA undertook desktop research and analysis, commissioned an evidence scan from Dr Kevin Lowe and colleagues from various Australian universities, reviewed SVA and partner projects related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, examined Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's stories of education experiences, and engaged with sector representatives, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, through workshops and interviews.

This paper provides SVA's definition of the cohort, considers the scale of the challenge, outlines the current ecosystem of support and includes some quotes from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to describe their experience of education.

It documents SVA's exploration of the SVA Education Driver Tree through the educational experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. It then identifies the key drivers of better educational outcomes across home/community, the system and formal education environments for these children and young people. The paper provides examples of these drivers in action to highlight some activities in the sector that are creating promising outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The paper does not aim to present a complete view of all activity related to the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Australia. Nor does it aim to capture all the nuance and complexity related to the educational experiences of different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in diverse cultural and geographical contexts around Australia and the broader systems, policies, politics and historical context that influence this experience. The paper focuses on illustrative examples predominantly from one Australian state (Victoria) to give a perspective of activity across one state's education system. A Victorian focus means that this paper concentrates on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in primarily urban and regional settings. Acknowledging that there are very different contexts in remote and very remote communities, the gaps, issues, and drivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education described in this paper are likely to play out differently in those settings.

14. SNAICC, NATSILS and NFVPLS. (2017). Strong Families, Safe Kids: Family violence response and prevention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Melbourne: SNAICC – National Voice for our Children, National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Forum (NFVPLS) and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS).

2. SVA Education Driver Tree

In 2016, SVA released the original SVA Education Driver Tree to identify the key drivers of better educational outcomes. Many stakeholders have found the SVA Education Driver Tree to be a useful universal statement of educational drivers and use it as a tool to analyse and prioritise their activity in the sector (see Appendix on page 42).

Over the last two years, we discovered that the SVA Education Driver Tree needed more nuance to address the educational needs of specific cohorts of children. The cohort-specific driver tree provided here dives deeper into the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, building on the original SVA Education Driver Tree. It provides more detailed insights to assist those making decisions on investments and the design of programs to improve the educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

In future, SVA plans to refresh the original SVA Education Driver Tree to incorporate further system elements and integrate the feedback and lessons learned from the design and use of the cohort-specific driver trees described in this series of papers.

Figure 1: SVA Education Driver Tree for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children successfully engage in education, are supported to celebrate their cultural identity, and develop the skills to participate fully in society

Supportive home and community environment conducive to learning, wellbeing and aspirations	Interplay	System configured to respond to personal and cultural learning and developmental needs	Interplay	Formal education fosters optimal learning progress and social emotional and cultural development
Health and housing needs met providing ability to learn effectively (including safe housing, nutrition, sleep and exercise)		System facilitates accessible and culturally responsive education, including students being able to express cultural identity free from discrimination		Teacher capability and teaching practice utilises effective instruction and responds to learning, wellbeing and cultural needs of children
Family and community relationships that support educational aspirations		Agency of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities is valued in educational decision-making and governance		School culture is inclusive, fosters belonging, values student voice and celebrates cultural identity
Development of child's identity and sense of belonging is supported including cultural identity		System invests in adequate and integrated health, family and welfare services to support learning, wellbeing and cultural needs		Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and languages are taught to and assessed for all students in partnership with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups
Learning needs and interests are supported (e.g. tutoring, homework support)		System invests in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, knowledge and cultural education		School leadership engages with evidence-informed interventions, networks, services and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
Opportunities to build social and cultural capital and belonging (e.g. extracurricular, community and cultural activities)		Workforce capacity and capability is sufficient to deliver culturally responsive services, which includes the recruitment, development and promotion of qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff		Schools proactively and genuinely engage with caregivers and community members and ensure communication is sensitive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
Additional support given during times of increased vulnerability (e.g. transition between early learning, schools and post school)		Learning, wellbeing and cultural outcomes are monitored, shared and improved upon		Additional support for key transitions including between early learning, school/s, post school and study, and different communities)

Engagement between home, community and formal education environments

Unique features of Aboriginal and Torres Strait children experiencing vulnerability that might impact their education:

- May experience cultural dislocation and experiences of racism
- May experience intergenerational trauma through colonisation and dislocation of families through removal
- Might attend an education setting with poor understanding of culture

Drivers apply across all stages of education, with particular emphasis on the following during each stage:

Early learning and development supports effective early identification and intervention that ensures children are ready for school	**K – 12 schooling** is responsive to cultural identity, learning and wellbeing needs to help students make the best possible progress	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have culturally responsive resources and support for an effective **transition into work or further study**

Supported Transition   Supported Transition

Source: SVA, 2019

The SVA Education Driver Tree for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children draws heavily on the drivers of better outcomes described in SVA's Perspective Paper on First Australians.[15] While acknowledging that the experience and circumstances of every community are unique, SVA believes that there are common conditions and actions that drive improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Cultural identity is the central driver for better outcomes, supported by three other inter-related drivers of change:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples being empowered to achieve self-determination;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples having access to, and equal opportunities to build strong foundations that are aligned with their cultural values; and
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and mainstream bodies engaging effectively and individuals participating fully in society.

Figure 2: SVA Drivers of Better Outcomes for First Australians

STRONG FOUNDATIONS
First Australians have equal opportunity to build strong foundations that are aligned with their cultural values

Family and community: Improved child, family and community safety and wellbeing

Employment: Increased pathways and support for First Australian employment and entrepreneurship

Housing: Access to, and support for ownership of, safe, stable and culturally appropriate accommodation

Access: First Australians have access to effective and culturally appropriate services, co-designed with community and commissioned to achieve agreed outcomes

Justice: First Australian incarceration and recidivism rates are reduced through justice reinvestment and diversionary initiatives

Participation: First Australians help shape and have equal opportunities and support to achieve sustainable social, cultural and economic participation

Education: Equal opportunity to access, and support to attain, high quality education and skills required for full participation

Opportunity: First Australians have a right to cultural identity

Language: First Australians have the opportunity to learn culture and language

Health: The gap between mainstream and First Australians in health outcomes and life expectancy is closed

Mainstream bodies: Government and other mainstream bodies are flexible and responsive, with the capacity to innovate and effectively engage with First Australian communities

Formal recognition: Constitutional reform ensures formal recognition and equality for First Australians

CULTURAL IDENTITY

Country: First Australians exercise the right to manage and care for their country

Understanding: First Australian cultural identity is understood, respected and celebrated by mainstream Australia

Leadership: Pathways are established for the development of First Australian leaders in the private, public and for-purpose sectors

First Australian bodies: Representative First Australian bodies are established, or legitimised, and engage with mainstream bodies at the national and local levels

Governance: First Australian organisations develop effective governance structures that are compatible with traditional authority structures and mainstream principles

ENGAGEMENT
Individuals participate fully in society and First Australian and mainstream bodies engage effectively

SELF-DETERMINATION
First Australians are empowered to achieve self-determination

Source: SVA. (2016). SVA Perspectives: First Australians. Sydney: Social Ventures Australia.

15. SVA. (2016). SVA Perspectives: First Australians. Sydney: Social Ventures Australia.

3. Cohort overview

Cohort definition

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are those whose ancestors lived in Australia before colonisation. The definition includes those that lived on the Australian mainland, surrounding islands, and the Torres Strait Islands.[16] This report focuses on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are experiencing vulnerability.
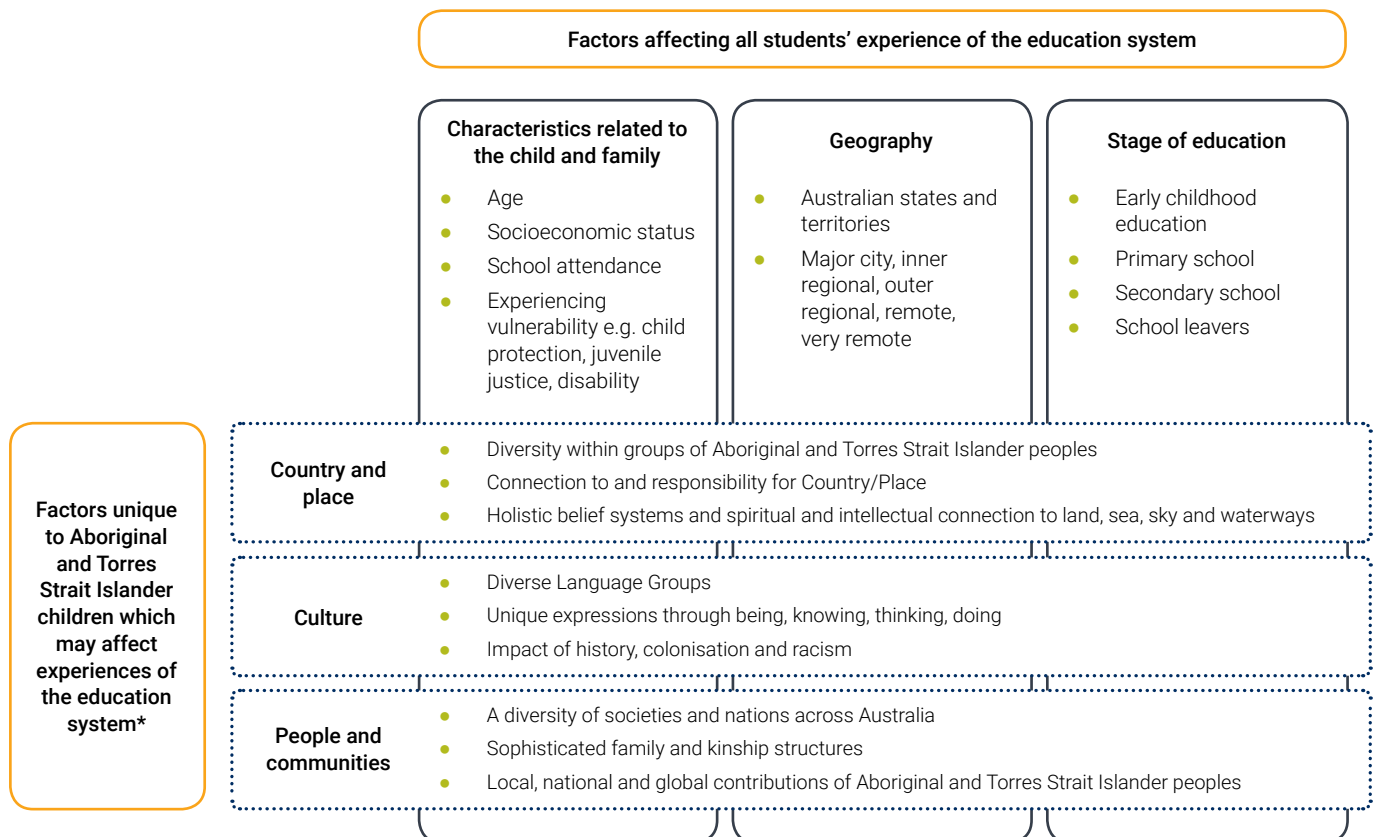
There is significant diversity in the experience of education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in this cohort. Often an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child's experience of the education system is multi-layered and formed through the intersection of several factors, as depicted in Figure 3.

Some factors are unique to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, such as Country, place, culture and communities. These factors may vary for different Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander children, with diverse Language Groups, unique expressions of culture and a diversity of family, kinship structures and societies across Australia.

Other factors may influence the education experience of all children, such as socioeconomic status, location and stage of education. A child's experience of education might also be impacted by the type of vulnerability they may be experiencing, for example disability or involvement in the child protection or juvenile justice systems. While we consider this diversity of factors in this paper, we do not capture all the nuance and complexity related to the education of different groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Figure 3: Factors affecting an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child's experience of the education system

Factors affecting all students' experience of the education system		
Characteristics related to the child and family	**Geography**	**Stage of education**
• Age • Socioeconomic status • School attendance • Experiencing vulnerability e.g. child protection, juvenile justice, disability	• Australian states and territories • Major city, inner regional, outer regional, remote, very remote	• Early childhood education • Primary school • Secondary school • School leavers

Factors unique to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children which may affect experiences of the education system*

Country and place	• Diversity within groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples • Connection to and responsibility for Country/Place • Holistic belief systems and spiritual and intellectual connection to land, sea, sky and waterways
Culture	• Diverse Language Groups • Unique expressions through being, knowing, thinking, doing • Impact of history, colonisation and racism
People and communities	• A diversity of societies and nations across Australia • Sophisticated family and kinship structures • Local, national and global contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

*Adapted from the Organising Ideas of the Australian Curriculum's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures. Source: ACARA. (n.d.). Australian Curriculum. Retrieved from: https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/cross-curriculum-priorities/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-histories-and-cultures/

16. Common Ground. (n.d.). Aboriginal, Indigenous or First Nations? Retrieved from: https://www.commonground.org.au/learn/aboriginal-or-indigenous

Scale of the challenge

There are approximately 649,200 people who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander in Australia, which represents 2.8 percent of the Australian population, according to official census figures. It is unlikely that official figures capture all people who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander in Australia, and the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that the population is 798,365 once the undercount is factored in.[17]

Based on the official figures, the Northern Territory has Australia's highest proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (25.5 percent of the Northern Territory population) and New South Wales is home to the highest number, with more than 216,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.[18]

Figure 4: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population and proportion by state

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population by state
000's of people, 2017

NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT
216.2	47.8	186.5	34.2	76.0	23.6	58.2	6.5

Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by state
%, 2017

Low — High

NT 25.5%
WA 3.1%
SA 2.0%
Qld 4.0%
NSW 2.9%
Vic 0.8%
Tas 4.6%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2017, June 27). Census: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.
Retrieved from: https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/MediaRealesesByCatalogue/02D50FAA9987D6B7CA25814800087E03

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17. Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2018, August 31). 3238.0.55.001 - Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2016.
    Retrieved from: https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3238.0.55.001
18. Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2017, June 26). Census: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.
    Retrieved from: https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/MediaRealesesByCatalogue/02D50FAA9987D6B7CA25814800087E03

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is relatively young. The median age of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is 23.0 years, compared to 37.8 years for the non-Indigenous population.[19]

The majority (nearly 80 percent) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged zero to 19 years old live in major cities, inner regional and outer regional areas. Approximately a third of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people live in major cities, and less than 20 percent live in remote or very remote areas, as depicted in Figure 5.[20]

