



Australian Government

**Australian Institute of
Health and Welfare**

SCSEEC successful school attendance strategies evidence-based project

Summary report



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*Authoritative information and statistics
to promote better health and wellbeing*

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Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
Canberra

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Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AEW	Aboriginal education worker
AIEO	Aboriginal and Islander education officer
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
AIO, ALO	Aboriginal liaison officer
ATSIEAP	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DEEWR	Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
LOTE	Languages other than English
MCEECDYA	Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs
NAIDOC	National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee
SCSEEC	Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood

Summary

Governments, schools and communities throughout Australia are working to improve school attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students using strategies such as incentive programs, improvement to literacy and numeracy skills, school-family partnerships, transport to school, attendance monitoring, ensuring that school is a welcoming place for Indigenous students, and programs that focus on non-academic achievement as a way of engaging students in school.

Currently, however, little is known about the effectiveness of these strategies and the key factors which underpin programs and strategies which are successful. The SCSEEC Successful School Attendance Strategies Evidence-based Project (the Project) was designed to fill this gap in the evidence by bringing together published data on effectiveness with the on-the-ground experiences of schools and communities who have been successful in improving the attendance of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

This report summarises the Project findings, and shows that schools which improved their attendance undertook four key steps. They all:

- recognised the importance of attendance as an issue for the school
- identified individual students for whom non-attendance is an issue
- investigated and understood the reasons behind non-attendance
- developed and implemented effective strategies to address those issues to enhance the likelihood that children and young people attend school regularly.

Linked to these steps, this report includes information and insights about:

- the 4 key domains that can be barriers or enhancers to school attendance (school factors, family factors, student factors, community/structural factors)
- 9 strategies with demonstrated effectiveness and the various ways in which schools implemented those strategies
- lessons for developing and implementing strategies that are effective in improving the attendance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the long-term. These represent the key underpinning factors that the schools have said are essential to have in place before specific strategies can be implemented successfully
- the 6 elements that the schools reported as being critical to successfully improving and maintaining attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students because they address the factors underpinning non-attendance.

The report also includes information and feedback from the consultations about how this type of information could potentially be shared through the development of a dedicated school attendance 'one-stop-shop' website.

1 Introduction

This report highlights the key findings of the SCSEEC Successful School Attendance Strategies Evidence-based Project (the Project) carried out by staff of the Indigenous and Children's Group at the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). The Project was funded by SCSEEC (Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood) to progress National Collaborative Action 22 from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (ATSIEAP):

MCEECDYA [the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, which was replaced by SCSEEC] will dedicate National Project Funds in 2011 to further develop a better evidence base of what works in improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student attendance. The evidence base will consider a range of contextual information, including the way in which schools respond to the diverse linguistic, cultural and geographical contexts in which they operate (MCEECDYA 2010:18).

Combining the findings of a comprehensive literature review with qualitative evidence from a series of consultations held with 9 diverse school communities in 2 jurisdictions, the AIHW provided a final project report to the ATSIEAP Working Group, which concluded that:

- There is now a body of evidence demonstrating that there are effective strategies for improving attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students that address identified barriers to regular school attendance.
- One effective potential method for sharing that evidence would be a 'one-stop-shop' web portal which combines a searchable evidence base with practical implementation tools and with opportunities for sharing ideas among education practitioners and school communities.

This paper draws upon that final project report. Its focus is on presenting and discussing the findings that education policy makers, practitioners, schools and school communities are likely to find useful for their own work on improving attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The rest of this paper provides an overview of the background to the Project, outlines its methodology and summarises its key findings.

Background

There are clear links between school attendance, achievement in school, school completion rates and overall educational attainment (Musser 2011; Zubrick et al. 2006). Recent research has also shown that high rates of school attendance may have a substantially higher impact on skill development for students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds than for those from more highly advantaged backgrounds (Ready 2010).

Most Australian children attend school regularly. However, school attendance rates are lower for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students than for other students; the greatest gaps are at high school level and the lowest rates of attendance are in more remote areas (ABS 2011; ACARA unpublished data).

Closing this gap in school attendance is critical to reducing the gaps in educational outcomes and in employment in later life. This also has an impact on closing the gap in life expectancy

and child mortality between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and other Australians as recognised in the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Closing the Gap initiatives.

Governments, schools and communities throughout Australia are actively using a wide variety of strategies to improve school attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Yet, there is currently scarce evidence about the effectiveness of particular strategies and the factors that underpin their success, or about their applicability to particular school or community settings (MCEECDYA 2010; Purdie & Buckley 2010).

The Project thus focused on identifying the key factors underpinning successful strategies to increase school attendance by conducting a literature review and by consulting school communities who have successfully improved attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The Project was also tasked with investigating the feasibility of a web-based tool to be used as a practical resource for school communities through recommendations about design, content, method of delivery, governance, legal and technical issues.

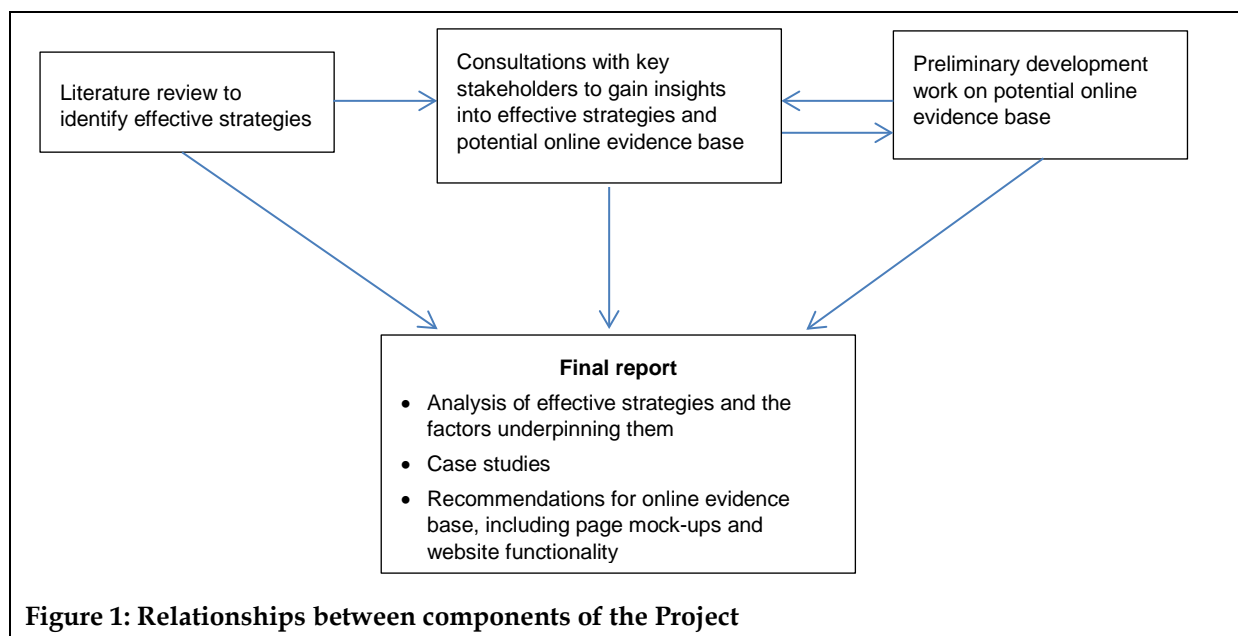
The project had 3 main components:

- an expert literature review of attendance strategies and policies that successfully increase school attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- a coordinated stakeholder consultation process on effective school attendance strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the assessment of community engagement requirements for an effective online tool
- detailed recommendations for developing an online evidence-based tool.

The next section describes the methodology used in the Project.

2 Overview of Methodology

As shown below in Figure 1, the 3 main components of this project were interrelated.



The literature review had 2 purposes:

- (1) to examine the individual, contextual and structural factors that influence school attendance (and non-attendance) among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, summarise the policy context, and review national and international evidence on effective attendance strategies and the mechanisms behind them
- (2) to use the evidence to help select the school communities for the consultation component of the Project and to develop the consultation tools.

Nine distinct strategies were found to be effective in increasing school attendance:

- incentive programs
- student engagement programs, including extracurricular and out-of-school activities
- literacy and numeracy programs
- nutrition programs
- attendance monitoring
- whole-of-school approaches
- school, family, and community partnerships
- transport
- parental consequences for poor attendance.

The next step was engaging directly with schools and communities who have used these strategies to understand their experiences and perspectives on the key factors underpinning success and the lessons that they would pass on to other schools and communities.

Using nominated contacts in jurisdictional Education departments provided by the Project Team members, the AIHW sought nominations for schools (both government and non-government) which had used these strategies successfully. From a list of 37 possible schools within 2 states, 9 initial schools were selected. Following ethics approval, the schools were approached, and all but 1 agreed to participate. A replacement school with similar characteristics was found and agreed to take part.

The 9 schools were categorised as follows:

- 3 independent schools
- 6 government schools
- 3 metropolitan schools
- 4 regional schools
- 2 remote schools
- 4 primary schools
- 2 high schools
- 3 K-12 schools.

The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at each school ranged from just under 50 to over 100, representing 13% to 93% of the respective student bodies.

Twenty-four staff members participated in the interviews/focus groups, including 7 principals, 4 vice-principals, 8 Aboriginal education/liaison officers, 3 members of student welfare teams, 1 administrative staff member, and 1 program-specific staff member.

Table 1 details the types of strategies initially identified by the state contacts; Table 2 shows that, in practice, each of the schools was employing nearly all the strategies.

Table 1: Initially identified strategies by school

Strategy	Metro. primary	Metro. primary	Metro. high	Regional high	Regional primary	Remote primary	Regional comp.	Regional comp.	Remote primary
Incentives	X		X	X				X	X
Student engagement			X	X				X	X
Literacy/numeracy	X		X			X	X	X	X
Nutrition			X					X	
Attendance monitoring		X	X					X	X
Whole-of-school approach			X			X	X	X	X
Community partnerships	X		X			X	X	X	X
Transport		X						X	X
Other					X				

Notes: The ninth strategy, parental consequences, is not reflected as it is a government, not a school-initiated, policy. Metro. = metropolitan. Comp. = composite (K-12).

Table 2: Strategies being used by schools identified through the consultations

Strategy	Metro. primary	Metro. primary	Metro. high	Regional high	Regional primary	Remote primary	Regional comp.	Regional comp.	Remote primary
Incentives	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Student engagement	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Literacy/numeracy	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Nutrition	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Attendance monitoring	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Whole-of-school approach	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Community partnerships	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Transport		X		X		X		X	X
Other	X				X				

Notes: The ninth strategy, parental consequences, is not reflected as it is a government, not a school-initiated, policy. Metro. = metropolitan. Comp. = composite (K-12).