Half of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students go to schools where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students make up less than 15 percent of the total student enrolment. A considerable minority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (11 percent) go to schools where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students make up more than 95 percent of the total student enrolment.[21]

Approximately 30,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged zero to 24 years old speak an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language at home.[22]

Figure 5: Geographical local of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged 0 to 19 years old

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population age 0-19 by remoteness of resident
000's of people, % 2011

	82.8	79.5	78.2	72.8
Major City	34%	34%	35%	37%
Inner Regional	24%	23%	24%	23%
Outer Regional	22%	22%	23%	22%
Remote	7%	7%	7%	7%
Very Remote	13%	14%	12%	12%
	0-4 years old	5-9 years old	10-14 years old	15-19 years old

65% of 0-19 years old population

Note: Remoteness is a measure of accessibility of the location. This is different to urban/rural, which is a measure of population density and clustering
Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2018, August 30). 3238.0.55.001 - Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2011.
Retrieved from: https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/3238.0.55.001June%202011?OpenDocument

19. Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2018, August 31). 3238.0.55.001 - Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2016.
   Retrieved from: https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3238.0.55.001
20. Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2018, August 30). 3238.0.55.001 - Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2011.
   Retrieved from: https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/3238.0.55.001June%202011
21. Australia Productivity Commission. (2016). Indigenous Primary School Achievement Background Paper 1: About Indigenous Australian students. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
22. Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2012, November 27). 2076.0 - Census of Population and Housing: Characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2011.
   Retrieved from: https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/2076.02011?OpenDocument

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are over-represented in several indicators of vulnerability. Prior to starting school, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are more than twice as likely to be vulnerable in relation to early developmental domains.[23] Approximately 17,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are in out-of-home care, which equates to a rate 10 times higher compared to non-Indigenous children.[24] Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are significantly more likely to be in contact with the justice system[25] and are about twice as likely to have a disability than non-Indigenous counterparts.[26] Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people between 15 and 34 years of age experience suicide rates over three times that of non-Indigenous Australians.[27]

Figure 6: Statistics related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children rates of out-of-home care, juvenile justice and disability

Rate of children in OOHC by Indigenous status, state
children per 1000, at 30 June 2017

Source: AIHW. (2018). Child protection Australia 2016–17: Child Welfare Series No. 68. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

Proportion of persons living in households with disability* by Indigenous status and age group
Proportion of population, 2012-15

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2016, October 18). 4430.0 - Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2015. Retrieved from: https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4430.0

*A person has a disability if they report they have a limitation, restriction or impairment, which has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least six months and restricts everyday activities

Rates of young people aged 10–17 years under community-based supervision and detention, by Indigenous status
per 10,000 population, 2006–07 to 2012–13

Source: Australian Government. (2015). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework 2014 Report. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

23. Australian Government. (2015). 2015 Australian Early Development Census National Report. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
24. AIHW. (2018). Child protection Australia 2016–17: Child Welfare Series No. 68. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.
25. Australian Government. (2015). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework 2014 Report. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
26. Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2016, October 18). 4430.0 - Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2015. Retrieved from: https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4430.0
27. Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2018, September 26). 3303.0 - Causes of Death, Australia, 2017. Retrieved from: https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/3303.0~2017~Main%20Features~Intentional%20self-harm%20in%20Aboriginal%20and%20Torres%20Strait%20Islander%20people~10

Too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experience poor educational outcomes. There are improvements to celebrate in Year 12 completion rates, post-school education, and some national literacy and numeracy testing areas in some Australian states and year levels for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.[28] Year 12 attainment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, for example, has improved substantially over the last 20 years, from just 32% in the 1990s to 65% today. An increasing number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are participating in higher education, with enrolment doubled over the last decade.[29]

There are also positive increases in the growth of language learning in Australian schools. In 2010, nearly 8,000 students from 36 schools were learning one of 13 Aboriginal languages and in 2011, over 530 students had undertaken a Certificate level course in an Aboriginal language at TAFE.[30]

However, there are still significant gaps in national literacy and numeracy levels, school attendance and educational attainment between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and the non-Indigenous population, with the largest gaps for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in remote areas. Figure 7 shows the gaps between education outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and non-Indigenous children on national literacy and numeracy testing (NAPLAN) data.
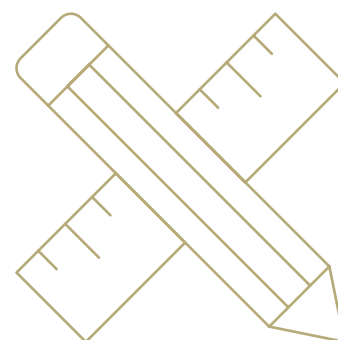
Figure 7: National literacy and numeracy testing benchmarks for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
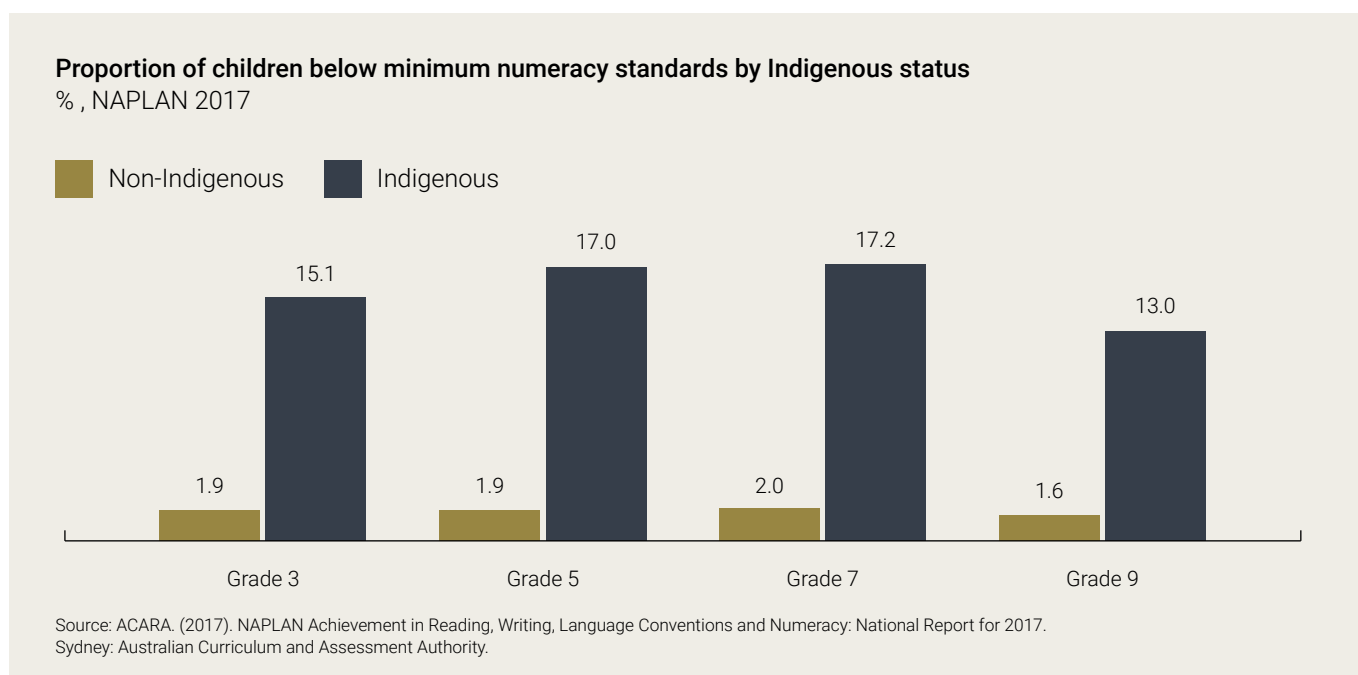
Proportion of children below minimum numeracy standards by Indigenous status
% , NAPLAN 2017

Non-Indigenous   Indigenous

	Grade 3	Grade 5	Grade 7	Grade 9
Non-Indigenous	1.9	1.9	2.0	1.6
Indigenous	15.1	17.0	17.2	13.0

Source: ACARA. (2017). NAPLAN Achievement in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy: National Report for 2017. Sydney: Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority.

28. Goss, P. (2018, February 8). Closing the gap in Indigenous literacy and numeracy? Not remotely – or in cities.
    Retrieved from: https://theconversation.com/closing-the-gap-in-indigenous-literacy-and-numeracy-not-remotely-or-in-cities-88704; Australia Productivity Commission. (2016).
    Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2016. Melbourne: Productivity Commission.
29. Australian Government. (2018). Education. Retrieved from Closing the Gap: https://closingthegap.pmc.gov.au/education
30. First Languages Australia. (2018). Nintiringanyi: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Teaching and Employment Strategy.
    Canberra: First Languages Australia and the Australian Government Department of Communication and the Arts.

At a national level, Year nine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are on average three years behind non-Indigenous students in numeracy, 3.4 years behind in reading, and 4.2 years behind in writing.[31] These performance gaps increase for children in remote locations. Year nine remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are 4.1 years behind metropolitan non-Indigenous students in numeracy, 4.6 years behind in reading, and six years behind in writing. Very remote Year nine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are still further behind – 7.7 years behind in writing.[32]

Attendance rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are lower at all levels of schooling and attendance rates decrease as children get older, as depicted in Figure 8. The gap in attendance rates increases for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with remoteness. The attendance rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in very remote areas is 65 percent.

The attendance gap starts early, with 87 percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolled in an early childhood education program the year before full-time schooling, compared with 98 percent of non-Indigenous children.[33]

Figure 8: School attendance rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
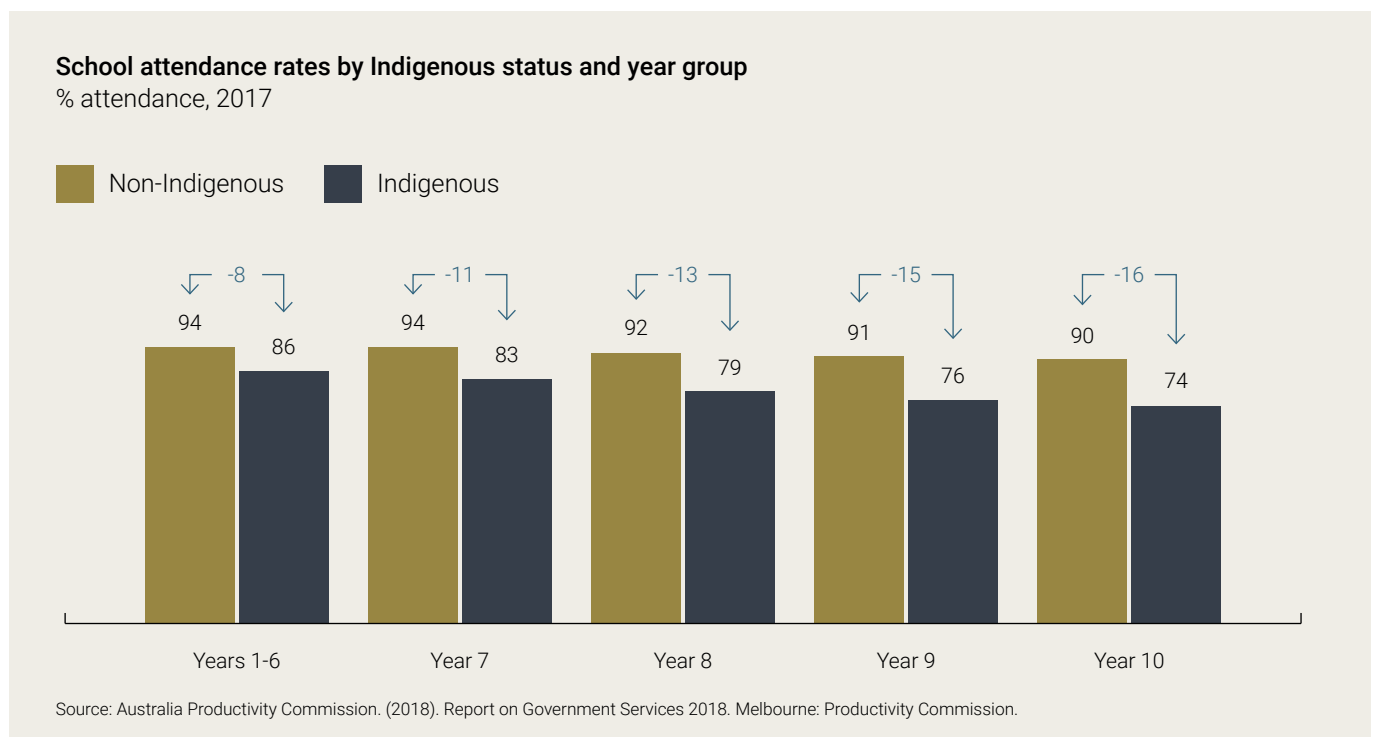
School attendance rates by Indigenous status and year group
% attendance, 2017

Source: Australia Productivity Commission. (2018). Report on Government Services 2018. Melbourne: Productivity Commission.

31. Goss, P. (2018, February 8). Closing the gap in Indigenous literacy and numeracy? Not remotely – or in cities.
   Retrieved from: https://theconversation.com/closing-the-gap-in-indigenous-literacy-and-numeracy-not-remotely-or-in-cities-88704
32. Goss, P. (2018, February 8). Closing the gap in Indigenous literacy and numeracy? Not remotely – or in cities.
   Retrieved from: https://theconversation.com/closing-the-gap-in-indigenous-literacy-and-numeracy-not-remotely-or-in-cities-88704
33. AIHW. (2017). Closing the Gap targets: 2017 analysis of progress and key drivers of change. Cat. no. IHW 193

Educational attainment rates are lower for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged 20 to 24 years old compared to the general population, as shown in Figure 9. The attainment rate decreases for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people living in rural areas, with approximately 34 percent attaining a Year 12 qualification or equivalent.[34]

Figure 9: Educational attainment rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Educational attainment by indigenous status, 20-24 years old
% , 2017

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2017, October 17). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Census: Education.
Retrieved from: https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mediareleasesbyReleaseDate/3DBA1B3973A0286ACA258148000D0DB8?OpenDocument

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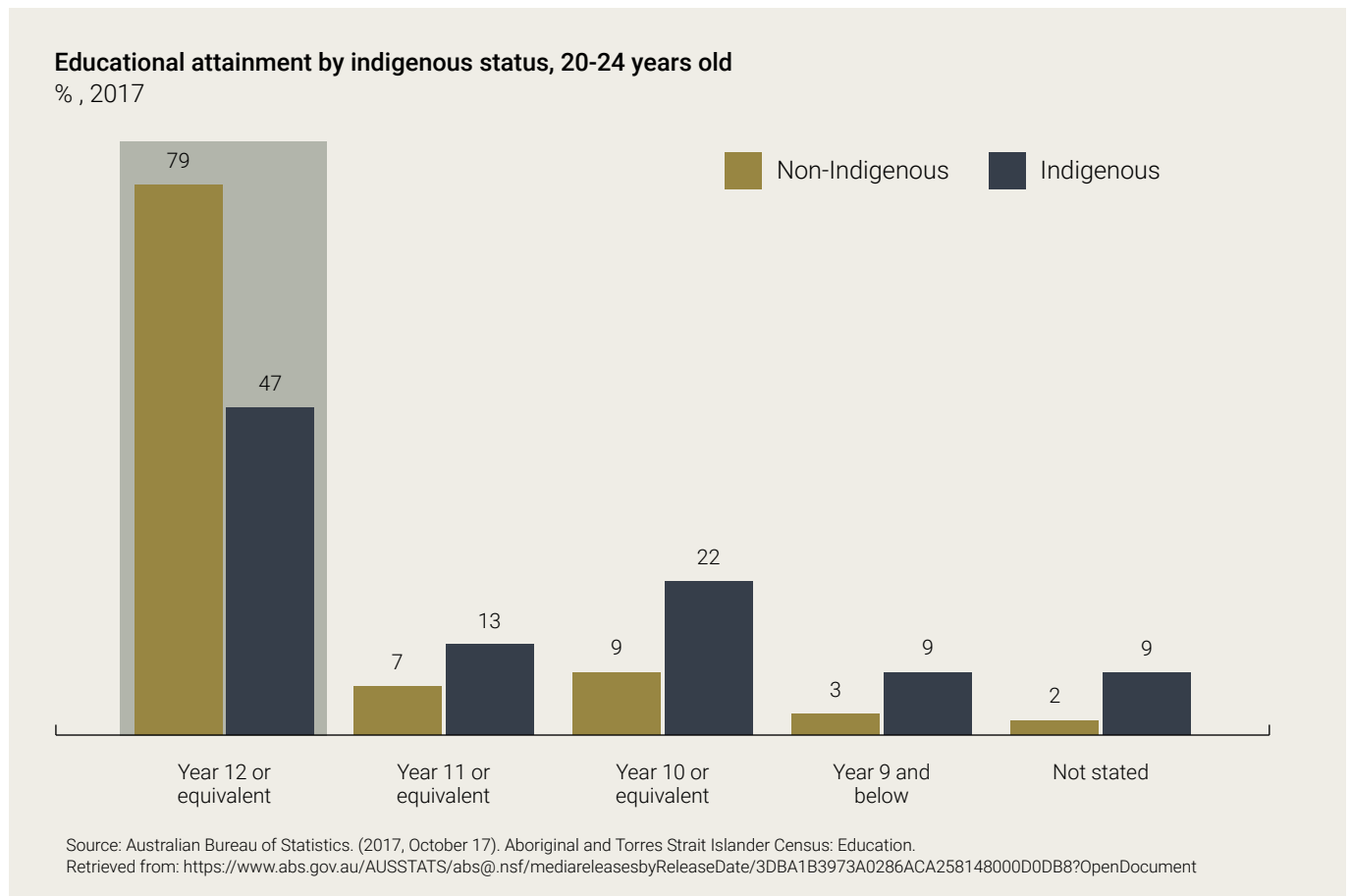
34. An urban area is generally defined as a population cluster of at least 1,000 usual residents. Rural areas generally have populations of 200 to 999 people or less. Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2017, October 31). 2071.0 - Census of Population and Housing: Reflecting Australia - Stories from the Census, 2016. Retrieved from: https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/2071.0~2016~Main%20Features~Aboriginal%20and%20Torres%20Strait%20islander%20Population%20Article~12

4. Ecosystem of support

Ecosystem overview

There are many stakeholders involved in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education across Australia, including but not limited to:

- Federal Government agencies related to education and training, Indigenous affairs, child and family services, health, employment and income support that develop federal policy, national partnerships and programs, and allocate funding to national initiatives, state agencies and other federally-funded bodies;

- The education and training systems, including State Government departments, government and non-government schools and state vocational education providers (such as TAFEs), responsible for education and training policy and delivery;

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and community members that govern, operate or support education services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people;

- Other government agencies and third-party service providers (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations), such as Indigenous affairs, child protection, disability and health services, responsible for providing services to support the engagement, participation and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in education;

- Policy and advocacy groups (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations) that undertake research, advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, including peak bodies and associations;

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people who attend formal education settings, and their families.

There are several types of services and supports available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families throughout the stages of education. Some of these supports are specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, and others are services that they can access because they are more likely to meet other indicators of vulnerability. Specific supports depend upon factors such as demographic profile, geographical location, and state education policies. Figure 10 summarises these types of activities.
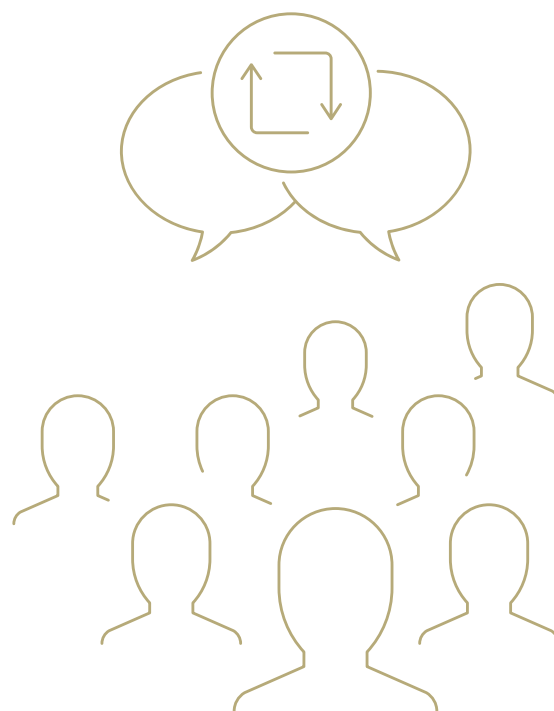
There are various schooling models that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including public schools, specialist independent schools that serve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and flexi or alternative schools that serve significant numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.[35] Melbourne Indigenous Transition School (MITS), for example, is a new independent school that accepts a small number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and supports them through a specialist Year seven school and boarding facility in order to provide choice and opportunity for those students who wish to attend secondary school in Melbourne.[36] Another model of a specialist school, Gawura, is described in Section 7.

Figure 10: Examples of the types of activity to support the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Early childhood education	School education	Transition from school
• Free or subsidised early childhood education and care for 0 to 2 year olds e.g. playgroups • Free or subsidised early childhood education and care in the two years before school • Support for transition to primary school • Integrated early years services (early childhood, material and child health and family support services) e.g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child and Family Centres • Parenting initiatives that help caregivers support children's early learning and development	• Effective teaching and intensive learning support • Attendance, extracurricular and holistic student support programs including health and wellbeing, student voice, sports, arts • Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language and cultural programs • School and community engagement initiatives; partnerships with and initiatives / school governance led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations • Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, teaching and support staff and staff development initiatives • Specialist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schools • Financial support e.g. Abstudy, scholarships • Mentoring programs • Support for transition from primary to secondary school • Capacity building for staff to support the learning, well-being and cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children	• University transition programs and initiatives • Employment and pathways support (including mentoring, cadetships, traineeships and vocational education) • Alternative learning programs (based and not based in schools) • Mentoring programs • Financial support e.g. Abstudy, scholarships

35. Flexi-schools support young people who have been excluded from mainstream education to re-engage with education. Shay, M. and Lampert, J. (2018, June 14). How flexischools could help close the gap in Indigenous education. Retrieved from: https://theconversation.com/how-flexischools-could-help-close-the-gap-in-indigenous-education-98013
36. MITS. (2018). Melbourne Indigenous Transition School 2018 Annual Report. Retrieved from: https://www.mits.vic.edu.au/annual-reports

There are variations in the policy, processes and activities of education support provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children between and within geographical locations in each state and territory.

Victoria's Aboriginal Education Plan, entitled Marrung, was developed in consultation with key Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and incorporates system enablers such as cultural inclusivity, community engagement and professional leadership as well as excellence in teaching, learning and development across early childhood, school and higher education and skills as depicted in Figure 11. Section 7 contains further information about Marrung.

Figure 11: Overview of outcomes and actions in Marrung, Victoria's Aboriginal Education Plan 2016-2026

Key System Enablers		
Positive climate for learning & development	**Outcomes** • Koorie children and learners of all ages are strong in their identity within all services • All Victorians understand and respect Koorie culture and history	**Actions** 1. We will improve the cultural inclusivity of service providers 2. We will support sectors to enhance learners' understanding of Koorie culture and history
Community engagement in learning & development	**Outcome** • Services and Koorie communities work together on local, place-based approaches to improving learning outcomes	**Actions** 3. We will increase opportunities for Koorie people to participate in decision making that affects them
A culture of professional leadership	**Outcome** • Success for Koorie Victorians is core business for all educational leaders	**Actions** 4. We will further develop our leaders in the early childhood, schools and VET sectors

Excellence in Teaching, Learning and Development		
Early childhood	**Outcomes** • Young Koorie children are on track in their health, development and wellbeing • The early learning experience for Koorie children sets them up for life	**Actions** 5. We will further support Koorie parents as first educators of their children 6. We wil improve access to and participation in early childhood services including MCH, supported playgroups and kindergarten programs
Schools	**Outcome** • Koorie students engage fully throughout their schooling years, and gain the knowledge and skills to excel at Year 12 or its equivalent	**Actions** 7. We will support schools to better support their Koorie students
Higher education and skills	**Outcomes** • Koorie learners transition successfully into further education and development • Koorie people have opportunities to access education at all stages of life	**Actions** 8. We will provide improved support for all Koorie learners undertaking further education and training

Source: Victorian Department of Education and Training. (2016). Marrung: Aboriginal Education Plan 2016-2026. Melbourne: State of Victoria

Gaps and issues

Recent reviews and reports identify the following key system gaps and issues in the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

● *System does not support the learning needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*

Recent reviews acknowledge the learning needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are not being met shown by no consistent improvement in the literacy and numeracy achievement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.[37] There are complex causes behind this lack of improvement and the persistent gap in achievement between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-Indigenous students.

Recent reports highlight the need to focus on effective teachers and teaching. Schools with higher proportions of disadvantaged students often report difficulties in attracting and retaining educators who have the skills, knowledge and capabilities to appropriately meet the learning needs of these students.[38] Teachers also require more specialist training to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, especially those who may be English as an additional language learners.[39]

● *System does not support the cultural identity and cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*

Early childhood and school education systems around the world and in Australia often fail to fully address the culturally-specific needs of Indigenous children[40] and the effects of racism on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.[41] This may be through a lack of general staff capability as well as a lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, language and culture programs.

Systems often fail to facilitate comprehensive cultural knowledge and language education programs as part of standard classroom teaching.[42] The task to implement effective and sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language and cultural education programs in schools is significant and complex. Even with a policy regime for this work to occur, its implementation is often challenging, and many programs fail to live up to the aspirations of communities due to under-resourcing, lack of principal support, limited opportunities for teachers to undertake language training, too few fluent speakers and lack of language resources.[43] Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives on Australian and Aboriginal Australian history are often not meaningfully included in the curriculum.[44] Cultural practices are also seldom recognised in schools. For example, few schools recognise what cultural initiation means for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men.

These issues are linked to the small number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators. Growth in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers is low and their representation is far lower than that of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders representing one percent of the teacher workforce in Australia, compared to 5.3 percent of students identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.[45]

In addition to the recruitment and development of more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators, more comprehensive professional development for educators working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is needed, including specialist training in cultural knowledge and responsiveness which needs to reflect the local community needs and culture.[46]

● *Too many schools do not successfully prioritise engagement with parents and invest in creating culturally responsive spaces for families*

Some schools foster positive relationships with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.[47] However, there is little evidence across the system of sustained success in forging school interactions with parents to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student outcomes.[48]

37. Australia Productivity Commission. (2016). Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2016. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
38. Australia Productivity Commission. (2016). Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2016. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
39. Australia Productivity Commission. (2016). Indigenous Primary School Achievement. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia; Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs. (2017). The power of education: from surviving to thriving - educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Canberra: The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia.
40. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2017). Promising Practices in Supporting Success for Indigenous Students. Paris: OECD Publishing; Sydenham, E. (2019). Ensuring equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the early years. Melbourne: Early Childhood Australia and SNAICC.
41. Moodie, N., Maxwell, J., & Rudolph, S. (2019). The impact of racism on the schooling experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: A systematic review. Australian Educational Researcher, 46(2), 273–295.
42. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2017). Promising Practices in Supporting Success for Indigenous Students. Paris: OECD Publishing.
43. Lowe, K. and Giacon, J. (2019). Meeting community aspirations: The current state of Aboriginal language programs in NSW. Babel, 54(1 & 2), 46-49.
44. Lowe, K., & Yunkaporta, T. (2013). The inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content in the Australian National Curriculum: A cultural, cognitive and socio-political evaluation. Curriculum Perspectives, 33(1), 1-14.
45. Ernst and Young. (2017). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teacher 2015 Workforce Analysis. Canberra: More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSI).
46. Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. (2011). Doing Time - Time for Doing - Indigenous youth in the criminal justice system. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia; Sydenham, E. (2019). Ensuring equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the early years. Melbourne: Early Childhood Australia and SNAICC.
47. Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. (2011). Doing Time - Time for Doing - Indigenous youth in the criminal justice system. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
48. Lowe, K., Burgess, C., Harrison, N. & Vass, G. (2019). A systematic review of recent research on the importance of cultural programs in schools, school and community engagement and school leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. Melbourne: Social Ventures Australia.