The schools included in the Project provided excellent coverage of strategies across locations, school sectors and school types as shown in Table 2. The schools were similar in that they all experienced challenges related to attendance and were actively working to address attendance on multiple levels. However, the ways in which they implemented the particular strategies depended upon their local circumstances, resources and needs.

The consultations focused on the school and community contexts, details about specific strategies that had been selected and their implementation, underlying mechanisms, and lessons learned. Participants also provided feedback on the purpose and content of a potential online evidence base, which was aided by a series of wireframes (page schematics of websites) and style tiles (visual references of font and colours).

3 Findings

The evidence from the literature review and the consultations demonstrated that, at the local school level, closing the gap in school attendance rates between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other students requires several key steps:

- recognising the importance of attendance as an issue for the school
- identifying individual students for whom non-attendance is an issue
- understanding the reasons behind non-attendance
- developing and implementing effective strategies that address those issues and that enhance the likelihood that children and young people will attend school regularly.

The schools participating in the Project followed these steps, although the particular triggers for focusing on attendance varied across the schools, depending upon local issues or contexts. For example, a particular school's focus on attendance was driven by its concern about attendance as a symptom of larger issues in their students' overall welfare. At another school, the arrival of a new principal saw a new focus on attendance: *attendance was quite low and it was identified that there was an area of concern...when I asked about attendance, the response from the staff was 'you make all the phone calls, and you can do all this stuff' and I'm like 'no, this is a holistic approach about all of us and what are we going to do as a school'. And now they're really good with that.*

Policy initiatives such as the required reporting of attendance data, and funding opportunities for attendance-related programs and staff members through National Partnership agreements or state-funded initiatives, also allowed schools to increase their focus on attendance.

Factors affecting attendance — domains and strategies

Before appropriate programs and policies could be developed, it was critical for schools to identify individual students with attendance-related issues and to understand the reasons behind non-attendance. The factors affecting attendance and non-attendance at school among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are multifaceted and complex, and vary across communities, geographic locations, school sectors and school types. As found in the literature review, these factors can be categorised into 4 domains affecting attendance (in either a positive or negative way), namely:

- school factors
- family factors
- structural/community factors
- student factors.

Box 1 provides an overview of key issues within each of these domains. All factors were cited by the schools included in the consultations (without prompting) as barriers to attendance among their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, although their level of importance varied across the schools depending upon local contexts and histories.

Box 1: Factors affecting non-attendance among Indigenous students by domain

School factors

- Culturally appropriate curriculum and school environment
- Cultural understanding
- Language
- Indigenous staff members
- Bullying and suspension policies
- School leadership

Family factors

- Family's socioeconomic status
- Experience with education
- Parents' levels of literacy and numeracy

Structural/community factors

- Remoteness
- Transport
- Community involvement
- Education experiences
- Employment opportunities

Student factors

- Child's health
- Level of school readiness
- Safe and secure environment
- Attachment to school/education

Understanding these factors provides opportunities for clear and targeted interventions. For example, if a barrier to school attendance is physical (for example, transport) or financial (for example, the cost of uniforms), strategies can be adopted that target these barriers specifically. If a barrier is a lack of cultural understanding on the part of school staff, appropriate interventions may consist of staff development, training and mentoring.

Box 2 lists the effective strategies identified in the literature review, which were reinforced in the consultations, by the type of domain they target.

Box 2: Effective strategies by domains targeted

School factors

- Whole-of-school approaches
- Attendance monitoring programs

Family factors

- Parental consequences for poor attendance
- School/family/community partnerships

Structural/community factors

- School/family/community partnerships
- Transport

Student factors

- Literacy and numeracy programs
- Incentive programs
- Student engagement programs
- Nutrition programs

The nature of the factors varies by local context. Just as there were different triggers behind the focus on attendance, schools used a range of strategies as described in Box 2 to address

those triggers. Schools also differed in their approaches to selecting strategies: some resulted from local problem solving; others came about as targeted interventions (such as external programs brought into the school).

One of the key messages to emerge from the consultations about the ways in which these schools were able to improve the attendance of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was that there was no 'one size fits all' approach, and that schools had to be both innovative and committed.

Table 3 provides examples of the specific ways in which the 9 schools implemented the particular types of strategies they used (with parental consequences the only strategy not to be covered). It also illustrates that there are both similarities and differences in the ways in which the schools applied the strategies. For example, some schools used personalised learning plans to engage students; others used sporting programs, playgroups and preschool programs, links to post-school options, and cultural programs.

The consultations provided rich feedback on how the schools chose strategies, implemented them and the challenges they faced. Below we present some of the details of these strategies by the domain they address.

Student factors

Schools used a number of strategies to meet the physical and mental health needs of their students. These included:

- ensuring that student support/welfare teams include appropriately skilled staff (for example, some schools with high needs have a school psychologist and social worker)
- working with the families to organise screening and follow-up therapies; if necessary, taking students to medical appointments themselves
- liaising with other services and using a case management approach to ensure that needs are being followed up (as part of its building program, a high school is constructing an integrated onsite community service centre)
- providing an onsite school nurse (funded partly through school funds and partly through external funds) and liaising with the local Division of General Practice (now Medicare Local) or Aboriginal Medical Service to provide health services onsite at least once a week.

At a regional school, the Medicare Local's Aboriginal worker picks up students from school, takes them to appointments, gets prescriptions filled if necessary, then drops them back to school. Taking an innovative approach, another school has partnered with a local university to have its third-year speech pathology students come and screen all the children in the school and provide them with follow-up care; another school is considering using funding to hire its own speech pathologist.

Table 3: Summary of specific strategies used by the participating schools

Strategy	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4	School 5	School 6	School 7	School 8	School 9
Incentives	Awards, rewards	Awards, rewards, chocolate wheel School Passport program	Awards, rewards Level of attendance required for extracurricular activities	Online rewards program School jumper Itunes and Westfield vouchers 85% level of attendance required for end-of-year trip to amusement park	Reward chart	Rewards	Participation at camp based on attendance and behaviour	90% level of attendance required for end-of-term treat	Awards assemblies End-of-year Indigenous award
Student engagement	Personalised learning plans Link to post-school options	Personalised learning plans Playgroup and preschool program	Sporting program Personalised learning plans	Police Citizens Youth Clubs programs Personalised learning plans	Indigenous club, undertaking cultural activities such as painting, cooking, gardens and dancing Homework club Playgroup Student counsellors	Cultural days Goal setting Program for 0–4 year olds	Link to scholarship options	Integration programs Link to other programs	Homework centre Cultural perspective across the curriculum

(continued)

Table 3 (continued): Summary of specific strategies used by the participating schools

Strategy	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4	School 5	School 6	School 7	School 8	School 9
Literacy/ numeracy	One-on-one tutoring	One-on-one or small group tutoring	One-on-one or small group tutoring Ensuring learning resources meet students' needs	In-class teacher aides	Local language is taught	Local language is taught	Make own books to provide cultural context Reading to students 3 or more times a week	One-on-one in-class tutoring Promoting alternative thinking strategies	Individual tuition
Nutrition	Provide food when required	Provide food when required Run a nutrition program	Food program	Provide food when required	Provide food when required	Provide food when required	Provide food when required	Provide food when required	Provide food when required
Attendance monitoring	Daily monitoring, follow-up by Indigenous support officer	Daily monitoring, follow-up by vice-principal and Aboriginal education workers	Daily monitoring, follow-up by principal, welfare team, teachers and Aboriginal education workers	Letters Attendance lunches with parents at the end of the month	Daily monitoring overseen by the deputy principal and Aboriginal worker	Daily monitoring, with follow-up by the Aboriginal and Islander education officer (AIEO)	Daily monitoring, with follow-up by the deputy principal and attendance officer	Daily follow-up by Aboriginal liaison officer via phone calls, letters and meetings with parents, overseen by principal Individual attendance targets	Daily monitoring with follow-up phone calls

(continued)

Table 3 (continued): Summary of specific strategies used by the participating schools

Strategy	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4	School 5	School 6	School 7	School 8	School 9
Whole-of-school approach	Overall philosophy Teaching and behaviour management approaches Staff development	Overall philosophy Teaching and behaviour management approaches Staff development	Overall philosophy Teaching and behaviour management approaches Staff development	Liaison officers with ethnic backgrounds Half-day program	Overall philosophy Staff development Resources to aid home-to-school bridging Teaching and behaviour management	Overall philosophy Holistic approach	Overall philosophy Holistic approach Classes formed on skill level rather than year level	Overall philosophy Holistic approach Focus on late arrivals	Overall philosophy In-school suspension
School/family/community partnerships	Inviting community into the school Home visits Respect	Community partnership agreement Home visits Community liaison officer	Aspirational program that involves the community Community partnership agreement	Home visits Parent meetings fortnightly Community lunches	Home visits Partner with liaison officer at the local GP to pick up students for appointments	Respect Extended services coordinator School presence at community meetings	Cultural program	Home visits Attendance focus in most newsletters Relationship building	Home visits when required School presence at community events (including funerals)
Transport	School coordinates bus transport for all students Will pick up individual students from their homes when there are attendance issues	School coordinates bus transport if necessary	School coordinates bus transport for all students	School coordinates bus transport to and from the station and the school	Not necessary	Aboriginal and Islander education officer drives to locate students not attending school	Attendance officer picks up students not in attendance in the morning	Bus is provided to pick up students	Transport provided by staff members

Schools also provided information and support for post-school options, which included:

- trying to build students' aspirations about what they could achieve after high school (both through formal programs and as a general priority within their teaching/counselling), and then
- helping students make those post-school options a reality by providing information and direct links to the opportunities (including finding scholarships, filling out forms, helping prepare students for job interviews, and so on).

Several of the schools also used school trips and camps as a way to expose students to opportunities beyond their current communities and to broaden their perspectives. This was felt to be particularly important for students in late primary/early high school as a way of developing aspirations that they could then work towards.

What I've learnt over the last couple of years is that you've got to start young. So the lesson I actually had with the kids today was exactly that. Think about our camps, what kind of jobs did you see happening? The Year 6/7s was very focused on that this year. But just getting the younger kids talking...what are the jobs around? From that, that's when we're going to start doing a whole heap on just goal setting – 'that looks like an interesting job', but doing it young. I think they need to be focused. And they need to see there's more of the world, but you can still come back.

Aboriginal education/liaison workers were cited as an important element of a number of these strategies, both in the literature review and the consultations.

One staff member described their position as follows:

I work solely with the students – or I liaise with the teachers obviously – but I basically look after all their needs really, from liaising with the families, dealing with their health issues, dealing with day-to-day personality issues, behavioural issues, liaising with the principal and vice-principal regarding issues to do with family welfare, attendance, helping them with their day-to-day work, communicating with teachers on specific needs and the way that Aboriginal children learn and the issues that they face. For instance, the importance of family and travelling to funerals is a big one, and how important that is to Indigenous people. So basically, yeah, I work full-time and I put on NAIDOC [National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee] days, I take children to the diabetes clinic. I pretty much cover everything. And I give the children a voice.

Family factors

All of the family-related issues and the strategies from the literature review were relevant for the schools in the consultations. All schools discussed the fact that breaking down barriers between families, communities and the school and developing a trusting relationship was a fundamental element for improving school attendance and for understanding the particular circumstances affecting individual students. For example:

We have a Year 11 student – I spent some time at her home the other night. There's been a death in the family, and sometimes that out-of-school support is part of, you know, just going along and being part of the community. Certainly her grandma appreciated both the chaplain and myself coming. She [the student] is overwhelmed at the moment. She has assignments that are outstanding, assignments are coming, she wants to move out of home, the family member who's died has had mental illness, there's been great stress in the family, and so school is just part of what you're dealing with. In order for them to be successful at school, you're actually dealing with their whole life. So you've got to be looking at creating that support network for all aspects of their lives.

Schools used numerous strategies to build relationships with families. This included having staff who were well respected within the local community (although not necessarily always Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members).

Some of the key strategies that worked for the schools included:

- treating families and members of the community with respect
- contacting them when the students had done well in school and also inviting them into the school for positive occasions – assemblies, performances, barbecues, student awards, NAIDOC week – so that contact was not always focused on what was ‘wrong’ with their families or their children
- engaging with them on occasions outside of school. Schools reported that informal contact at the local shops when staff members stopped to chat with families and students was an effective way of building connections.

Being present at funerals, family events when invited and community events were other useful practices, and had symbolic as well as practical consequences.

Schools also used several strategies to work with families to develop goals and aspirations for the students (including the personalised learning plans), but also including home visits and meetings where they sat down and openly discussed matters of concern: *With the Indigenous family – it’d be the same with anyone, but particularly the Indigenous families, because it’s probably not something that’s been done historically – is to engage with them as equals. So you’re sitting down with them and being very direct with them and saying ‘if you want your children to succeed, then you need to partner with us’. It’s not going to be one-way traffic, and we’ll admit when we haven’t got it right...just be up-front and honest with them, engage them as partners in their child’s education.*

One way to build early engagement with education was for the primary/combined schools to run playgroups, preschools or transition programs. These served several important functions, which included:

- the actual early childhood education experience for the children (which affects their school readiness)
- a chance for families to build connections with each other, as a way to engage families early on with the school itself as well as promoting the value of education
- an opportunity to run programs for the families themselves (including parenting programs as well as arts and cultural programs).

One school has begun to hold an onsite group for pregnant women in order to deliver antenatal care services as well as to begin the engagement process.

Structural/community factors

The importance and occurrence of community and structural issues was reinforced throughout the school consultations.

All 9 schools were either in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas or the school population itself was disadvantaged compared with the surrounding community. Nearly half of the schools reported they were characterised by both historical and current levels of mistrust between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. For example, staff at 2 schools reported that their Indigenous students were subject to racist comments in the broader community and in local sporting events, and another school found it difficult to schedule

sporting events against other schools because the other schools perceived their students as 'too rough'.

Transport was an issue in regional areas, where some students travelled around 90 minutes one way to get to school. Commuting made it difficult for the school to organise after-school activities (such as homework clubs) because alternative transportation home was unavailable. Transportation was not an issue in the remote schools that were included in the consultations.

The development of partnerships between families, schools and communities was found to be an essential component of improved school attendance rates in both the literature review and the consultations. Creating a positive relationship between families, communities and schools led families to feel more comfortable at the school and to contact the school when issues did arise so that they could work in partnership.

As a way of developing relationships between the community and the school, the following school runs a cultural program for students, families and community members:

It's been going for about 5 years now. It just aims to bring community into the school. Providing the opportunity for them to take traditional activities, I suppose, keep those traditions going...what have we had this year? We've had family tree days, we've had traditional cooking days, we had a damper making and jewellery making. It's run by all the AIOs [Aboriginal liaison officers]. So they have ownership of the program. They decide on what activities to run. I'm just there to make sure that all the paperwork side of things is done. Then keep them on task I suppose, not that that's hard. They're pretty good at it. These guys do all the work themselves. They have ownership of it. It belongs to them and to the community. It doesn't belong to the school so much. We just provide the facilities and the support and time.

The importance of a strong community is illustrated in the following example:

Within the community, there's an expectation that the kids will go to school, and that education is important and that it's the way forward. I've worked in a lot of communities and this is the only one where parents push kids to go to school every day. And I don't know why that is, or why it is different from other communities. But it is there and it's very noticeable...A lot of the parents here have been away for school themselves. The vast majority of our high school kids go away on scholarships to Perth or Darwin or we've had kids go to Melbourne for scholarships. So our kids go everywhere for scholarships. And the parents have as well, so there's that expectation of 'I went away for school so you're going to go away for school as well. So to do that you need to go to school every day, you need to do your homework, you need to make sure you're participating and attending every day.'

The availability of and relationships with community services were vital to schools in addition to the established relationships and support with the broader community. A number of children were in out-of-home care, and some students were also dealing with issues of child abuse, child neglect, sexual abuse, domestic violence and substance misuse. Some may have also have had family members in prison.

The complex range of issues meant that schools were heavily involved with both broader community services as well as with individual families. How well those relationships worked across areas varied. For example, a staff member at the following school where the agencies and school worked in partnership reported:

I would say one of our big differences is our involvement with these outside agencies to the point where parents pick up on, and the community picks up on, us working together...Youth justice will come up and we'll give them a meeting room and they'll talk [here]...the community service

people will pick up little Johnny and take him out cleaning walls or whatever and then bring him back to school, not leaving him wandering the streets for the rest of the afternoon. So that's worked. Child protection will come up. Instead of the kid having to go down there, they'll come up to see how they're going and they will use the meeting room...I keep an open communication with the police. We're out to sort of share information. I make sure to keep that open too. If I'm suspecting there's drugs in town or something I say 'you know we've got a few kids turning up with drugs'. If they hear that such and such is going to thump such and such they'll ring the school to say 'keep an eye out for this or that today'. That is behaviour, but it affects attendance because if the kids come and thump each other and get suspended for 5 days and then it's just ongoing and ongoing...When you say about the police, too, young xxxx was telling me yesterday, that she found the police really supportive. She was able to identify that police here were different to [another town]. That they will take you home, they won't just throw you in a holding cell. And they will go to your families and say 'hey look' to the matriarch of the family 'can you keep the girls in for the next week because of feuding with another mob'.

School factors

One of the most important factors cited by the schools and in the literature regarding school-based factors was the importance of having a strong leader committed not just to school attendance, but also to the overall welfare and wellbeing of the students. The impact of leadership was demonstrated in:

- the overall philosophy or vision for the school and the students – in particular, high expectations for student achievement and behaviour
- the allocation of resources and positions to focus specifically on the academic and welfare needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- the flexibility for staff to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families/carers in a culturally appropriate manner
- school-based policies, programs and practices that are culturally inclusive (for example, where acknowledgement of country is done at the beginning of every assembly)
- strong attendance monitoring and follow-up policies
- identifying and dealing with issues such as bullying or the display of racist slurs and offensive behaviour on the part of other students
- policies that support parental notification for positive feedback as well as the raising of concerns
- ongoing staff development.

The importance of well-qualified and committed staff to support the principal and implement these policies was also acknowledged. According to this principal:

If the teachers are enthusiastic and caring and create an environment that kids want to be in and learn – they see it's learning. I've really learnt at this school with staff I've had, that sometimes it doesn't have to be all bright and bubbly, it has to be real. And the kids have got to feel it. Kids aren't dumb. They know when it's just 'play away', and it's like 'why are we doing this?' They can do all the fun stuff in the world, but it's got to be real, it's got to be relevant, and they've got to feel like they're actually achieving. And that's the thing I think that this school has been so blessed to have, for many years, even before my time: a number of quality staff is important. And it kind of goes in a cycle – you've got quality staff that care, then I think the parents want the kids to come to school. Because they can see it's being purposeful.

Thus, strong leadership and a cohesive, well-trained and committed staff are able to create environments that are physically, culturally and emotionally safe that children want to be in, even in the face of challenging circumstances.

The staff at this school, whether you're an education assistant, an Aboriginal officer, teacher, admin, there's no demarcation, you've got your role, you're supported, and everyone works as 'a staff', and that's the beauty of this place. It's probably the best staff gathered in 'one spot' that you would see anywhere. Chosen because of their skills. And they want to be here as well. So it works both ways. That's a snapshot of our community. It is challenging, but what we've tried to create is this little beacon in the middle of it, which is this school. So that the children want to come here. They respect the school. And when they arrive here they know that they've got to code switch. They're in school mode, and whatever's happening at home, we'll help them with it, but we don't want all the aggression in the school, we don't want that sort of stuff. So that's pretty much where we're at. And it is working. Five, 6 years ago it was a dysfunctional environment. Now it's not, but we still have the same challenges. And that's the difference. The challenges if anything have intensified.

According to another school:

Breaking through some of those barriers...it's almost like this invisible glass ceiling for some of the students to get them to think 'what is possible?' And I think for that reason, for us, the key element that we have worked on as a group of leaders within the school is, for us, culture is king. It's all about creating a culture here which is strong enough to withstand the diminishing impacts of the community and home life and other things, so when students come here they develop a deep sense of loyalty and appreciation of the school and its programs and the staff. I firmly believe that as a school we will only rise to the level that our staff allow us to, so it's about getting the right people onsite, and we work very hard at that, and all of those sort of intangible elements coming together to create a culture where the students feel safe, they feel at home, they feel as though this is a place where they can come and experience learning, but also be supported to have a dream, to have a hope and an aspiration for something beyond school.

Particular strategies that schools and staff have used to create a welcoming cultural environment have included:

- involving the students in Aboriginal artworks
- displaying names for things in the traditional language as well as in English
- putting up an Aboriginal seasons wheel
- always doing a welcome to country before assemblies, and providing cultural-specific activities at the school (for example, dance, art).

One school provided a separate 'enclave' in an old demountable room, which was given a traditional language name. According to staff: *anything Aboriginal that happens, happens in that room.* This included cultural activities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students once a week during school time, playgroups, parent meetings, artwork, cooking, the antenatal group, and so on. The Aboriginal liaison officers are also based there.