There are many underlying personal, structural and philosophical barriers that negatively impact on the capacities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and schools and early learning services to establish collaborations that support students' learning.[49] If these can be overcome, the involvement of parents in supporting their children's academic learning can have a positive impact on student outcomes.[50] To do so, schools must become welcoming spaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations lack ownership over education policies and programs*

Many reviews of programs and initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples recommend mechanisms for increased community control, but there is little evidence that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have been given more influence over service delivery in their communities.[51]

The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), the national non-government peak body for interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, notes that "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ownership of services has been identified as a key factor in improving service access and participation, redressing the trust issues many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have with early education and care services, and improving outcomes for both children and the broader community."[52]

- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education policy is not responsive to context*

Education policy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is often not informed by context, with little differentiation given to settings with large Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolments compared to those in which students attend schools with few other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.[53] The intensity of services required in settings with students with more complex needs is also often not considered in policymaking, nor is consideration given to the lack of access to support services in remote and rural locations.[54]

- *The support system for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families is complex, fragmented and poorly funded*

Health, mental health, intergenerational trauma and distrust of western institutions can all affect positive educational outcomes. The support system for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families is complex, often insensitive to cultural needs and regularly inconsistent and misaligned across multiple agencies. Service delivery fragmentation, for example, can provide a barrier that prevents Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families from accessing services such as early childhood education and care, as it is difficult for early childhood education providers to provide adequately funded, flexible and holistic services that support children's needs across education, health and family support.[55]

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49. Lowe, K., Burgess, C., Harrison, N. & Vass, G. (2019). A systematic review of recent research on the importance of cultural programs in schools, school and community engagement and school leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. Melbourne: Social Ventures Australia.; Sydenham, E. (2019). Ensuring equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the early years. Melbourne: Early Childhood Australia and SNAICC.
50. Education Endowment Foundation. (2019). Evidence for Learning Teaching and Learning Toolkit: Education Endowment Foundation. Retrieved from https://evidenceforlearning.org.au/the-toolkits/the-teaching-and-learning-toolkit/full-toolkit/
51. Queensland Productivity Commission. (2017). Final Report: Service delivery in remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Brisbane: Queensland Productivity Commission.
52. Sydenham, E. (2019). Ensuring equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the early years. Melbourne: Early Childhood Australia and SNAICC.
53. Australia Productivity Commission. (2016). Indigenous Primary School Achievement. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
54. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2017). Closing the gap: 2017 analysis of progress and key drivers of change. Canberra: Australian Government.
55. Sydenham, E. (2019). Ensuring equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the early years. Melbourne: Early Childhood Australia and SNAICC.

Funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs is often insecure and ad hoc, making it difficult to sustain services.[56] Strategies to support language revival, for example, are often significantly under-funded.[57] Continuity and co-ordination of services is one of the key principles and practices that underpin successful programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.[58]

- *Data, research and evaluation of programs and practices is insufficient*

In 2016, it was estimated that less than 10 percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific programs are evaluated.[59] Evaluation of programs and policies that are effective in improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education outcomes has grown in recent years, but important gaps in the evidence base still exist. For example, independent, large-scale and longitudinal evaluations of education initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are not often available[60] and data regarding the factors which contribute to the gap in education outcomes is fragmented.[61] There is also limited research on alternative models of schooling for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, such as flexi-schools[62] and even less evidence on responses to intersectional issues, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with disability. Section 5 contains further information on evidence.

Student experience of the system

A child's vulnerability arises from the multiple experiences of adversity and exposures to harm, and limited access to and use of resources that support them to cope with and recover from this adversity.

The key risk and protective factors that may impact this cohort depend on the child's experience to date, including their level of engagement and support through their education. A student's experience may include cultural dislocation and experiences of racism; intergenerational trauma through colonisation and dislocation of families through removal; and experience of an education setting with poor understanding of their cultural background and needs.[63]

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are more likely to have fears about personal safety, drugs, bullying and discrimination than non-Indigenous young people in Australia. In a national survey of more than 24,000 young Australians, nearly one in 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people reported feeling very sad about their life overall, compared to one in 50 non-Indigenous youth. Around one in five said they felt either extremely or very concerned about suicide and discrimination, compared with around one in 10 non-Indigenous respondents. Housing stability was also a much bigger concern for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people than non-Indigenous young people.[64]

'In the old house Nan and me were a team. I did all the cooking and looked after the little ones and Nan did the cleaning and everything else. Our house was full of kids, cousins and noise. Nan welcomed everyone in that little house 'cos everyone needs a home and a family. Nan never had that so she tried to make it there, for anyone who needed it.

Lots of our family needed a place to stay, and there are not many safe places to go 'round here. When my uncle moved away for work we ended up with four more little cousins here. They nagged and screamed and got up in the night but I loved looking after them, I was good at it. Sometimes they looked at me like I was their unbreakable superhero. Other times I felt heavy with all the jobs, like I was dragging my body around to do cooking, shopping, bath-time, then more cooking, shopping, bath-time. Weed and booze made me feel light, like someone lifting a lead backpack off my shoulders.

I started getting to school late, never had time for homework, I'd nap during maths and get sent home for fighting at lunch. I got behind at school and no one cared, they just thought I wasn't trying, a lazy, bludger blackfulla. No one expected me to finish school anyway, so I stopped caring and stayed home helping Nan where I was wanted.'

– An extract from Binak's story (Binak means basket in Woiwurrung)

Koorie Youth Council. (2019). Ngaga-dji (hear me): Young voices creating change for justice. Melbourne: Koorie Youth Council.

56. Chaney, F. (2013). The Indigenous policy experience 1960 to 2012. Better Indigenous Policies: The Role of Evaluation. Canberra: Australia Productivity Commission.
57. Lowe, K. and Giacon, J. (2019). Meeting community aspirations: The current state of Aboriginal language programs in NSW. Babel, 54(1 & 2), 46-49.
58. Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. (2013). What works to overcome Indigenous disadvantage: key learnings and gaps in the evidence 2011-12.
    Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
59. Hudson, S. (2016). Mapping the Indigenous program and funding maze. Sydney: Centre for Independent Studies.
60. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2017). Closing the gap: 2017 analysis of progress and key drivers of change. Canberra: Australian Government.
61. Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs. (2017). The power of education: from surviving to thriving - educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
    students. Canberra: The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia.
62. Shay, M., & Heck, D. (2015). Alternative education engaging Indigenous young people: Flexi schooling in Queensland. The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education, 44(1), 37-47.
63. SNAICC, NATSILS and NFVPLS. (2017). Strong Families, Safe Kids: Family violence response and prevention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Melbourne:
    SNAICC – National Voice for our Children, National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Forum (NFVPLS) and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS).
64. Bullot, A. et. at. (2017). Mission Australia's 2017 Youth Survey Report. Sydney: Mission Australia.

Racism negatively impacts experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in several wide-reaching and life-long ways. Racism negatively impacts academic achievement, attitudes to language, emotional wellbeing, physical health, self-concept, school attendance, post-school pathways, and eventually school choice and parental engagement in schooling.[65]

In a recent study of New South Wales and Victorian school students, nearly 40 percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students report that they'd been racially discriminated against by their peers, 20 percent reported experiences of racial discrimination from their teachers and more than a third reported experiences of racial discrimination from wider society.[66]

'I would eradicate racism between black and white to build respect… It is a bit confusing growing up Aboriginal in this society because we are taught to be proud but lots of times we aren't really accepted, even when we try to be like them.' – 13 year-old Noongar young person

'Culture [is important], because I have a very spiritual connection with Aboriginal culture and it helps me as a person.' – 16 year-old Koori young person

'[I] need help from teachers, homework centres, mentors, family and most of all a lot of role models that are showing a lot of young kids like me that's they can be somebody.' – 12 year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young person

– The voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people from Western Australia

Commissioner for Children and Young People. (2018). It's like a big circle trap: Discussion paper on children and young people's vulnerability. Perth: Western Australia Commissioner for Children and Young People.

65. Moodie, N., Maxwell, J., & Rudolph, S. (2019). The impact of racism on the schooling experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: A systematic review. Australian Educational Researcher, 46(2), 273–295.
66. Priest, N. et. al. (2017). Findings from the 2017 Speak Out Against Racism (SOAR) student and staff surveys. Canberra: Australian National University.

5. Evidence on education programs and practices

Policies, programs and practices related to Indigenous education are not widely evaluated, both globally and in Australia.[67] Given the diverse nature of the contexts and the complexity of measuring multidimensional concepts of wellbeing and cultural learning, many studies on Indigenous education are understandably qualitative, small in scale and not longitudinal in nature.[68] Historically, collecting data and undertaking research was done without partnership with Indigenous peoples and organisations, and it was often used against their interests, further limiting the quantity and quality of evaluation of Indigenous education.[69]

Two recent projects have aimed to build more systematic research and evidence on Indigenous education: one undertaken by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and one undertaken by a consortium of Australian academics. These projects and their findings are described below.

International evidence

In 2017, the OECD undertook a global study on Indigenous education to identify promising strategies, policies, programs and practices to support improved learning outcomes for Indigenous students; build an empirical evidence base on what works to better support Indigenous students to succeed in education; and to assist provinces and territories to learn from one another to accelerate progress in closing education gaps for Indigenous students. The study focused on four Canadian provinces and two territories, with New Zealand and Queensland, Australia also participating.

The study found that:

- There is a clear will and strong commitment among stakeholders at every level to improve education outcomes for Indigenous students;
- Many promising practices are evident, and a number of schools achieve positive outcomes for Indigenous students;
- Practices that benefit Indigenous students also benefit non-Indigenous students with all benefiting from high-quality, responsive teaching in combination with local

adaptions to curriculum; embedded local Indigenous values, history and cultural approaches; and safe and inclusive school environments;

- Achieving change at a system level requires deliberate, sustained effort including setting, measuring and reporting on targets and using reliable data to regularly monitor progress; taking multiple actions at both system and local levels; and persisting and adjusting efforts over a significant period.

Drawing on the promising policies and practices identified in the study, the OECD identified six system-level priorities for accelerating positive change in the educational experiences of Indigenous students:

1. Systematically monitoring the wellbeing of Indigenous students in schools;
2. Implementing deliberate efforts to increase the participation rates of Indigenous students, especially in early childhood education and the senior years of schooling;
3. Systematically monitoring and taking action at both central and local levels to support regular student attendance in school;
4. Providing high-quality early childhood education and care that is responsive to the needs of individual children and their families;
5. Supporting teachers and leaders to build their capabilities to deliver effective teaching and learning through preparation and ongoing professional development; and
6. Establishing positive relationships with families and working alongside them as partners to support children's education.

Drawing on the experiences and evidence of where improvements were achieved in Canada, New Zealand and Queensland, the OECD study identified a number of system-level priorities that support progress for Indigenous students and classified them according to likely impact on student outcomes and likely cost, as shown in Figure 12.

67. Hudson, S. (2016). Mapping the Indigenous program and funding maze. Sydney: Centre for Independent Studies; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2017). Promising Practices in Supporting Success for Indigenous Students. Paris: OECD Publishing.
68. Australia Productivity Commission. (2016). Indigenous Primary School Achievement. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia; Purdie, N., & Buckley, S. (2010). School Attendance and Retention of Indigenous Australian Students. Issues Paper No. 1. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.
69. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2017). Promising Practices in Supporting Success for Indigenous Students. Paris: OECD Publishing.

Figure 12: OECD's system-level priorities for supporting progress for Indigenous students by likely impact and cost
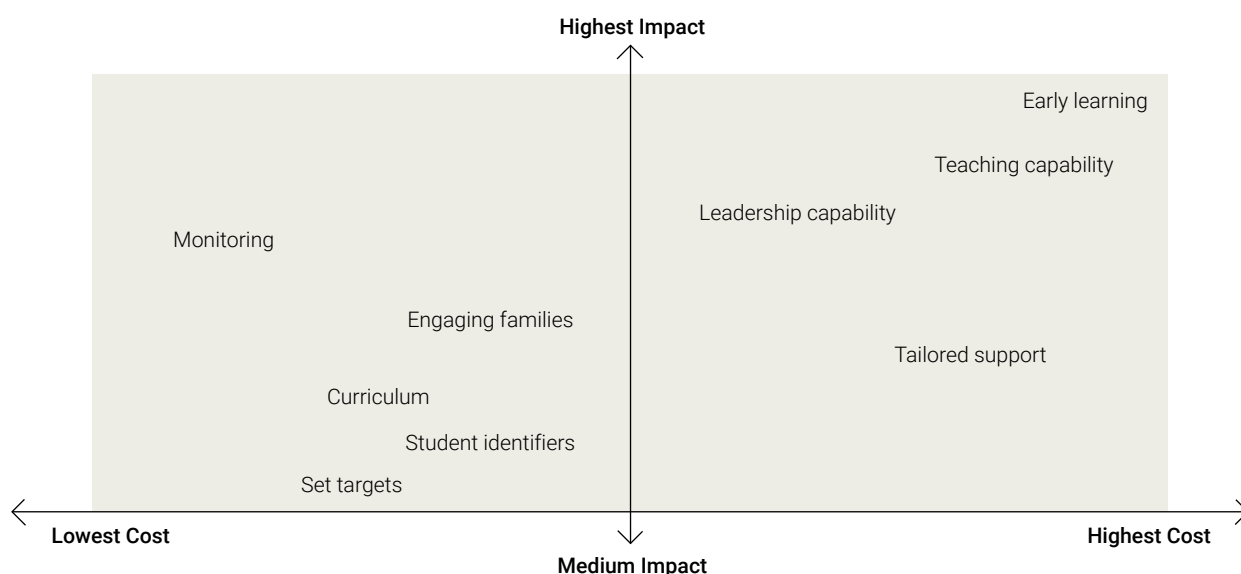
Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2017). Promising Practices in Supporting Success for Indigenous Students. Paris: OECD Publishing

While the combination of priorities will differ based on the context, the OECD identified three priorities that schools should focus on to boost education outcomes for Indigenous students:

1. High-quality and effective teaching, including teachers' expectations of students' capability, and deliberate selection of learning activities, curriculum content and assessment mechanisms to build confidence, competence and engagement in learning;

2. Engaging families in education by working with parents on goals for individual students and supporting parents to play an active role in their child's learning; and

3. Direct support for individual students through various mechanisms including Indigenous Support Workers and engaging the support and advice of Indigenous community leaders.

Figure 13 summarises the priorities the OECD would expect schools to consider to grow education outcomes for Indigenous students, classified according to likely impact on student outcomes and likely cost to implement in schools.

Figure 13: OECD's school-level priorities to boost education outcomes for Indigenous students by likely impact and cost
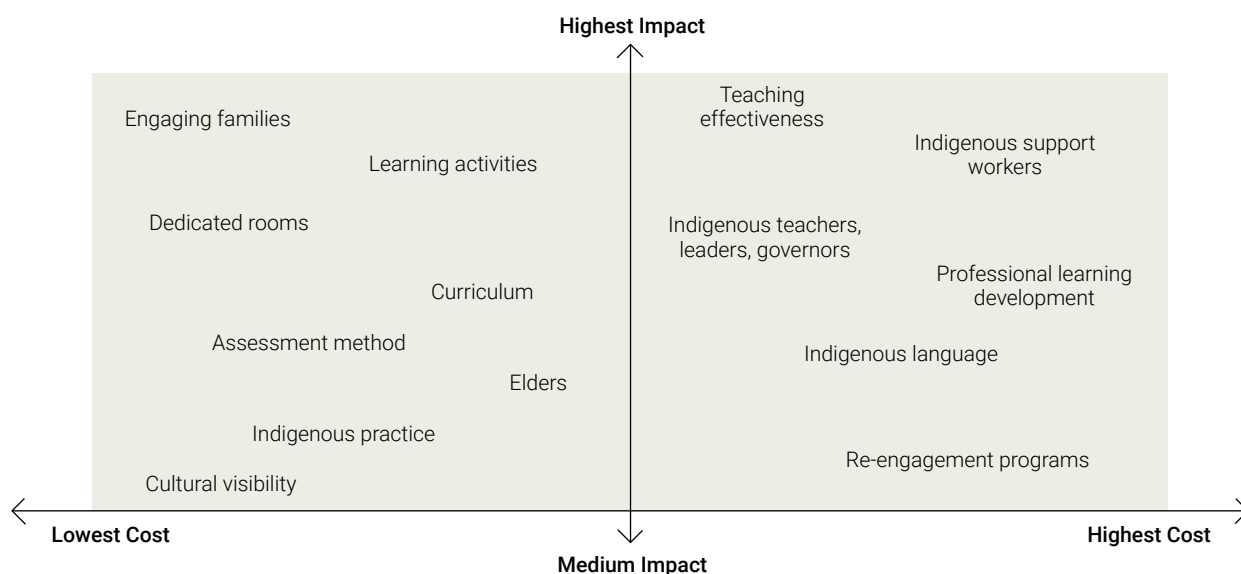
Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2017). Promising Practices in Supporting Success for Indigenous Students. Paris: OECD Publishing.

Australian evidence

Over the period of 2016-2019, a team of 13 senior Australian academics across 10 universities undertook a series of systematic reviews of 10 critical areas of Indigenous education across Australia as part of the 'Aboriginal Voices' project. The project examined over 13,000 studies from educational and social sciences research literature to gain an understanding of the effective policies, practices and structures that were seen to enhance the engagement of Indigenous students in Australian schools.[70]

As part of an evidence scan commissioned by Social Ventures Australia for this project, members of the 'Aboriginal Voices' research team summarised the systematic literature review of three critical areas of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education as described in Table 1.[71] The 'Aboriginal Voices' research project highlights the critical importance of culture and identity in relation to education, and the need for a whole school approach to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.[72]

Table 1: Summary of an evidence scan on three critical areas of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education[73]

Area of education	Summary findings from the systematic review of research literature
The importance of language and cultural programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students The review investigated the cultural, social and educational impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who have had the opportunity to access school-based Indigenous languages and/or cultural programs.	• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities expressed their aspirations for their language and cultural programs to be made available through schools; • Access to cultural programs deepened students' learning, appreciation and understanding of local knowledge and beliefs; • Access to quality programs deepened students' connectedness to kin and Elders, local knowledge and the Dreaming; • That Elders want school programs to be developed that meet the cultural and educational aspirations of families.
School and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community engagement This review looked at the ways in which schools have, often unsuccessfully, sought to establish stronger ties with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents. It provides insights into the reasons why schools have often failed to meet their own and the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family's expectations for authentic, purposeful and productive interactions.	• Concerns that parental engagement was to primarily enforce contested school programs and interactions between students and the school; • That there was little evidence of sustained success in forging school interactions with parents; • That there was little available evidence that current engagement programs had improved student outcomes; • That school and community engagement was dependent on the co-leadership of families and the school; • That families looked for evidence of sustained, authentic and purposeful collaboration before they were prepared to actively participate.
School leadership and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student outcomes This review looked to provide evidence of the qualities and attributes of school leaders charged with leading schools and to review their impact on effecting substantive change in how these schools meet the unique needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.	• That leaders need to empower communities to be actively involved in schools; • That leadership requires principals to share power with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, such that they are enabled to be actively involved in the school's programs; • That a new school leadership selection criterion needs to be established that focuses attention on the leadership skills required to lead a school; • Principals need to be curriculum and pedagogic leaders to affect classroom practice; • That principals need to be given the skills to negotiate the space between management, policy and school leadership.

70. Lowe, K., C. Tennent, J. Guenther, N. Harrison, N. Moodie, G. Vass and C. Burgess (2019). "'Aboriginal Voices': An overview of the methodology applied in the systematic review of recent research across ten key areas of Australian Indigenous education." Australian Educational Researcher: 17.
71. Lowe, K., Burgess, C., Harrison, N. & Vass, G. (2019). A systematic review of recent research on the importance of cultural programs in schools, school and community engagement and school leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. Melbourne: Social Ventures Australia.
72. Lowe, K., C. Tennent, J. Guenther, N. Harrison, N. Moodie, G. Vass and C. Burgess (2019). "'Aboriginal Voices': An overview of the methodology applied in the systematic review of recent research across ten key areas of Australian Indigenous education." Australian Educational Researcher: 17.
73. Lowe, K., Burgess, C., Harrison, N. & Vass, G. (2019). A systematic review of recent research on the importance of cultural programs in schools, school and community engagement and school leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. Melbourne: Social Ventures Australia.

6. Drivers of better outcomes

Driver tree

SVA's Education Driver Tree describes the key drivers of better educational outcomes for all children (see Appendix on page 42). These drivers are designed to apply across settings and cohorts of students. The SVA Education Driver Tree for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (outlined on page 7) builds from the general SVA Education Driver Tree to identify drivers of educational outcomes that are specific for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are experiencing vulnerability.

The SVA Education Driver Tree for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children includes three groups of drivers:

- **Home and community:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experiencing vulnerability may experience increased risk factors and the absence of protective factors in their home and community environment caused by cultural dislocation, family dislocation and experience of racism.[74] Children need strong home and community support for learning and development including support for learning aspirations, cultural identity, connection to Country, and social and cultural capital.

- **System:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and their families, may have learning, wellbeing and cultural needs that require additional support from the health, education and social services systems and the system must support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' self-determination.

- **Formal education:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families, may have had negative experiences of school and or may have experienced vulnerability that makes engagement with school and learning more difficult, necessitating formal education to provide additional support including support for learning needs and cultural identity.

The drivers illustrate there are many factors that need to work in combination to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. A holistic approach is needed across home, community, the system and schools. Schools must take a whole school approach – including curriculum and pedagogy, teachers, leadership, cultural education, community engagement, student agency and wellbeing support – to address the gap in outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-Indigenous students.[75] The critical importance of culture and identity must be at the centre of this work (as described in Figure 2).

While the home and community environment and system supports are critical elements to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, as an education perspective paper, this paper primarily focuses on examples from formal education due to SVA's experience in this area.

74. SNAICC, NATSILS and NFVPLS. (2017). Strong Families, Safe Kids: Family violence response and prevention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Melbourne: SNAICC – National Voice for our Children, National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Forum (NFVPLS) and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS).
75. Lowe, K., C. Tennent, J. Guenther, N. Harrison, N. Moodie, G. Vass and C. Burgess (2019). "'Aboriginal Voices': An overview of the methodology applied in the systematic review of recent research across ten key areas of Australian Indigenous education." Australian Educational Researcher: 17.

Home and community drivers

Children and young people need supportive home and community environments that are conducive to engaging in education. A home environment that supports engagement in education is one that provides for a child's basic health and housing needs including sufficient nutrition, sleep, and exercise. These foundational needs contribute to overall wellbeing, which is linked to academic achievement.[76] Protective factors related to family and household such as attachment to family, competent and stable care, adequate family income and housing are critical to early childhood development.[77]

Identity, belonging and social and cultural capital are also important to child development and overall wellbeing. Development of identity and a sense of belonging, especially cultural identity and belonging, is important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. There is a positive relationship between access to land, language and culture and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person's wellbeing.[78]

Opportunities to build social and cultural capital through extracurricular, community and cultural activities are likewise critical to development and wellbeing and thus ability to successfully engage in education.

Kinship, community environments and networks are important protective factors in child development, including supportive relationships, cultural networks, participation in community activities and access to community services.[79]

Support for educational aspirations and learning needs are important drivers of successful engagement in education. A parent who supports educational aspirations is a factor linked to school engagement.[80] The quality of the home learning environment has a long-term impact on academic achievement.[81] Parents can support the learning of children in the home through various interactions including reading, homework support, computer usage, expressive play and enrichment outings.

Young people experiencing vulnerability may require additional support to remain engaged in school or re-engage in another learning pathway during times of increased risk of disengagement, such as transitioning to primary school, transitioning to secondary school and transitioning from secondary school. This kind of support may involve outreach, early intervention, support services, and counselling.[82]

76. Kern, M. L., Waters, L. E., Adler, A., & White, M. A. (2015). A multidimensional approach to measuring well-being in students: Application of the PERMA framework. The journal of positive psychology, 10(3), 262-271.
77. Emerson, L., Fox, S. & Smith, C. 2015, Good Beginnings: Getting it right in the early years, The Lowitja Institute, Melbourne.
78. Biddle, N., & Swee, H. (2012). The Relationship between wellbeing and Indigenous land, language and culture in Australia. Australian Geographer, 43(3), 215-232.
79. Emerson, L., Fox, S. & Smith, C. 2015, Good Beginnings: Getting it right in the early years, The Lowitja Institute, Melbourne.
80. Polidano, C., Hanel, B., & Buddlemeyer, H. (2013). Explaining the socio-economic status school completion gap. Education Economics, 21(3), 230-247
81. Sammons, P., Toth, K., & Sylva, K. (2015). Pre-school and early home learning effects on A-level outcomes. London: Department for Education.
82. Balfanz, R., Herzog, L., & Mac Iver, D. J. (2007). Preventing student disengagement and keeping students on the graduation path in urban middle-grades schools: Early identification and effective interventions. Educational Psychologist, 42(4), 223-235.

System drivers

As many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who experience vulnerability have complex needs, the system plays a crucial role to ensure integrated and targeted service delivery at the nexus of education, training, health, family, Indigenous Affairs and other related services.

Successful systems are configured to identify and respond to the personal and cultural needs required to successfully engage in education. Initiatives should be targeted and specifically address these needs, both socially and practically. In the health sector, for example, specific health service information is available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at Australian Indigenous Health*Info*Net.[83]

In relation to education, the system must facilitate accessible and culturally responsive education and invest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, knowledge and cultural education. Indigenous peoples have the right to access an education that respects and promotes their own culture and languages.[84]

The system must ensure the workforce has the capacity and capability to deliver this kind of education, including the recruitment, development and promotion of qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. There is a link between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and children's engagement in schools. For example, the presence of a preschool worker who identifies as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander working in the area where a child lives significantly increases attendance.[85] All staff working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples need to respect and understand local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and knowledge.[86]

The system must also value the agency of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities in educational decision-making and governance. International and local evidence indicates that self-determination is essential to making decisions in the best interests of Indigenous children.[87] Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ownership of early learning services, for example, is a key factor in improving service access and participation.[88]

Community involvement and engagement in both the development and delivery of programs are a key principle of successful programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.[89]

An effective system invests in adequate and integrated health, family and welfare services to support learning, wellbeing and cultural needs. Successful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policies and programs involve holistic and integrated approaches.[90] Provision of health and wellbeing services in conjunction with school programs is critical for school retention, in communities in which there are high levels of poverty, family breakdown, and unemployment.[91]

Holistic programs that address social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children by strengthening cultural connectedness and identity, providing opportunities for individual and family healing, and building skills to manage pain and loss can have large benefits for both individuals and society. It is estimated that the Healing Foundation's program run at the Aboriginal and Islander Independent Community School (known as the Murri School) provides $8.85 return for every additional dollar invested.[92]

An effective system monitors education, wellbeing and cultural outcomes for students not only to identify and provide additional support for these children, but also to monitor, share and improve upon policies and practices. A continuous, collaborative, systematic process of innovation and evaluation is key in building a high-quality and accepted evidence base in Indigenous education.[93]

83. Edith Cowan University. (n.d). Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet website. Retrieved from: https://healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/
84. United Nations. (2017). United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Geneva: United Nations.
85. Biddle, N. (2007). Indigenous Australians and preschool education: Who is attending? Australian Journal of Early Childhood, 32(3), 9–16.
86. Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. (2013). What works to overcome Indigenous disadvantage: key learnings and gaps in the evidence 2011-12. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
87. See for example Victorian Commission for Children and Young People. (2016). Always was, always will be Koori children: Systemic inquiry into services provided to Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care in Victoria. Melbourne: Victorian Commission for Children and Young People and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2017). Promising Practices in Supporting Success for Indigenous Students. Paris: OECD Publishing.
88. Sydenham, E. (2019). Ensuring equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the early years. Melbourne: Early Childhood Australia and SNAICC.
89. Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. (2013). What works to overcome Indigenous disadvantage: key learnings and gaps in the evidence 2011-12. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
90. Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. (2013). What works to overcome Indigenous disadvantage: key learnings and gaps in the evidence 2011-12. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
91. Lamb, S., Walstab, A., Teese, R., Vickers, M., & Rumberger, R. (2004). Staying on at school: Improving student retention in Australia. Brisbane: Queensland Department of Education and the Arts
92. Deloitte Access Economics. (2017). Cost Benefit Analysis of the Murri School Healing Program. Canberra: The Healing Foundation.
93. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2017). Promising Practices in Supporting Success for Indigenous Students. Paris: OECD Publishing.