In addition, the school brings in a number of Aboriginal performers and sportspeople, flies the Aboriginal flag, has Aboriginal artwork by students and local community members mounted on the buildings, and teaches the local Aboriginal language.

Attendance monitoring and follow-up strategies not only were present at each of the schools, but also their importance was emphasised in several key ways. The first was through dedicated attendance officers: *if you're looking at improving attendance in any school, if you don't*

have a dedicated person to look at that, the principal does not have the time to address the needs of every child in the school. The second was setting up a process whereby attendance was the responsibility of the whole school, not just of the attendance officer.

The specific role of Aboriginal education/liaison/support workers was discussed with each school (and was highlighted in the discussion of student factors). Staff at all schools believed that this was an important role and that, particularly where students had home lives that were characterised by high levels of stress and disruption, the staff member provided stability in the students' lives.

In addition to home visits and building connections with families and the community, staff felt that the role of these workers was to support other staff members' learning and development about Indigenous issues, culture, practices and ways of communication, which then also provided key symbolic value to the schools.

There were differences of opinion on whether the person needed to be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and whether they needed to be from that particular community. What staff felt was important was that the person who filled that role had some qualification, that they had the ability to communicate well and that, whether or not they were from the community, they were able to stay neutral in any community disputes.

Key lessons

The key lessons for developing and implementing strategies that are effective in improving the attendance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the long-term are presented in Box 3.

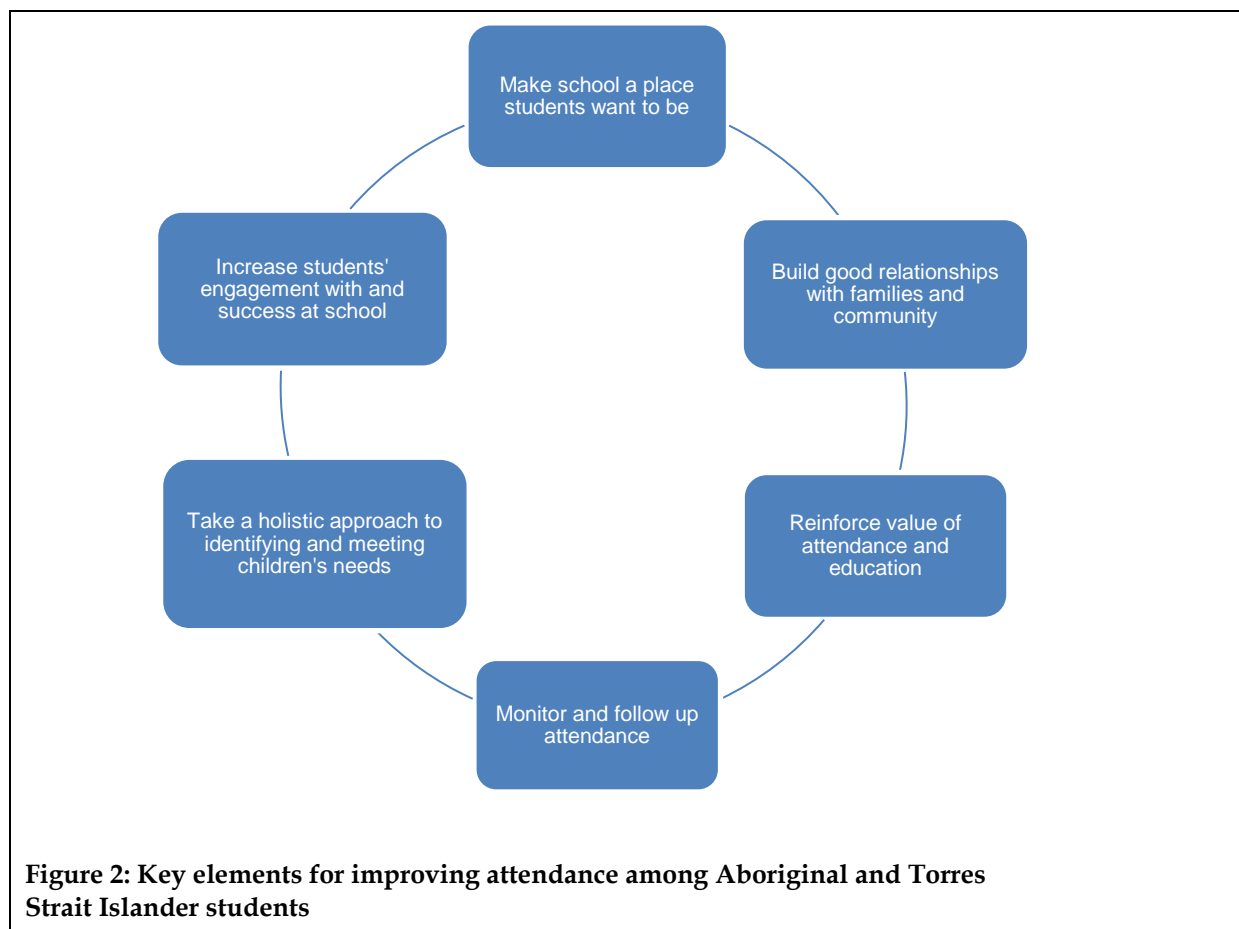
These lessons represent the key underpinning factors that the schools have said are essential to have in place before specific strategies can be implemented successfully. They are backed up by the findings from the literature review (for example, Boulden 2006; Bourke et al. 2000; Purdie & Buckley 2010). They can be viewed as a set of necessary, but not sufficient, factors for improving attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. One school felt that these elements represent the 'what' while the individual strategies represent the 'how you get there'.

For example, this school felt that the key to its success was that...*fundamentally it's a multifaceted approach that we have and it's predominantly built on relationships, and that's relationships with young people and relationships with the parents and the community...we have an aspirant program and a sports program for Aboriginal students, and an engagement program, plus a case management approach, and attendance officers and home visits...It's a very welcoming school and predominantly our young people seem to be happy to come here.*

Box 3. Key lessons for developing and implementing effective attendance strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

- Improving/maintaining attendance requires strong leadership from the principal, who not only allocates resources and priorities, but also sets the tone that attendance is an important whole-of-school issue. Following on from this is having highly skilled, well-trained and committed staff.
- Ongoing collection and monitoring of attendance data at an individual student level (as well as at a school level) with dedicated processes in place for follow-up is vital to identifying attendance patterns as well as at risk students. This includes having at least 1 dedicated staff member whose role is to follow up attendance issues with students and families.
- Improving attendance among at risk students requires a focus on the whole child, including their physical and mental health, their family situations, their literacy and numeracy skills, their social skills and their aspirations. Addressing these issues requires close working relationships with services outside the school.
- The school environment needs to be a safe and welcoming place where students want to be. This includes cultural safety, physical safety and emotional safety (for example, no racism and bullying), as well as having appropriate teaching and behaviour management practices.
- The school needs to have a culture of high expectations that all students can achieve, balanced with appropriate individual goals and supports to develop academic and social skills.
- Developing a trusting relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, their families, the local community and the school is essential to maintain and improve attendance levels. It requires commitment from all staff, and needs to be viewed as an ongoing and long-term process. A key element in this process is open, honest and respectful communication.
- Schools, students and families need to be 'on the same page' with regard to the importance of education in general and attendance at school specifically, which, particularly for high school students, involves building the connection between education and post-school options.
- Improving attendance requires a multifaceted approach, and what works in certain schools may not be as effective in others because of particular local circumstances.
- Once policies, staff, programs and/or structures are in place that are effective in improving attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, they need to be embedded within the school in order to be sustainable (which may require ongoing funding). Long-term sustainability requires that they not depend upon a single individual who may leave that role.

These key lessons can be distilled into 6 key elements for improving attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Figure 2). These elements were present in all of the schools selected for inclusion in the consultations. It is important to note that the schools were selected precisely because they either had consistently high levels of attendance among their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students or because they had managed to raise their levels of attendance significantly.



These key elements relate directly to the 6 priority domains of the ATSIEAP:

- readiness for school
- engagement and connections
- literacy and numeracy, leadership
- attendance
- quality teaching and workforce development
- pathways to post-school options.

For example, the readiness for school domain affects students' engagement with and success at school. The engagement and connections domain has a direct link to building good relationships with families and community, while the quality teaching and workforce development domain affects whether students view particular schools as safe places that they want to be.

The 6 elements were reported as being essential to successfully improving and maintaining attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students because they address the factors underpinning non-attendance. For example, schools that have been successful in building relationships with families and communities have shown an understanding of the reasons why relationships may have been strained in the past and have chosen strategies to address those issues specifically.

How schools might use these findings

There are numerous ways that schools and school communities can use these findings. As well as using the key lessons in Box 3 as a 'starting point' for an initial discussion about attendance in their own school, schools could also:

- use the 4 domains to begin to identify the particular barriers to school attendance that are relevant for their communities
- use the 6 key elements in Figure 2 as a framework to identify strengths/areas of improvement for their school
- assess whether any of the strategies in the report might be appropriate for their school.

4 Sharing the evidence: A web-based strategy

Enthusiastic feedback was received from education professionals in the school consultations about the potential development of a dedicated school attendance 'one-stop-shop' website. For example: *I would use that, definitely, as a principal. And I'm sure our attendance officer would if she knew that there was something out there. You know, it's about sharing and it's about 'oh geez, look at what they did there'.*

The education professionals felt that the primary users of a website would be principals, Aboriginal education/liaison officers, teachers, school administrators, policy analysts, and those from related community services who deal with students. They felt that the information and functionality should be targeted to those groups.

Consistent feedback was received on the potential website's functionality and content. Key elements include:

- A case study highlighted on the front page: *Case studies – for me as a school leader, those are what I'm looking at and reading; that's what's useful to me. So any common threads that are across schools, pulled into some kind of paper, that's something that I would read myself with the leadership team and then I'd share with the staff, and then get ideas...say, okay, here's some broad principles – you know, respect, partnerships with the communities, with the families, you know, whatever it is – what do you think that could look like in our context? So to take whatever the broad principles are that is success and then, 'here's some examples of how it's worked at other places. How do you think we could apply that to our context?'*
- Links, particularly to attendance policies, resources, staff training/professional development opportunities, funding sources/opportunities, scholarships, post-school options, and information on the issues 'behind' non-attendance, with links to resources for dealing with them: *You know what I'd like to see? Having a website as a resource. As a one-stop resource, for example: here's a list of scholarships that are going this year...this is the website to go to, this is the email address, because these things are hard to find...or health. These are the resources, these are the issues, so you might have a school that's new to Indigenous education – these are the issues that you will confront, these are the things that you need to look out for.*
- An opportunity for linking up or engaging directly with other schools as well as a moderated bulletin board where schools could ask for help from other schools or share ideas: *An ideas forum. Like the Department of Rec [Recreation] – I would never have thought of that but for the fact that I sat next to this guy and we got chatting about it and they ran a traditional Indigenous games session for us. Participants also wanted a separate section on the website where Aboriginal education/liaison officers could connect directly with each other to share their experiences.*
- A searchable evidence base which would include relevant articles, resources and practical tips and summaries of key articles or issues that principals could use to foster discussion with their staff. Participants also wanted searchable case studies to select those that were most relevant to their situations: *I'd want success stories, research, attendance, breakfast, whatever it is, like the whole ramification of things that you're going to tackle if you have any issues with attendance, government initiatives, funding, programs, even personal learning plans for schools – like a toolbox that schools can say 'here's a model, and here's a case study of how this school does it; they do it through this process' so I can take it and modify*

it... and there's many facets, and maybe schools might not have thought about 1 facet or 2 facets, you know what I mean, unless they actually see it they might not think about it.

- Sign-up for notifications (by email or text) when new content was posted on the website, so participants would know to check it.

The consultations provided clear guiding principles for the development of the website. In essence, it would need to be clear in its purpose, practical, easy to navigate, and include information/links to factors related to attendance issues (for example, health, housing, domestic violence, substance misuse). In order to be useful, it would need to be updated regularly. Other key messages were that the website would need to have inherent reliability and validity (that is, its content, by definition, would be trustworthy); it should have access to the latest government-sponsored research, data, funding and policies; and that it would need to be promoted through the relevant jurisdictional department or peak body websites.

The AIHW recommends adopting the following good practice principles in respect to establishing and managing such a website:

- clear identification of the website's functions and intended users
- establishment of ongoing processes to identify users' information needs
- quick and easy accessibility to information and materials for intended users, in formats and distribution modes that are appropriate for their individual and workplace contexts
- provision of information that is valid, reliable, current, comprehensive and useful for intended users
- establishment of robust quality assurance mechanisms, including quality standards and criteria for material acquisition, review, synthesis, research (where applicable), publication and dissemination
- engagement of a range of personnel (both internal and external, as needed) with an appropriate mix of qualifications, experience and expertise to undertake the website's identified functions for its target audiences
- implementation of stakeholder satisfaction surveys.

It is imperative that any website development accords with the 2000 Government Online Strategy. This strategy requires all departments and agencies to comply with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 (World Wide Web Consortium), and with web policies and guidelines set out in the Australian Government Web Publishing standards <webpublishing.agimo.gov.au>.

The AIHW recommends that a Reference Group be established to provide strategic direction and to oversee the operations of an online evidence base were it to be developed. In addition, a scientific advisory board more focused on the specific content of the website could also be established to provide more operational oversight, including establishing protocols to source and assess content.

One issue requiring further consultation with key stakeholders is the extent to which any such website should be branded as being specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The schools in the Project clearly recognised that attendance is not only an Indigenous issue, and that all schools could benefit from the information (not just those with Indigenous students).

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This report summarises the findings from the SCSEEC successful school attendance strategies evidence-based project. Bringing together information from a detailed literature review and a series of consultations with schools, it presents key lessons for developing and implementing effective strategies for improving school attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.



Australian Government

**Australian Institute of
Health and Welfare**

SCSEEC successful school attendance strategies evidence-based project

Final report



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*Authoritative information and statistics
to promote better health and wellbeing*

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Canberra

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Acknowledgments

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Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AEW	Aboriginal education worker
AIEO	Aboriginal and Islander education officer
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
AIO, ALO	Aboriginal liaison officer
ATSIEAP	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DEEWR	Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
LOTE	Languages other than English
MCEECDYA	Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs
NAIDOC	National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee
SCSEEC	Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood

Summary

Governments, schools and communities throughout Australia are working to improve school attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students using strategies such as incentive programs, improvement to literacy and numeracy skills, school-family partnerships, transport to school, attendance monitoring, ensuring that school is a welcoming place for Indigenous students, and programs that focus on non-academic achievement as a way of engaging students in school.

Currently, however, little is known about the effectiveness of these strategies and the key factors which underpin programs and strategies which are successful. The SCSEEC Successful School Attendance Strategies Evidence-based Project (the Project) was designed to fill this gap in the evidence by bringing together published data on effectiveness with the on-the-ground experiences of schools and communities who have been successful in improving the attendance of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

This report details the Project findings, and shows that schools which improved their attendance undertook 4 key steps. They all:

- recognised the importance of attendance as an issue for the school
- identified individual students for whom non-attendance is an issue
- investigated and understood the reasons behind non-attendance
- developed and implemented effective strategies to address those issues to enhance the likelihood that children and young people attend school regularly.

Linked to these steps, this report includes information and insights about:

- the 4 key domains that can be barriers or enhancers to school attendance (school factors, family factors, student factors, community/structural factors)
- 9 strategies with demonstrated effectiveness and the various ways in which schools implemented those strategies
- lessons for developing and implementing strategies that are effective in improving the attendance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the long-term which represent the key underpinning factors that the schools have said are essential to have in place before specific strategies can be implemented successfully
- the 6 elements that the schools reported as being critical to successfully improving and maintaining attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students because they address the factors underpinning non-attendance.

In addition, the report includes 3 case studies which highlight the experiences of schools that have either raised or maintained high levels of attendance among their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Each of the case studies includes a description of the school, the community, the key issues facing the school related to attendance, the strategies used to improve attendance, key lessons/mechanisms for other schools and ongoing issues/future plans.

The report also includes information and feedback from the consultations about how this type of information could potentially be shared through the development of a dedicated school attendance 'one-stop-shop' website.

1 Introduction

Most Australian children attend school regularly. However, school attendance rates are lower for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students than for other students; the greatest gaps are at high school level and the lowest rates of attendance occur in the more remote areas of Australia (ABS 2011; ACARA unpublished data).

Closing this gap in school attendance is critical to reducing the gaps in educational outcomes and in employment in later life. This also has an impact on closing the gap in life expectancy and child mortality between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and other Australians as recognised in the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Closing the Gap initiatives.

Governments, schools and communities throughout Australia are actively using a wide variety of strategies to improve school attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Yet, there is currently scarce evidence about the effectiveness of particular strategies and the factors that underpin their success, or about their applicability to particular school or community settings (MCEECDYA 2010; Purdie & Buckley 2010).

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (ATSIEAP) for 2010–14 (MCEECDYA 2010) recognised the need to enhance available evidence (National Collaborative Action 22):

MCEECDYA [the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, now the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC)] will dedicate National Project Funds in 2011 to further develop a better evidence base of what works in improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student attendance. The evidence base will consider a range of contextual information, including the way in which schools respond to the diverse linguistic, cultural and geographical contexts in which they operate (MCEECDYA 2010:18).

To progress this action, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) was commissioned to conduct the SCSEEC Successful School Attendance Strategies Evidence-based Project (the Project), which was carried out by staff of the Indigenous and Children's Group. The Project combined the findings of a comprehensive literature review with qualitative evidence from a series of consultations held with 9 diverse school communities in 2 jurisdictions to produce a final project report to the ATSIEAP Working Group. The report concluded:

- There is now a body of evidence demonstrating that there are effective strategies for improving attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students that address identified barriers to regular school attendance.
- One effective potential method to share that evidence would be a 'one-stop-shop' web portal, combining a searchable evidence base with practical implementation tools and opportunities for sharing ideas among education practitioners and school communities.

This paper draws upon that final project report. However, its focus is on presenting and discussing the findings that education policy makers, practitioners, schools and school communities are likely to find useful for their own work on improving attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The report is structured as follows:

- The rest of this chapter provides an overview of the methodology used to conduct the Project.

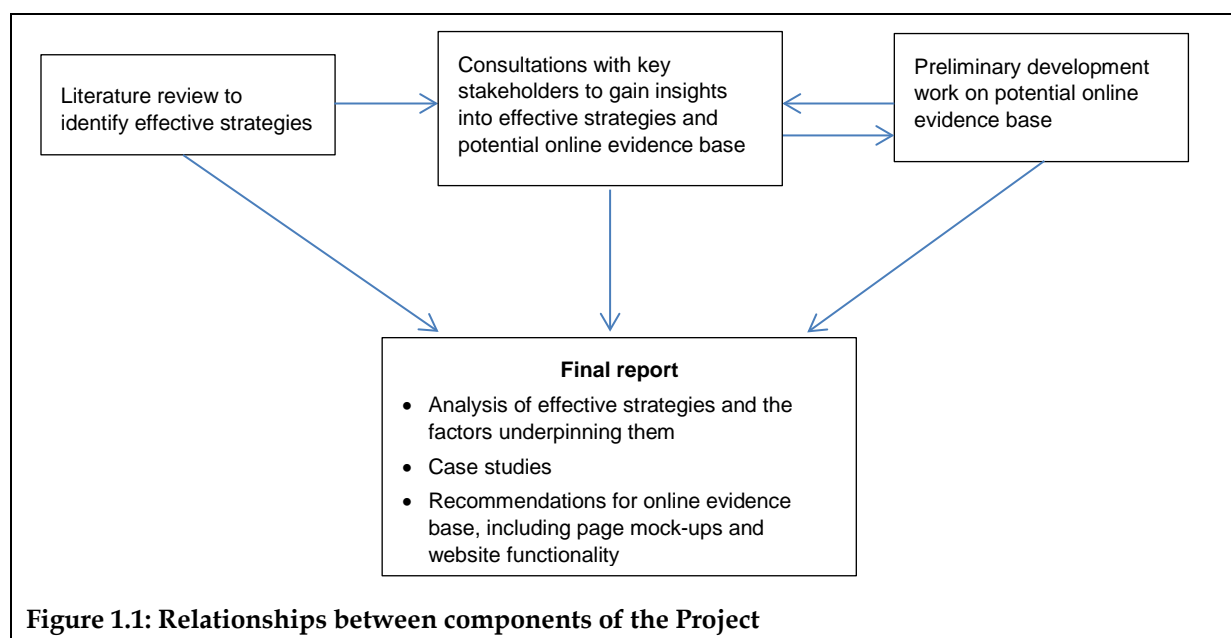
- Chapter 2 brings together the findings from the literature review and the consultations to discuss the issues affecting students' attendance and to illustrate how schools have dealt with these issues in a practical and effective manner. It also discusses the types of policies, structures and services that support schools in this role. In addition, it describes 6 key school-level elements that can help improve attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, as well as lessons drawn from the experiences of those schools that other schools can use to develop and implement effective strategies.
- Chapter 3 provides in-depth case studies of 3 schools included in the consultations.
- Chapter 4 summarises the developmental work on a potential web-based method for sharing the evidence on effective attendance strategies.