Formal education drivers

Effectiveness of teaching is one of the highest impact strategies to improve education outcomes for Indigenous students around the world, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.[94] This is particularly important in the fundamental areas of literacy and numeracy. Teacher capability and teaching practice needs to respond to learning, wellbeing and cultural needs of children. A teacher's expectations of students' capability and success are critical to student progress in learning.[95] Deliberate learning activities, customised curriculum content, assessment mechanisms and learning support can all be used to improve learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and to build their confidence and competence.[96]

Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and languages should be valued and taught to all students in partnership with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language and cultural programs can enhance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' sense of identity and connectedness, wellbeing and academic achievement.[97] It is important that this material is connected into an overall, meaningful narrative on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and is not just fragments of content spread throughout the curriculum.[98] Cultural knowledge and perspectives should not only be embedded in the curriculum content, they should also be assessed as a critical and valued part of learning for all students. Cultural knowledge and language programs should leverage the cultural expertise of students, staff, parents and community members. They must have the strong support of school leadership and the local communities and be resourced adequately to support the training of language proficient teachers and the development of language resources.[99]

High-performing schools have effective, accomplished school leaders.[100] Effective leaders have the curriculum and pedagogic expertise to lead staff to affect change in classroom practice and in turn increase student learning.[101] Leaders of schools with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students should also engage with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, school networks and support services to implement evidence-informed support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.[102]

Schools should celebrate cultural identity and foster a sense of connectedness with local community, events, recognition of achievement, and a respect for the lands on which they are situated. When school leaders promote a safe, inclusive and stable learning environment in classrooms and through school culture, they create conditions for learning that are crucial for students that have experienced vulnerability.[103] One way to foster this kind of school culture is through valuing student voice. Student participation through initiatives related to student voice, student engagement or student-centeredness is positively associated with wellbeing at school.[104] Educators that are critically aware of the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can respond to their needs.

Schools around the world that achieve sustained improvements for Indigenous students recognise the co-leadership role of parents, leaders and other community members and actively build relationships with these stakeholders.[105] Schools should proactively and genuinely engage with parents and community members and ensure communication is sensitive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. This involves school leaders sharing power with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to enable them to be actively involved in the school.[106]

94. Australia Productivity Commission. (2016). Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2016. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2017). Promising Practices in Supporting Success for Indigenous Students. Paris: OECD Publishing.
95. Hattie, J. (2009). Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement. London: Routledge.
96. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2017). Promising Practices in Supporting Success for Indigenous Students. Paris: OECD Publishing.
97. Lowe, K., Burgess, C., Harrison, N. & Vass, G. (2019). A systematic review of recent research on the importance of cultural programs in schools, school and community engagement and school leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. Melbourne: Social Ventures Australia.
98. Harrison, N., Tennent, C., Vass, G., Guenther, J., Lowe, K., & Moodie, N. (2019). Curriculum and learning in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education: A systematic review. The Australian Educational Researcher, 46(2), 233-251.
99. Lowe, K. and Giacon, J. (2019). Meeting community aspirations: The current state of Aboriginal language programs in NSW. Babel, 54(1 & 2), 46-49.
100. Day, C. et al. (2010). Ten strong claims about successful school leadership. Nottingham: National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services.
101. Robinson, V. M. J., Lloyd, C. A., & Rowe, K. J. (2008). The impact of leadership on student outcomes: An analysis of the differential effects of leadership types. Educational Administration Quarterly, 44(5), 635-674.
102. Lowe, K., Burgess, C., Harrison, N. & Vass, G. (2019). A systematic review of recent research on the importance of cultural programs in schools, school and community engagement and school leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. Melbourne: Social Ventures Australia.
103. ARACY. (2018). Report Card 2018: The wellbeing of young Australians. Canberra: Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth.
104. Graham, A. et. al. (2018). Improving Wellbeing through Student Participation at School: Executive Summary. Lismore: Southern Cross University.
105. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2017). Promising Practices in Supporting Success for Indigenous Students. Paris: OECD Publishing.
106. Lowe, K., Burgess, C., Harrison, N. & Vass, G. (2019). A systematic review of recent research on the importance of cultural programs in schools, school and community engagement and school leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. Melbourne: Social Ventures Australia.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families look for evidence of sustained, authentic and purposeful collaboration before they are prepared to actively participate in engagement activities.[107] Collaborative initiatives focused on valued educational, language and cultural programs, for example, have a high impact on staff and students.[108] Parent and teaching interventions, teacher-designed interactive homework with parents, and strategies to access family or community knowledge are school-home connections that have the biggest influences on student achievement.[109]

Schools should offer additional support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experiencing vulnerability during key transitions including between early learning, primary to secondary school, post school and study, and different schools and communities. A study of child protection data in Queensland found that school transitions – when children either commence primary school or move from primary to secondary school – are times when children are likely to experience maltreatment.[110]

Social exclusion factors may affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school-leavers in the transition to employment, such as labour market discrimination, the relatively higher cost of education to those of lower socioeconomic status, caring responsibilities, and intergenerational poverty.[111]

For transition to primary school, schools should offer additional support which might involve assistance for language and cognitive development, relationship building, cultural competence, the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, strong relationships between early learning centers and schools, and support for families.[112] For transition from secondary school, this additional support might involve additional careers education and counselling, guided opportunities for work experience, in-school offerings of vocational education and transition mentoring.[113]

107. Lowe, K., Burgess, C., Harrison, N. & Vass, G. (2019). A systematic review of recent research on the importance of cultural programs in schools, school and community engagement and school leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. Melbourne: Social Ventures Australia.
108. Lowe, K., Burgess, C., Harrison, N. & Vass, G. (2019). A systematic review of recent research on the importance of cultural programs in schools, school and community engagement and school leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. Melbourne: Social Ventures Australia.
109. Robinson, V. M., Hohepa, M., & Lloyd, C. (2009). School leadership and student outcomes: Identifying what works and why. Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration [BES]. Wellington: New Zealand Ministry of Education.
110. Stewart, A., Livingston, M., & Dennison, S. (2008). Transitions and turning points: Examining the links between child maltreatment and juvenile offending. Child Abuse & Neglect, 32(1), 51-66.
111. Hunter, B.H. (2010). Pathways for Indigenous School Leavers to Undertake Training or Gain Employment, Resource sheet no. 2, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
112. Sydenham, E. (2019). Ensuring equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the early years. Melbourne: Early Childhood Australia and SNAICC.
113. Lamb, S., Walstab, A., Teese, R., Vickers, M., & Rumberger, R. (2004). Staying on at school: Improving student retention in Australia. Brisbane: Queensland Department of Education and the Arts; Liu, S. H., & Nguyen, N. (2011). Successful Youth Transitions: Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth. Briefing Paper 25. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research; Victorian Ombudsman. (2017). Investigation into Victorian government school expulsions. Melbourne: Victorian Ombudsman.

7. Drivers in action

This section provides examples of promising programs and practices that support the educational needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and indicates how that activity addresses one or more of the drivers of better educational outcomes.

Home and community drivers in action

AIME

An alumnus of SVA ventures

- **Primary driver**
  - Home/Community: Learning needs and interests are supported (e.g. tutoring, homework support)
- **Secondary driver**
  - Home/Community: Opportunities to build social and cultural capital and belonging (e.g. extracurricular, community and cultural activities)
  - Home/Community: Development of child's identity and sense of belonging is supported including cultural identity

AIME is an educational program founded in 2005 by Jack Manning Bancroft, a then 19 year old university student. AIME gives Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander high school students the skills, opportunities, belief and confidence to finish school at the same rate as their peers.

By matching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander high school students with university student mentors (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous mentors), AIME successfully supports the students to finish high school. AIME also connects students with post Year 12 opportunities, including further education and employment.

The children and young people that AIME initially worked with told them that the systems were biased against them, and without 'imagination' in education, they were forever forced to the margins. AIME created an Imagination Curriculum, with the lens that these young people are not the problem, they are the solution.

Over 15 years, in partnership with the government, universities, schools, corporates and giving Australians, AIME has played a part in shifting the narrative for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people as follows:

- AIME has a tried-and-tested and repeatable Imagination Curriculum which consists of 400 x one-hour modules that address topics such as shame, failure, identity, resilience and forgiveness that unlock children's psychological frameworks, help achieve educational parity and accelerate change.
- Using the Imagination Curriculum, AIME has scaled their mentoring programs from one school, working with 25 mentees in 2005 to 356 schools, working with

6,827 mentees in 2018.[114] Young people that AIME have worked with have completed Year 12 at higher rates than their non-Indigenous counterparts, and landed in successful post-secondary pathways (university, employment or further training) at approximately the same rate as non-Indigenous Australians.[115]

- AIME has created the largest volunteering movement of university students in Australia's history[116], with 12,948+ mentor-years donated since 2005. Over 90 percent of AIME's mentors reported that AIME has enhanced their university experience, with 84 percent reporting that AIME has significantly improved the way they connect with and serve their local communities.[117]

- Every $1 invested into AIME resulting in $8.9 worth direct economic benefit to the Australian economy.[118]

Over the next three years, AIME has committed to: delivering a world-class Indigenous Australian AIME program by working directly with over 6,500 Indigenous children and young people's lives per annum; investing in external independent research to test AIME's expertise globally and to highlight the Australian case study as an example for the rest of the world; and building an off-the-shelf toolkit for educators and social entrepreneurs to pick up and create change for marginalised children and young people in their communities.

'Education's always been really important in my family but we haven't really had the opportunity to have that education. I was the first in my family to go from Kindergarten to Year 12 and then go into further education…

…Growing up my mum was a single mum. I had a lot of responsibility from a young age. I had to help out looking after my younger siblings being the eldest. During high school I worked two jobs to help support my family…

…I started the AIME program when I was in Year 9 in 2013. It gave me a voice that I never knew I needed. Growing up I was never really given the stage or given the chance to say what I thought or speak my truth. So, coming to AIME, there's no shame at AIME, you have to get up and say what you want to say…

…Growing up out west, you don't get a lot of opportunities. Domestic violence and alcohol abuse are big factors out in those communities. In my high school life, through the AIME program, it was the mentors that made the most difference. So, I started my degree in primary education, and I decided to come back to mentor in the same region that I had attended school. I knew what AIME had done for me, but seeing that with my own eyes - changing kids -- it was like an out of body experience, it was amazing…

…The reason why I wanted to be the co-CEO for 2019 is because I believe in kids. I believe that it doesn't matter who you are or where you come from, that you can be anything you want to be.' – Sherice Jackson is a proud Bundjalung woman who came to AIME as a Year 9 student in 2013. She is AIME's Co-CEO for 2019.

– Participant story from AIME

AIME. (2019, March 17). Introducing Sherice Jackson: AIME's 2019 Co-CEO.
Retrieved from: https://aimementoring.com/story/introducing-sherice-jackson-aimes-2019-co-ceo.

114. 'AIME. (2018). Annual Report. Retrieved from: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZPLB205lOaVmwh7NXkMgXcMpc4dmnBle/view
115. AIME. (2019). The Impact of AIME. Retrieved from: https://aimementoring.com/impact/
116. Social Ventures Australia. (2018). 'Aiming high - what it takes', Retrieved from: https://www.socialventures.com.au/sva-quarterly/aiming-high-what-it-takes/
117. AIME Research Partnership. (2019). Overview of Key Findings. Retrieved from: https://aimeresearchpartnership.com/overview-of-key-findings/
118. KPMG. (2018). Economic evaluation of AIME mentoring. Sydney: KPMG.

Ganbina

An alumnus of SVA Ventures

- **Primary driver**
  - Home/Community: Additional support given during times of increased vulnerability (e.g. transition between early learning, schools and post school)
- **Secondary driver**
  - Home/Community: Opportunities to build social and cultural capital and belonging (e.g. extracurricular, community and cultural activities)
  - Home/Community: Learning needs and interests are supported (e.g. tutoring, homework support)

Ganbina is an Indigenous-led charity that aims to provide young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people the skills and support needed to access and engage with meaningful education and employment opportunities.

Ganbina's school to work transition program involves the mentoring of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, from the ages of six to 25 years old, to help them gain the education, skills and experience they need to unlock their full potential. The program includes learning support, life skills training, cultural appreciation, career guidance and financial assistance.
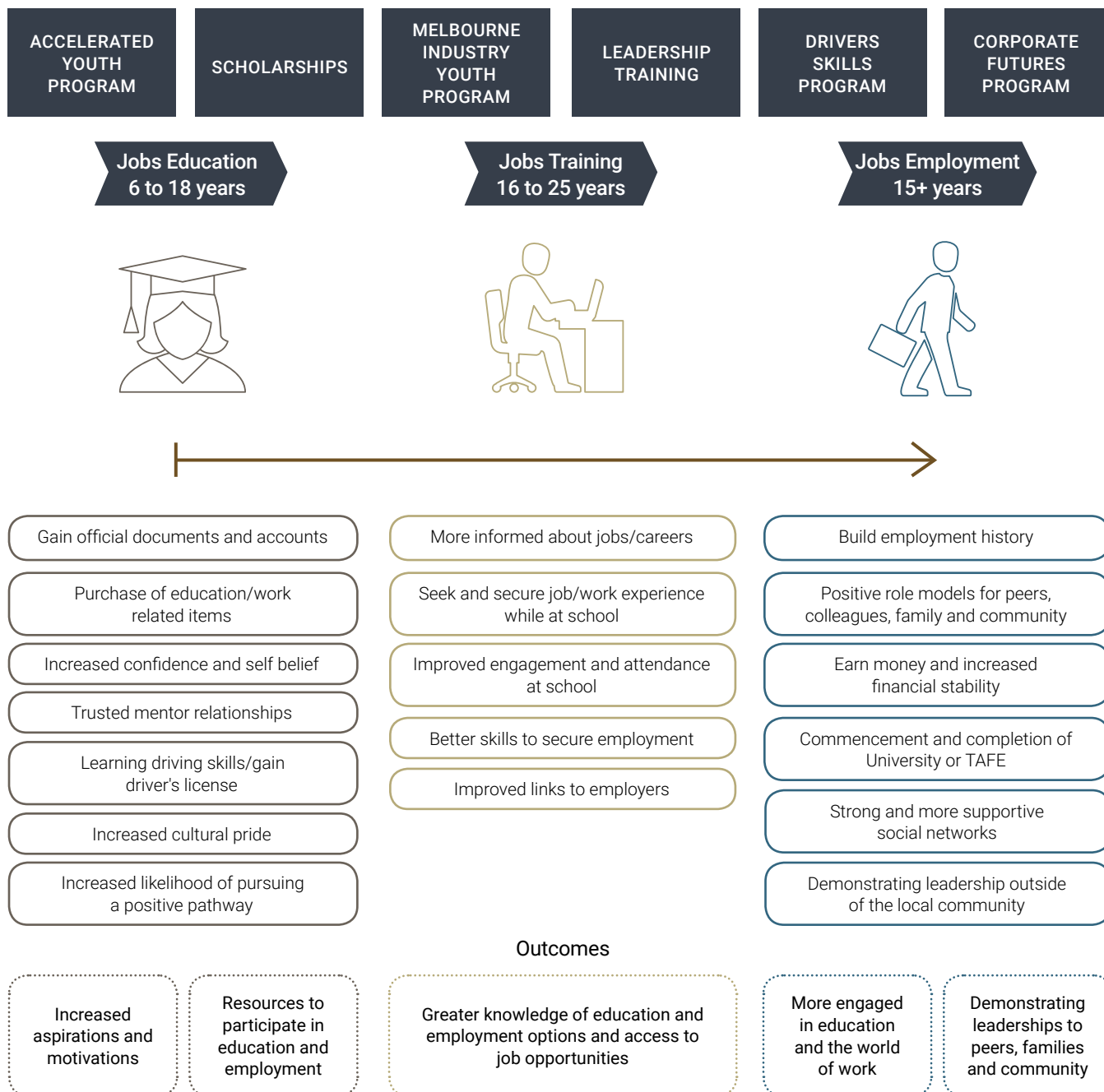
Since 2005, Ganbina has worked with over 1,000 young people in the Greater Shepparton region of Victoria, Australia.[119] Ganbina works closely with all secondary schools in the Goulburn Valley region and with several universities in Melbourne.