Overview of methodology

The project had 3 main components:

- an expert literature review of attendance strategies and policies that successfully increase school attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- a coordinated stakeholder consultation process on effective school attendance strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the assessment of community engagement requirements for an effective online tool
- detailed recommendations for developing an online evidence-based tool.

As shown in Figure 1.1, the 3 main components in the project were interrelated. This section describes each of these components/processes.



Literature review

The literature review had 2 purposes:

- (1) to examine the individual, contextual and structural factors that influence school attendance (and non-attendance) among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;

to summarise the policy context; and to review national and international evidence on effective attendance strategies and the mechanisms behind them

- (2) to use the evidence to help select the school communities for the consultation component of the Project and to develop the consultation tools.

The completed literature review is included at Attachment A. Nine separate strategies were found to have a demonstrated level of effectiveness in increasing school attendance:

- incentive programs
- student engagement programs, including extracurricular and out-of-school activities
- literacy and numeracy programs
- nutrition programs
- attendance monitoring
- whole-of-school approaches
- school, family, and community partnerships
- transport
- parental consequences for poor attendance.

The literature review discusses each of these strategies and the barrier to school attendance each attempts to address. The review also provides examples of successful programs and the size of the impact they have had on attendance; where available, it presents evidence about the mechanisms that seem to underpin their success.

It is important to note, however, that the published literature can go only so far in guiding schools wishing to implement similar strategies. Having a detailed understanding of the experiences of schools and communities in their selection and implementation of successful strategies is critical in developing an evidence base that can offer practical advice to other schools and communities.

Thus, the next step was to engage directly with schools and communities who have used these strategies successfully to gather their perspectives on the key factors underpinning success and the lessons that they would pass on to other schools and communities.

Community engagement

The Project Team provided the AIHW with the names and details of a designated contact in the Education departments in 4 jurisdictions whose role would be to assist the AIHW in community selection and in guiding the process of ethics approval.

The AIHW connected with each of these contacts, explaining the purpose of the Project and asking for assistance in providing examples of schools for possible inclusion.

Next, the AIHW developed an overview of the effective strategies identified in the literature review and a template for jurisdictions to provide the names of schools that matched these strategies and sent these documents to the jurisdictions (see Appendix A).

One state provided a list of 13 possible schools (10 government and 3 independent) and another provided a list of 24 possible schools (23 government and 1 independent). Together, they provided coverage across locations, school size, primary/high school, and the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled at the school. The schools also covered all but 1 of the 9 strategies (parental consequences). The contacts also

had the option of nominating schools using strategies other than the previously identified 9 strategies.

The intent of the Project was to develop an understanding of the mechanisms underpinning effective strategies and to seek feedback on developing a potential online tool; it was not to seek a nationally representative sample. Hence, DEEWR and the AIHW agreed on a set of 12 schools to engage with initially: 6 from each state, including 2 metropolitan (metro) schools, 2 regional and 2 remote. The final list included 3 schools from 1 state and 6 from the other. The other 2 states were to be used as backup if necessary.

The coverage of schools is included as Appendix B.

Engagement process

Prior to contacting the schools, the AIHW sought appropriate ethics approval (internally and from the 2 states). The principals of the 3 independent schools had already given their permission to be contacted before the names of their schools were supplied to the AIHW. Their Association of Independent Schools advised that no additional ethics approval was required. Ethics approval from the Department of Education in the other state was received on 13 August 2012.

Based on templates from the ethics applications, the AIHW developed a series of letters explaining the project and inviting participation, along with consent forms for school administrators, school staff and community members.

The engagement process was as follows:

- Letters were sent/faxed to principals/site administrators explaining the Project and seeking their willingness to participate, with a follow-up phone call from the AIHW to answer any questions.
- The principal/site administrator was asked to nominate a staff member to liaise with the AIHW. A team member from the AIHW then contacted this liaison person to discuss the Project and to ask for guidance on whom to approach and how best to approach them. The AIHW supplied letters of invitation and consent forms, either directly to the proposed participants or to the liaison person to give out on its behalf, depending upon the school's preference and experience.

Content of the interview and focus group guides

Separate interview and focus group guides were developed for school staff and community members who had been involved with the successful strategies (which could include parents). The questions sought information about the broader context, details of the strategy/strategies chosen and their selection and implementation, underlying mechanisms/lessons learned, and feedback on the online evidence base. There was also the opportunity to provide any other feedback.

Participation

Nine schools were initially approached to participate in the Project; 8 agreed to participate and 1 declined. The name of a replacement school with similar characteristics to the school that chose not to participate was sought from the state contact. That replacement school agreed to participate, making a total of 9 schools participating in the consultation phase. Table 1.1 provides an overview of the characteristics of the schools that participated.

Table 1.1: Characteristics of participating schools

Characteristic	Number of schools	Per cent
School sector		
Government	6	66.7
Non-government	3	33.3
Type		
Primary school	4	44.4
Combined primary and high school	3	33.3
High school	2	22.2
Geographic location		
Metropolitan	3	33.3
Regional	4	44.4
Remote	2	22.2
Total number of students in the school		
<50	1	11.1
50–99	1	11.1
100–199	3	33.3
200–299	0	0.0
300+	4	44.4
Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students		
<50	1	11.1
50–74	5	55.5
75–99	2	22.2
100+	1	11.1
Percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students		
<25 %	4	44.4
25–49%	2	22.2
50–74%	1	11.1
75%+	2	22.2
Focus School funding		
Yes	3	33.3
No	6	66.7
Recipient of Smarter Schools National Participation funding		
Yes	6	66.7
No	3	33.3

The consultations included interviews/focus groups with a total of 24 participants from a range of roles within the 9 schools. With permission of participants, all interviews/focus group discussions were digitally recorded and then transcribed.

Each school was asked whether there were parents or community members it could suggest that the AIHW should interview (who had been involved with the initial identification of attendance as an issue and/or the development of attendance strategies). None of the schools was able to identify such potential participants.

Three of the 9 schools were non-government. Two of the non-government schools were faith-based, but accepted students of all backgrounds. One of the faith-based schools was part of a larger system of schools, while the other was not. However, all 3 of the independent schools were part of their state's Association of Independent Schools and were able to access resources and supports through the Association.

There was a mix of primary, secondary and combined primary and high schools. In addition, all the 7 schools with primary students ran pre-primary or preschool programs on the school site. These programs included structured playgroups, mother's groups, preschool programs, and transition-to-school programs.

Four of the schools were in regional areas, 3 were in metropolitan areas, and 2 were in remote areas (as defined by the departments of education). There was a range of school sizes: 2 of the schools had fewer than 100 students, and most had more than 300 students.

Both the total number and percentage of the student population who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander are important from a resource and programming perspective. Most of the schools had more than 50 students who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, representing from 13% to 93% of the student body.

Three of the schools included in the project received Australian Government Focus School funding to further the agreed National Collaborative Action 26 of the ATSIEAP, and 6 schools received funding from the Smarter Schools National Partnerships Programs (5 from Low Socio-economic Status School Communities, 1 from Teacher Quality, and 3 from Literacy/Numeracy).

Community profiles of the areas in which the schools are located are included in Appendix C. It is important to note, however, that these data pertain to the total population in these areas and do not necessarily reflect the families of the students in each school. For example, students in particular schools may be more disadvantaged than may appear from aggregate community statistics. In addition, these statistics reflect the area in which the school is located, not necessarily the area in which the students reside (which is an important issue for regional schools where students may travel long distances to school).

Table 1.2 presents the characteristics of the 24 staff who participated in the interviews/focus groups. A principal or vice-principal was interviewed at every school. All 9 of the schools considered attendance to be the responsibility of all staff members at the school as reflected in the range of participants.

Aboriginal education officers/liaison officers were interviewed at 7 of the 9 schools, and their roles were discussed in-depth at the other 2 schools. The terminology for the Aboriginal education/liaison positions differed between states and between schools within states. Included in this group are staff members whose responsibilities (at the minimum) include supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students within the school, developing/integrating/promoting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture within the school, and developing relationships with families and the community. Two were trained

teachers, and a number also had other responsibilities including attendance monitoring for all students and additional educational/emotional support for any students who required it (not only those who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander).

Table 1.2: Characteristics of participants

Role	Male	Female	Total	
			No.	%
Principal	3	4	7	29.2
Vice-/deputy principal	3	1	4	16.7
Aboriginal education/liaison officer	3	5	8	33.3
Student/welfare services	3	0	3	12.5
Administrative	0	1	1	4.2
Program-specific	0	1	1	4.2
Total	12	12	24	100

Coverage of strategies

Table 1.3 shows the types of strategies initially identified by the state contacts. Table 1.4 shows that, in practice, each of the 9 schools was employing nearly all of them.

Table 1.3: Initially identified strategies

Strategy	Metro. primary	Metro. primary	Metro. high	Regional high	Regional primary	Remote primary	Regional K-12	Regional K-12	Remote primary
Incentives	X		X	X				X	X
Student engagement			X	X				X	X
Literacy/numeracy	X		X			X	X	X	X
Nutrition			X					X	
Attendance monitoring		X	X					X	X
Whole-of-school approach			X			X	X	X	X
Community partnerships	X		X			X	X	X	X
Transport		X						X	X
Other					X				

Notes: The ninth strategy, parental consequences, is not reflected as it is a government, not a school-initiated, policy. Metro. = metropolitan. Other was an option offered to the state contacts for strategies that did not fit into one of the 9 previously identified.

Thus, as shown in Table 1.4, the 9 schools included in the Project provided excellent coverage of strategies across locations, school sectors and school types. All were similar in that they all experienced challenges related to attendance and were actively working to address attendance on multiple levels. However, as will be discussed later, the ways in

which they implemented the particular strategies depended upon their local circumstances, resources and needs.

Table 1.4: Strategies being used by schools as identified through the consultations

Strategy	Metro. primary	Metro. primary	Metro. high	Regional high	Regional primary	Remote primary	Regional K-12	Regional K-12	Remote primary
Incentives	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Student engagement	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Literacy/numeracy	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Nutrition	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Attendance monitoring	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Whole-of-school approach	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Community partnerships	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Transport		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Other	X				X				

Notes: The ninth strategy, parental consequences, is not reflected as it is a government, not a school-initiated, policy. Metro. = metropolitan. Comp. = composite (K-12). Other was an option offered to the state contacts for strategies that did not fit into one of the 9 previously identified.