Participants typically progress through Jobs Education (six to 18 years), Jobs Training (16 to 25 years or more) and Jobs Employment (15 years or more) stages with Ganbina. In each stage, Ganbina aims to support participants to experience a range of education, employment and leadership and life skills outcomes, as outlined in Figure 14.

119. SVA Consulting. (2016). Ganbina Impact Assessment. Sydney: Social Ventures Australia.

Figure 14: An overview of participant pathways through Ganbina's program and the typical outcomes experience[120]

| ACCELERATED YOUTH PROGRAM | SCHOLARSHIPS | MELBOURNE INDUSTRY YOUTH PROGRAM | LEADERSHIP TRAINING | DRIVERS SKILLS PROGRAM | CORPORATE FUTURES PROGRAM |

Jobs Education 6 to 18 years

Jobs Training 16 to 25 years

Jobs Employment 15+ years

Gain official documents and accounts

Purchase of education/work related items

Increased confidence and self belief

Trusted mentor relationships

Learning driving skills/gain driver's license

Increased cultural pride

Increased likelihood of pursuing a positive pathway

More informed about jobs/careers

Seek and secure job/work experience while at school

Improved engagement and attendance at school

Better skills to secure employment

Improved links to employers

Build employment history

Positive role models for peers, colleagues, family and community

Earn money and increased financial stability

Commencement and completion of University or TAFE

Strong and more supportive social networks

Demonstrating leadership outside of the local community

Outcomes

Increased aspirations and motivations

Resources to participate in education and employment

Greater knowledge of education and employment options and access to job opportunities

More engaged in education and the world of work

Demonstrating leaderships to peers, families and community

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120. SVA Consulting. (2016). Ganbina Impact Assessment. Sydney: Social Ventures Australia.

There are six key characteristics of Ganbina's approach, and these are consistent with best practice literature on effective school to work transition programs:[121]

- A long-term view in engagement of Indigenous young people, starting with foundational education, employment and life skills;

- Practical and hands on support including helping to acquire key documents (e.g. birth certificates, tax file numbers, bank accounts) and skills (e.g. leadership training, driver's licence, resume writing) to obtain employment;

- Requiring participants to achieve standards of performance (e.g. attendance) and celebrating their success.

- Focus on keeping young people in formal education by working closely with schools, their principals, teachers and other key staff; and

- Empowering participants to make the decision to be a part of the program through an opt-in mechanism each year.

An independent evaluation of Ganbina by PriceWaterhouseCoopers in 2014 found very high Year 12 completion rates (100 percent in 2014) and high retention rates (over 95 percent).[122] Compared to similar programs, Ganbina costs less to run and has higher retention rates, gender balance and age ranges.

A 2016 Social Ventures Australia Impact Assessment of Ganbina found that Year 11 to Year 12 retention rates increased from 62 percent in 2009-10 to 73 percent in 2015-16, which is considerably higher than the rate for Indigenous people in the Greater Shepparton area and national Indigenous rates. All participants aged 25 to 34 years who had been with Ganbina for five years or more had attained Year 12 or an equivalent qualification, surpassing the Greater Shepparton and regional Victorian rates and nearing the non-Indigenous Victorian rate. A 2013 Social Ventures Australia Social Return on Investment report showed that every $1 invested in Ganbina created about $6.70 in social value.[123]

Ganbina is currently exploring expansion of their model to other areas in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland.

'Ganbina pretty much saved my life. If I hadn't got involved with them as a teenager, I would have been going down the wrong path entirely. They gave me the courage and support to realise my potential.'

'Through my work, I want to help people understand that there are ways to undo what they have done and become better people.' – Mariah

Mariah completed her Certificate III in Business with the Department of Justice. She now works there full time as a Community Corrections Officer.

– Participant story from Ganbina

Ganbina. (n.d.). Participant stories. Retrieved from: ganbina.com.au/?page_id=148.

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121. Social Ventures Australia. (2015). Fundamental Principles for Youth Employment. Sydney: Social Ventures Australia; SVA Consulting. (2016). Ganbina Impact Assessment. Sydney: Social Ventures Australia.
122. PwC's Indigenous Consulting. (2016). Measuring the Value of Ganbina's Programs 2015. Sydney: PricewaterhouseCoopers's Indigenous Consulting.
123. SVA Consulting. (2016). Ganbina Impact Assessment. Sydney: Social Ventures Australia; SVA Consulting. (2014). Social Return on Investment Evaluative Analysis. Sydney: Social Ventures Australia; PwC's Indigenous Consulting. (2016). Measuring the Value of Ganbina's Programs 2015. Sydney: PricewaterhouseCoopers's Indigenous Consulting.

System drivers in action

STEM Aboriginal Student Congress (South Australian Department of Education)

- **Primary driver**
  - System: System invests in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, knowledge and cultural education
- **Secondary drivers**
  - System: System facilitates accessible and culturally responsive education, including students being able to express cultural identity free from discrimination
  - System: Agency of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities is valued in educational decision-making and governance

As part of a state-wide strategy in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and complementing its Aboriginal Education strategy, the South Australian Department of Education has conducted an annual STEM Aboriginal student congress since 2017. The congress engages Aboriginal students in Years five to 10 through a range of interactive, challenging and culturally relevant experiences designed to encourage more Aboriginal students to choose STEM subjects in Years 11 and 12.

The two-day congress offers approximately 50 workshops, with the opportunity for students to hear from Aboriginal elders and explore the connection between STEM and culture while developing strong STEM awareness, knowledge, attitudes and dispositions. Previous speakers include Aboriginal scientists including Ms Karlie Noon on Aboriginal Astronomy and Dr Chris Matthews on Maths Patterns. Cultural time with Elders is scheduled into the program.

Congress workshops are designed for Aboriginal students by Aboriginal students. Students have to apply to attend the congress and if accepted they co-design and lead workshops with teachers from their school. The process encourages students to be lead STEM thinkers, powerful learners and leaders of learning. The student-led workshops are on topics such as bush medicine, biomechanics and fitness, boomerang technology, and body works through culture, art and creativity.

In 2019, over 500 students from 140 schools plus teachers, Education Elders, university undergraduates and expert leaders registered to attend the congress.[124] This is up from 220 Aboriginal students who attended in 2018 with 180 teachers, educators, leaders and Education Elders. The initiative is in its formative stages but survey feedback data from students indicates a shift in disposition of attitudes towards STEM learning and a growing understanding of the relationship between STEM and culture.

In addition to the Aboriginal STEM Congress, the South Australian Aboriginal Secondary Training Academy recently launched the state's first ever Aboriginal STEM Academy. The academy provides Aboriginal students in Year 11 and 12 the opportunity to learn STEM in a university environment at the University of Adelaide. All participating students study Stage 2 Scientific Studies as well as Stage 1 Aboriginal Studies or Stage 2 University Studies.

Dr Chris Matthews, Chair, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mathematics Alliance (ATSIMA) said the congress was important and effective in supporting Indigenous students' identity.

'For the first time, Indigenous students have the opportunity to explore connections between their cultural knowledge and STEM knowledge.'

'The process will create leading thinkers in STEM and has the potential to create an Indigenous workforce in STEM related fields that will naturally draw on their cultural knowledge.'

'This generation will face big issues and the need to create a sustainable future for all Australians, and Indigenous knowledge will play a big part in realising this future.'

– Speaker stories from the STEM Aboriginal student congress

Government of South Australia. (2019, May 27). Careers in STEM a growing interest for Aboriginal students. https://premier.sa.gov.au/news/careers-in-stem-a-growing-interest-for-aboriginal-students.

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124. South Australian Department of Education. (2019, May 27). STEM Aboriginal student congress. Retrieved from: https://www.education.sa.gov.au/department/media-centre/news/stem-aboriginal-student-congress.

Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI)

- **Primary driver**
  - System: Agency of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities is valued in educational decision-making and governance

- **Secondary driver**
  - System: System facilitates accessible and culturally responsive education, including students being able to express cultural identity free from discrimination
  - System: System invests in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, knowledge and cultural education

The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association (VAEAI) was first established in 1976 as the Victorian Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (VAECG).[125] VAEAI is the peak state-wide Aboriginal community-controlled organisation for education and training in Victoria and represents the Koorie communities across Victoria in relation to education policy development and strategic programming at the local, state and national levels. VAEAI supports the provision of education and training that reinforces cultural identity and increases awareness in the wider community of Koorie culture and aspirations in education and training.

In relation to education policy, VAEAI advocates for the Koorie community by representing their views at the local, state, regional and national level; advises governments and education systems of ways to improve the outcomes and education experiences of Koorie students; advises the Koorie communities of important issues and opportunities in Koorie education; monitors current issues and trends in education and training; and celebrates success in Koorie education and training.

VAEAI has a Languages Education & Curriculum Unit which is focused on supporting the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum, across early childhood education, schools, vocational education and training, and higher education. In relation to Aboriginal histories, cultures and Victorian Aboriginal Languages, the unit provides advice and support to educators and Koorie community members delivering programs and projects; produces and promotes curriculum resources to support learning; and monitors and advises on state and national policies.

VAEAI's vision is reflected in the first ever 10-year plan for Koorie education in Victoria, entitled Marrung.[126] The vision is that Victoria will be a state where the culture, knowledge and experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are celebrated; service systems are inclusive, responsive and respectful of Koorie people; and every Koorie person achieves their potential, succeeds in life

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125. VAEAI. (n.d.). VAEAI History. Retrieved from: http://www.vaeai.org.au/history/
126. Marrung is the Wemba Wemba word for the Murray Cypress pine tree, representing branches of education and knowledge. The Victorian Department of Education and Training thanks the Wemba Wemba people for allowing the use of their language in the naming of the 2016-2026 Aboriginal Education Plan.

and feels strong in their cultural identity.[127] With a student-centred model, VAEAI's birth to death learning philosophy begins with strong Early Years programs and support for families, encouraging strong cultural identities in young Koorie kids and transition to school.

Consistent with the principle of self-determination, Marrung was developed in partnership between VAEAI, the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, the Victorian Community Controlled Health Organisation and the Victorian Department of Education and Training. A summary of the Marrung plan outcomes and actions is contained in Section 4. As the principle partner in Koorie Education with the Department of Education and Training, VAEAI fosters a whole community approach to education and is proud to work in partnership to provide lifelong learning opportunities for all Victorian Aboriginal people.
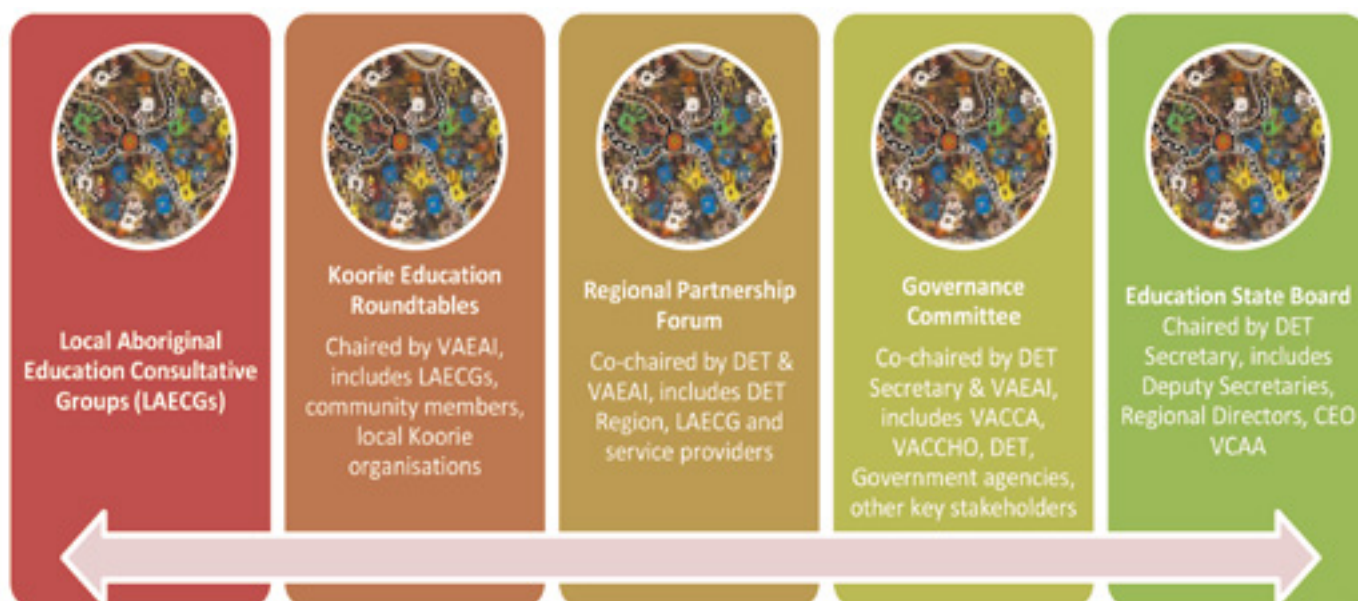
Community voice and engagement in learning and development is a key enabler in Marrung and VAEAI plays a key role in this engagement. The Marrung Governance Model is a three-tiered approach that increases opportunities for Koorie people to be partners in decision-making that affects them. It is made up of:

- A co-chaired Central Governance Committee to monitor overall progress against Marrung and provide strategies and advice on reforms and initiatives that impact Koorie children;
- Co-chaired Regional Partnership Forums to monitor the implementation of Marrung, share data and support place-based action; and
- Koorie Roundtables convened by VAEAI to identify local Koori community education priorities and support engagement with local families.

This model aims to provide accountability to the local Koorie community and responsiveness to local priorities by strengthening partnership and decision-making responsibility between education sectors and providers and the Koorie community. Figure 15 depicts the Marrung Governance Model and the central role played by VAEAI.

Across Victoria, improvements are being made in some indicators of Aboriginal education. In 2017, 94 percent of Aboriginal children were enrolled in Kindergarten in the year before school, on par with all Victorian children (93.4 percent). Apparent Year 10 retention rates for Aboriginal students are at 97.2 percent and Year 12 attainment rates have improved to 71.3 percent.

Figure 15: Marrung governance and accountability[128]

Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (LAECGs)	Koorie Education Roundtables	Regional Partnership Forum	Governance Committee	Education State Board
	Chaired by VAEAI, includes LAECGs, community members, local Koorie organisations	Co-chaired by DET & VAEAI, includes DET Region, LAECG and service providers	Co-chaired by DET Secretary & VAEAI, includes VACCA, VACCHO, DET, Government agencies, other key stakeholders	Chaired by DET Secretary, includes Deputy Secretaries, Regional Directors, CEO VCAA

127. Victorian Department of Education and Training. (2016). Marrung: Aboriginal Education Plan 2016-2026. Melbourne: State of Victoria
128. Victorian Department of Education and Training. (2016). Marrung: Aboriginal Education Plan 2016-2026. Melbourne: State of Victoria

Formal education drivers in action

Gawura

- **Primary driver**
  - Formal education: Teacher capability and teaching practice utilises effective instruction and responds to learning, wellbeing and cultural needs of children
- **Secondary drivers**
  - Formal education: Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and languages are taught to and assessed for all students in partnership with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups
  - Formal education: School culture is inclusive, fosters belonging, values student voice and celebrates cultural identity

Founded in 2007 by St Andrew's Cathedral School, Gawura is an independent school that educates up to 28 local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from Kindergarten to Year six. Gawura is located in inner Sydney near the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities located in Redfern, Glebe and Waterloo. The school shares facilities and resources with St Andrews Cathedral Junior School.

Gawura students learn in small classes, with the school offering an intensive literacy and numeracy program. Gawura students attend broader academic subjects, sport and the arts with students at St Andrew's Cathedral Junior School. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are embedded across the curriculum. As most Gawura families have a connection to it, Wiradjuri language is taught from Kindergarten in Gawura in dedicated lessons each week. The students in St Andrew's Cathedral Junior School also learn Wiradjuri. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Year five to 12 at Gawura and St Andrews Cathedral School can join an annual On Country Tour to learn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders.

There is pastoral care and mentoring for Gawura students and families, and a dedicated bus service to support attendance. Health checks are also provided free of charge to students. Selection into Gawura is based on certain criteria, including evidence of financial hardship. All Gawura students receive a scholarship at St Andrew's Cathedral School for their secondary education.

Gawura works in partnership with community and parents. The Gawura Parent Advisory Committee meets twice a term to provide feedback on curriculum, cultural events and other aspects of student learning. The school employs 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members including teachers, teacher aides, a secondary mentor, a community liaison coordinator and a Wiradjuri language teacher.

Gawura's attendance rate is 92-94 percent. Fifteen students have finished Year 12, and most are now studying at university. One graduate is undertaking a PhD and another studying at Oxford University.

'My family talks it and I want to learn how to talk it so I can talk it back to my family. I talk it sometimes at home to my nan and she sometimes says a few words to teach me a bit about it. When I'm in Coonabarabran, which is in the bush, I talk it to my family there.' – Kayliah Keegan, a Year six Gawura student

'I speak Wiradjuri with my uncle… my sister speaks it with me.' – Zavier Reid, a Kindergarten student at the Gawura school

'I have a really big interest in it because it is an Australian Aboriginal language and I am planning to speak it in the future.' – Mark Yang, a Year six student at St Andrew's Cathedral School

– Stories of learning Wiradjuri at Gawura and St Andrews Cathedral School

Melton West Primary School

Part of the SVA Bright Spots Schools Connection

- **Primary driver**
  - Formal education: School culture is inclusive, fosters belonging, values student voice and celebrates cultural identity
- **Secondary driver**
  - Formal education: Teacher capability and teaching practice utilises effective instruction and responds to learning, wellbeing and cultural needs of children

Melton West Primary School is situated in the outer metropolitan area of western Melbourne and has approximately 600 students enrolled. The student population includes a large proportion of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and a high number of families with a language background other than English.

Melton West's mission is to work collaboratively to ensure high levels of learning for all. The school supports their students with literacy intervention and social skills programs. In 2018, the school focused on building excellence in practice by implementing reading-specific instructional practices across the school and ensuring staff are trained in trauma-informed practice to support a positive climate for learning.

Melton West works closely with their parents who have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background. A 'Koorie Club' is run at the school to bring students together for art, stories, language and discussions. The 'Koorie Club' is run weekly in class time for 35-40 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.[129] The school partners with a local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation to run this program and encourage local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the community to visit often.

The school also previously ran a local language program, after close consultation with Traditional Owners, the Wurundjeri Tribal Land Council. Prep students, for example, learned about kinship and relationships, colour and counting, body parts and greeting phrases in the language program.

In 2018, Melton West were finalists for Outstanding Koorie Education at the Victorian Education Excellence Awards. Melton West's outcomes showed some progress in 2018, with improvements in some areas of student achievement, a reduction in student absences, and wellbeing outcomes higher than similar schools.[130]

129. VAEAI. (2017, July 19). Melton West Primary School Woiwurrung Language Program.
     Retrieved from: http://www.vaeai.org.au/melton-west-primary-school-woiwurrung-language-program/
130. Victorian Department of Education and Training. (2019). Melton West Primary School 2018 Annual Report to the School Community.
     Retrieved from: https://meltonwestps.vic.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Annual-Report-to-Community-2018-Final.pdf

8. Conclusion and next steps

This paper provides a perspective on the educational and wellbeing needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who experience vulnerability. It identifies the key drivers to improve educational outcomes for this cohort of children.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who experience vulnerability face a number of challenges in their home, community and formal education environments. Support provided by the education system is not meeting the needs of these children, with large gaps between the literacy, numeracy, school attendance and Year 12 attainment outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and non-Indigenous children.[131]

There are some key drivers and promising practices, but more investment in effective teaching and teacher development, and respect and prioritisation for cultural identity, cultural needs, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community ownership is required to improve the education system for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. It will take holistic school and system approaches to better support the needs of this group of children.[132]

To help achieve this aim, we need further Australian research on more effective teaching and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.[133]

We hope that this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of this cohort's needs and a recognition of the additional supports they require to address the challenges that prevent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from realising their potential through formal education and beyond.

We invite readers to interpret and apply the drivers of better educational outcomes identified in this paper to their own work and continue the conversation with us about the programs and practices that work to support the needs of this group of children and young people. We will use the learnings in this paper to inform SVA's work with partners in this area.

We welcome feedback and reflections on this paper; both on how you have used it and what more or different content could be added, especially in relation to activity in other Australian states and territories. We will capture this feedback in future versions of this paper.

Photo credentials

Cover page: Gawura, St Andrew's Cathedral School
Page 1 and 2: South Australian Department of Education
Page 3: VAEAI (Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc.)
Page 6: South Australian Department of Education
Page 20: South Australian Department of Education
Page 22: Ganbina

Page 26: Melton West Primary School
Page 27: Stock image
Page 30: Gawura, St Andrew's Cathedral School
Page 31: AIME
Page 33: Ganbina
Page 37: South Australian Department of Education
Page 40: Melton West Primary School

131. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2017). Closing the gap: 2017 analysis of progress and key drivers of change. Canberra: Australian Government.
132. Lowe, K., Burgess, C., Harrison, N. & Vass, G. (2019). A systematic review of recent research on the importance of cultural programs in schools, school and community engagement and school leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. Melbourne: Social Ventures Australia.; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2017). Promising Practices in Supporting Success for Indigenous Students. Paris: OECD Publishing.
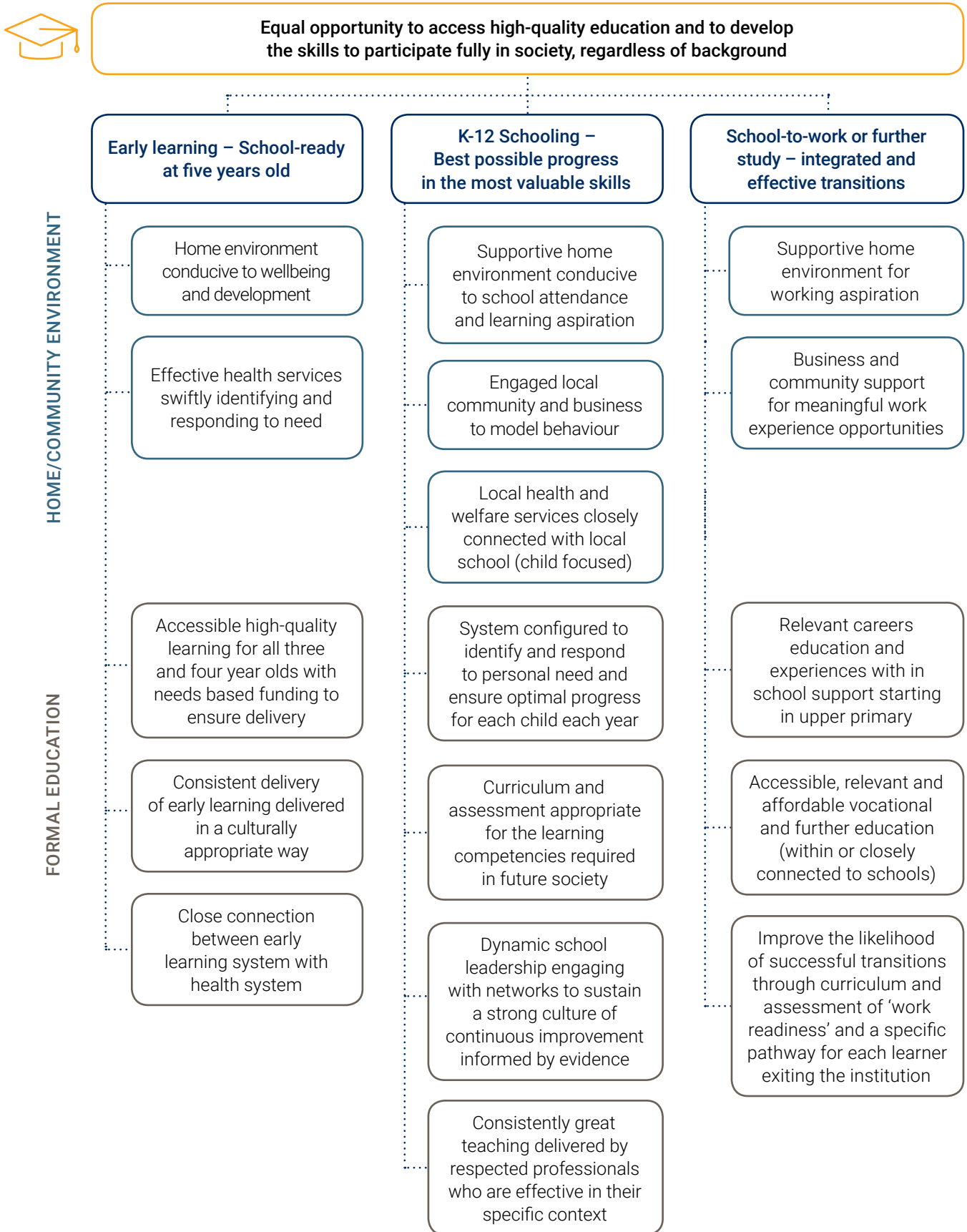133. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2017). Closing the gap: 2017 analysis of progress and key drivers of change. Canberra: Australian Government.

Appendix

Figure 16: SVA Education Driver Tree

Equal opportunity to access high-quality education and to develop the skills to participate fully in society, regardless of background

Early learning – School-ready at five years old	K-12 Schooling – Best possible progress in the most valuable skills	School-to-work or further study – integrated and effective transitions

HOME/COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

Home environment conducive to wellbeing and development	Supportive home environment conducive to school attendance and learning aspiration	Supportive home environment for working aspiration
Effective health services swiftly identifying and responding to need	Engaged local community and business to model behaviour	Business and community support for meaningful work experience opportunities
	Local health and welfare services closely connected with local school (child focused)	

FORMAL EDUCATION

Accessible high-quality learning for all three and four year olds with needs based funding to ensure delivery	System configured to identify and respond to personal need and ensure optimal progress for each child each year	Relevant careers education and experiences with in school support starting in upper primary
Consistent delivery of early learning delivered in a culturally appropriate way	Curriculum and assessment appropriate for the learning competencies required in future society	Accessible, relevant and affordable vocational and further education (within or closely connected to schools)
Close connection between early learning system with health system	Dynamic school leadership engaging with networks to sustain a strong culture of continuous improvement informed by evidence	Improve the likelihood of successful transitions through curriculum and assessment of 'work readiness' and a specific pathway for each learner exiting the institution
	Consistently great teaching delivered by respected professionals who are effective in their specific context	

SVA Social Ventures Australia