Development of a potential online evidence base

The Online Communications Unit at the AIHW worked with the team to progress the development and design of a potential online evidence base. Initial work focused on mapping out a general site structure and navigation, along with the prospective user roles. A matrix of the potential users of the website, and their purpose for using this material and associated information, was developed. The AIHW then funded Colmar Brunton to conduct preliminary research using online focus groups.

The Unit created a wireframe (page schematics of websites) based on the feedback from the initial set of consultations with schools. This wireframe and style tiles (visual references of font and colour) were taken on the next round of school consultations. This iterative process continued, whereby the feedback from each set of consultations was used to further develop both wireframes and style tiles. The final versions were included in the project report to the ATSIEAP Working Group. A summary of the key elements and findings from this process is presented in Chapter 4 of this report.

2 Findings

At the local school level, closing the gap in school attendance rates between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other students requires several key elements:

- recognising the importance of attendance as an issue for the school
- identifying individual students for whom non-attendance is an issue
- understanding the reasons behind the non-attendance
- developing and implementing effective strategies that address these issues and enhance the likelihood that children and young people will attend school regularly.

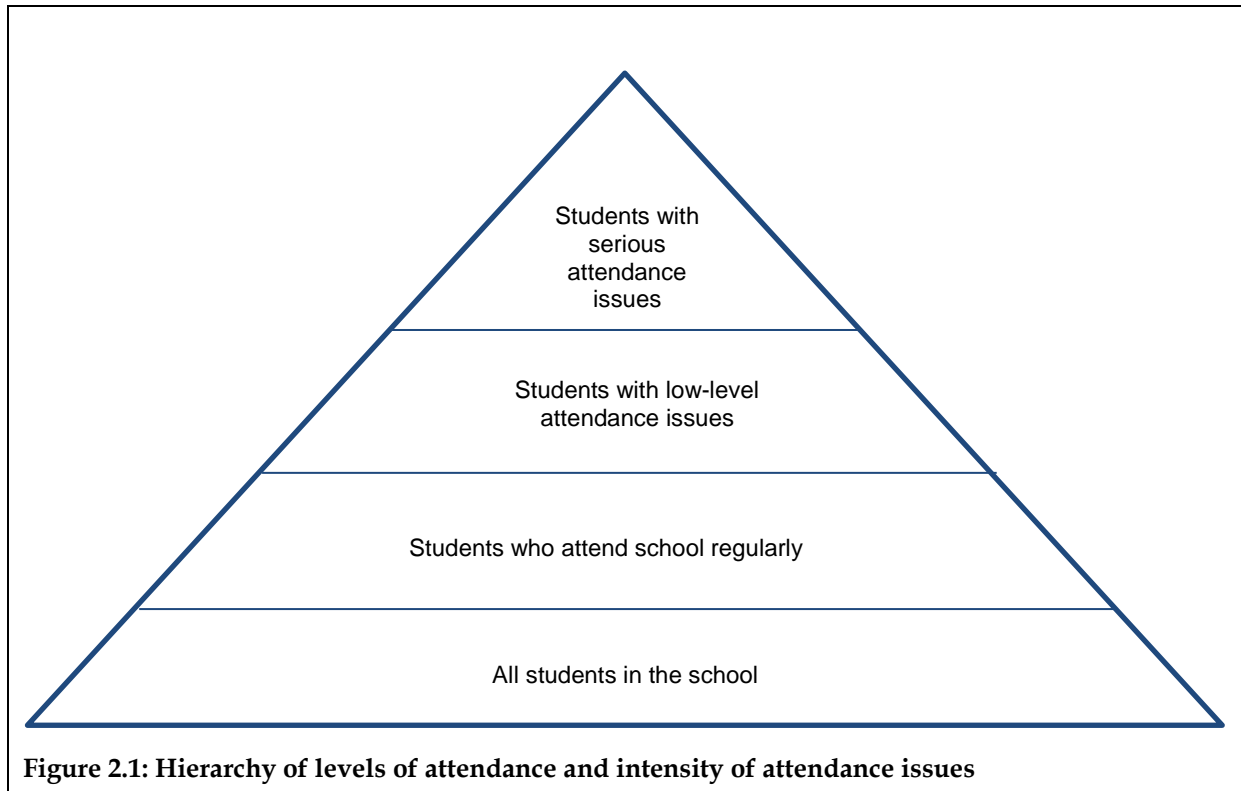
The 9 schools participating in the Project followed these steps, although the particular triggers for focusing on attendance varied across schools, depending upon local issues or context. For example, a regional school's focus on attendance was driven by its concern about attendance as a symptom of larger issues in their students' overall welfare. At another school, the entry of a new principal brought a new focus on attendance: *attendance was quite low and it was identified that there was an area of concern...when I asked about attendance, the response from the staff was 'you make all the phone calls, and you can do all this stuff' and I'm like 'no, this is a holistic approach about all of us and what are we going to do as a school'. And now they're really good with that.*

These efforts at a local level can be supported or hampered by other services, the local community, and by policy initiatives at the jurisdictional level. For example, the attendance and reporting requirements of state and Australian governments signify the importance of attendance as an issue and facilitate the monitoring of individual students' attendance patterns. From a practical perspective, however, school communities then have to identify and implement effective strategies that address the particular issues underpinning non-attendance among their students.

This chapter brings together the findings from the literature review and the consultations to discuss the issues affecting students' attendance and to illustrate how schools have dealt with these issues in a practical and effective manner. It also discusses the types of policies, structures and services that support schools in this role.

The consultations demonstrated that there is a hierarchy of attendance levels and intensity of attendance issues at every school. Figure 2.1 depicts this hierarchy. In practice, the shape is unlikely to be a perfect pyramid (as shown here); however, the figure is designed to represent both the general pattern of attendance (where the largest groups of students attend school regularly) and the level of intensity of issues (where the highest intensity is at the highest level).

The size and composition of each section of the pyramid varies between schools. In practice, schools decide how to allocate resources between the sections to try to ensure not only that the bottom sections of the pyramid are the largest (to prevent at risk students from moving 'up' to more serious attendance issues), but also students with serious attendance issues (the top section) are moved back 'down'.



It is important to note that, although Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have higher rates of non-attendance than other students at an aggregate level, the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students will be in the lower levels of the pyramid. Additionally, schools emphasised that non-attendance is not just an Indigenous issue; in schools with both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other students, there will be a mix of students in the higher levels.

Issues affecting attendance and effective strategies for addressing them

Improving school attendance requires firstly identifying the underlying factors why some students do not attend school regularly and then implementing strategies to target those issues effectively. The factors affecting attendance and non-attendance at school among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are multifaceted and complex, and may vary across communities, geographic locations, school sectors and school type. They will thus require a range of strategies. As discussed in the literature review, these factors can be categorised into 4 sets of issues affecting attendance (in either a positive or negative manner):

- school factors
- family factors
- structural/community factors
- student factors.

In the past, much of the 'blame' for the poorer attendance rates of Indigenous students was assigned to students, families and individual communities who were thought to be less supportive of education in general and who assigned lower priorities to attending school than parents from other backgrounds (Bourke et al. 2000). More recent work, however, has stressed the importance of the interaction between all 4 of these sets of factors affecting attendance. For example, if parents had poor experiences in their own past with the education system, they may feel uncomfortable in their children's school unless the school actively encourages and engages them in a welcoming manner and demonstrates a positive understanding of and commitment to Aboriginal culture.

Box 2.1 provides an overview of key elements within each of the 4 domains. All the factors were cited (without prompting) by the 9 schools included in the consultations as being barriers to attendance among their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, although their level of importance varied across the schools depending upon local contexts and histories.

Box 2.1: Factors affecting non-attendance among Indigenous students by domain

School factors

- Culturally appropriate curriculum and school environment
- Cultural understanding
- Language
- Indigenous staff members
- Bullying and suspension policies
- School leadership

Family factors

- Family's socioeconomic status
- Experience with education
- Parents' levels of literacy and numeracy

Structural/community factors

- Remoteness
- Transport
- Community involvement
- Education experiences
- Employment opportunities

Student factors

- Child's health
- Level of school readiness
- Safe and secure environment
- Attachment to school/education

Understanding these factors provides opportunities for clear and targeted interventions. For example, if a barrier to school attendance is physical (for example, transport) or financial (for example, the cost of uniforms), strategies can be adopted that target these barriers specifically. If a barrier is a lack of cultural understanding on the part of school staff, appropriate interventions may consist of staff development, training and mentoring.

Box 2.2 lists the effective strategies identified in the literature review, which were reinforced in the consultations, by the type of domain they target.

Box 2.2: Effective strategies by domains targeted

School factors

- Whole-of-school approaches
- Attendance monitoring programs

Family factors

- Parental consequences for poor attendance
- School/family/community partnerships

Structural/community factors

- School/family/community partnerships
- Transport

Student factors

- Literacy and numeracy programs
- Incentive programs
- Student engagement programs
- Nutrition programs

Because the nature of the factors varies by local context, and because there were different triggers for the focus on attendance in the first place, schools used a range of the strategies (as outlined in Box 2.2) to address their particular barriers.

Schools differed in the way they selected strategies: some arose organically and others were targeted interventions (such as external programs brought into the school). One of the key messages to emerge from the consultations about the ways in which these schools were able to improve the attendance of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was that there was no 'one size fits all' approach. It was also found to be necessary that schools be both innovative and committed.

Table 2.1 provides examples of the specific ways in which the 9 schools implemented these particular types of strategies (with parental consequences the only strategy not to be covered). Table 2.1 also illustrates that there are both similarities and differences in the ways in which the schools applied the strategies. For example, some schools used personalised learning plans as a means of student engagement, while others used sporting programs, playgroups and preschool programs, links to post-school options, and cultural programs.

The consultations provided rich feedback on how the schools chose strategies, implemented them, and the challenges they faced. Below we present some of the details of these strategies by the domain they address, including information on the practical experiences of schools.

Information is presented on the domains themselves and the schools' lived experiences of these factors, and on how they deal with them in an ongoing basis. The quotes that follow in the report present a realistic picture of the challenges that the schools face in raising/maintaining attendance levels among their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students specifically, and among all students in general. These recounts illustrate both the successes and (sometimes) the ongoing frustrations experienced by a group of schools which were selected because they have had success at addressing these factors.

Table 2.1: Summary of specific strategies used by the participating schools

Strategy	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4	School 5	School 6	School 7	School 8	School 9
Incentives	Awards, rewards	Awards, rewards, chocolate wheel School passport program	Awards, rewards Level of attendance required for extracurricular activities	Online rewards program School jumper Itunes and Westfield vouchers 85% level of attendance required for end-of-year trip to amusement park	Reward chart	Rewards	Participation at camp based on attendance and behaviour	90% level of attendance required for end-of-term treat	Awards assemblies End-of-year Indigenous award
Student engagement	Personalised learning plans Link to post-school options	Personalised learning plans Playgroup and preschool program	Sporting program Personalised learning plans	Police Citizens Youth Clubs programs Personalised learning plans	Indigenous club, undertaking cultural activities such as painting, cooking, gardens and dancing Homework club Playgroup Student counsellors	Cultural days Goal setting Program for 0–4 year olds	Link to scholarship options	Integration programs Link to other programs	Homework centre Cultural perspective across the curriculum

(continued)

Table 2.1 (continued): Summary of specific strategies used by the participating schools

Strategy	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4	School 5	School 6	School 7	School 8	School 9
Literacy/ numeracy	One-on-one tutoring	One-on-one or small group tutoring	One-on-one or small group tutoring Ensuring learning resources meet students' needs	In-class teacher aides	Local language is taught	Local language is taught	Make own books to provide cultural context Reading to students 3 or more times a week	One-on-one in-class tutoring Promoting alternative thinking strategies	Individual tuition
Nutrition	Provide food when required	Provide food when required Run a nutrition program	Food program	Provide food when required	Provide food when required	Provide food when required	Provide food when required	Provide food when required	Provide food when required
Attendance monitoring	Daily monitoring, follow-up by Indigenous support officer	Daily monitoring, follow-up by vice-principal and Aboriginal education workers	Daily monitoring, follow-up by principal, welfare team, teachers and Aboriginal education workers	Letters Attendance lunches with parents at the end of the month	Daily monitoring overseen by the deputy principal and Aboriginal worker	Daily monitoring, with follow-up by the Aboriginal and Islander education officer	Daily monitoring, with follow-up by the deputy principal and attendance officer	Daily follow-up by Aboriginal liaison officer via phone calls, letters and meetings with parents, overseen by principal Individual attendance targets	Daily monitoring with follow-up phone calls

(continued)

Table 2.1 (continued): Summary of specific strategies used by the participating schools

Strategy	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4	School 5	School 6	School 7	School 8	School 9
Whole-of-school approach	Overall philosophy Teaching and behaviour management approaches Staff development	Overall philosophy Teaching and behaviour management approaches Staff development	Overall philosophy Teaching and behaviour management approaches Staff development	Liaison officers with ethnic backgrounds Half-day program	Overall philosophy Staff development Resources to aid home-to-school bridging Teaching and behaviour management	Overall philosophy Holistic approach	Overall philosophy Holistic approach Classes formed on skill level rather than year level	Overall philosophy Holistic approach Focus on late arrivals	Overall philosophy In-school suspension
School/family/community partnerships	Inviting community into the school Home visits Respect	Community partnership agreement Home visits Community liaison officer	Aspirational program that involves the community Community partnership agreement	Home visits Parent meetings fortnightly Community lunches	Home visits Partner with liaison officer at the local GP to pick up students for appointments	Respect Extended services coordinator School presence at community meetings	Cultural program	Home visits Attendance focus in most newsletters Relationship building	Home visits when required School presence at community events (including funerals)
Transport	School coordinates bus transport for all students Will pick up individual students from their homes when there are attendance issues	School coordinates bus transport if necessary	School coordinates bus transport for all students	School coordinates bus transport to and from the station and the school	Not necessary	Aboriginal and Islander education officer drives to locate students not attending school	Attendance officer picks up students not in attendance in the morning	Bus is provided to pick up students	Transport provided by staff members

Student factors

While parents are ultimately accountable for their child's attendance at school, research has shown there are a number of critical factors at the individual student level that affect whether a child or young person attends school. Box 2.3 summarises these issues and presents options for strategies that address them, followed by a discussion of the issues.

Box 2.3: Summary of issues at the student level, and strategy options

Issues

- Child's physical health
- Child's mental health
- Extent to which basic needs are being met at home
- School readiness upon entry
- Success at school
- Attachment to school
- Attachment to education
- Nature of relationships at school

Strategy options

- Provision of early learning programs/activities (for example, preschool or playgroup)
- Extracurricular activities
- Sporting programs
- Case management
- Health screening
- Interagency links
- Individualised learning plans
- Literacy and numeracy/academic achievement programs
- Nutrition programs
- Incentive programs
- Post-school options
- Aboriginal education workers

Issues affecting attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students include:

- *Child's health:* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have significantly poorer health than other children, including higher rates of illness, infection and disability. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are also 3 times more likely to be diagnosed with severe otitis media and have significantly higher rates of hearing loss (Burns and Thompson 2013). In addition, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people have rates of high or very high levels of psychological distress that are 3 times those for other young people (AHMAC 2008). These health issues affect attendance both directly and indirectly: children who are sick are more likely to miss school, and the consequences of ongoing health problems may affect performance at school (which, in turn, may affect attendance).
- *Extent to which basic needs are being met at home:* The extent to which a child's basic needs – such as for food, shelter, clothing – are being met at home affects not only whether they attend school but also their performance at school (which then affects attendance again). Children without proper clothing or uniforms may be reluctant to attend school because of embarrassment. Nutritional intake affects children's energy levels, their levels of concentration and their ability to learn at school, and has been linked to disruptive behaviours within the classroom (Winicki & Jemison 2003). Previous research has shown that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, particularly those in

remote areas, have higher rates of under-nutrition and food insecurity than other children (AIHW 2011).

- *School readiness upon entry:* Level of school readiness when entering school and whether the child has attended an early childhood education program affects the child's achievement at school as well as their attendance.
- *Success at school:* Students with poor literacy and numeracy skills may feel uncomfortable in school because of their lack of progress in these areas and may be thus more reluctant to attend. Data show that reading, writing and numeracy outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are far below those for other students (MCEECDYA 2010). In particular, failure to acquire basic reading skills in the early years makes it difficult to attain educational parity (Adams 1998; Dunn 1999).
- *Attachment to learning:* Engagement in learning is critical to academic achievement and to providing students with the understandings, knowledge, skills and confidence to move on into training, employment and higher education.
- *Attachment to education:* The extent to which students value education and perceive that it has relevance for their own achievement affects attendance. For example, the consultations demonstrated that highly motivated students are able to overcome considerable obstacles in their personal lives to attend school.
- *Nature of relationships at school:* Students who feel safe and secure with teachers and other staff members, as well as with their peers, feel more comfortable coming to school and tend to be more engaged with the school.

The literature review found a number of effective strategies targeting these individual student factors. These included:

- student engagement programs/extracurricular activities (for example, the Jalaris Kids Future Club, the Song Room, Drumbeat, Girls from Oz)
- sporting programs (for example, the Clontarf Foundation, Kicking Goals)
- case management approaches (for example, Youth Connections)
- strategies to improve students' literacy and numeracy skills/success at school (for example, scaffolded literacy, personalised learning plans)
- nutrition programs (for example, School Nutrition Program; and Foodbank, the Western Australian School Breakfast Program)
- incentive programs (for example, School Passport, the 'No School/No Pool' policy).

All of these issues were mentioned during consultations with the 9 schools. For example:

We've got a couple of Indigenous children at the moment who have come in in Year 10. One of them can't read and she can't write, literally, and yet she has an amazing brain. So part of my role is to work with the teachers on how we can support this young person to realise she has amazing potential, and to try and modify tasks so that she can actually access what's going on. And that's a huge challenge in a school, because she literally can't read and write, and yet she can converse about onomatopoeia, she is an amazing young person. And she's someone, unless we treat her differently, she will be just another statistic.

The school visits also confirmed the relationship between these factors at the student level and attendance, and provided insight into the issues themselves and how the schools were dealing with them. For example, participants in the consultations reported that physical and mental health issues were salient issues for most (but not all) of their schools. For example, at a regional school, the staff reported that:

The health facilities for these children are absolutely disgraceful...we have one community speech pathologist who's booked out for the next 2 years. Audiologists – don't have one. Dentists. It's everything. Across the board. These all affect children. I have children in Year 10 who can't read because they haven't been able to hear for most of their life. And now they've dropped the screening program in kindergarten. So there's no mechanism to screen these children. I have to pound on the door, ring the parents and say 'have you booked them into [the local Aboriginal medical service] for a hearing test?', ring the medical service 'have you tested these children?'. Yes, we've been referred to a specialist. When can you see the specialist? November next year. Meanwhile, that crucial time of learning, from pre-kindy to Year 2 is finished...there's no backup, there's no organisation, there's no one I can ring up and say 'I have 3 children in kindergarten with serious hearing difficulties', which we do. These kids have had perforated eardrums. They've had glue-ear for 5 years. They're not going to get that skill back. And so they're going to go into high school with prolonged hearing difficulties and it's going to affect the rest of their lives...I've seen the third member of the same family in pre-kindy, the teacher telling me he can't hear. And all of those things do impact on attendance and learning and behaviour.

Interestingly, hearing issues were reported as being more prevalent in the regional and metropolitan schools than in the remote schools.

Mental health issues among the students (as well as their families) were quite common at both the primary and high school level, and required the involvement of both school staff and external services.

A young person that I was working with yesterday...came in and had a chat and there was some self-harming and suicide, and so obviously I involved my school psych in that and we did a safety plan where she identified her key people...and that's not an isolated incident. Our ICSEA [Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage] is around 919, and so our young people generally come to school with a whole range of other things that are going on for them...but it only takes one person to be welcoming to that young person and they will pick and choose their support structure and their support network...And we have external agencies that come in and support our young people like the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Unit and Anglicare.

Strategies schools used to meet the physical and mental health needs of their students included ensuring that student support/welfare teams contain appropriately skilled staff (for example, some schools with high needs have a school psychologist and social worker), working with the families to organise screening and follow-up therapies if necessary, taking students to medical appointments themselves, liaising with other services and using a case management approach to ensure that the needs are being followed up (as part of its building program, a high school is constructing an integrated onsite community service centre), providing an onsite school nurse (funded partly through school funds and partly through external funds), and liaising with the local Division of General Practice (now Medicare Local) or Aboriginal Medical Service to provide health services onsite at least once a week.

At a regional school, the Medicare Local's Aboriginal worker picks students up from school, takes them to appointments, gets prescriptions filled if necessary, then drops them back to school. Taking an innovative approach, another school has partnered with a local university to have its third-year speech pathology students come and screen all the children in the school and provide them with follow-up care, while another school is considering using funding to hire its own speech pathologist.

Schools also worked hard to meet the basic needs of a small fraction of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as an overall welfare issue as well as a way of encouraging them to come to school. Children felt shame when they did not have the basic fundamentals such as uniforms, or facilities at home to wash their clothes.

If they come to school and they're not dressed properly or groomed or those issues, we'll brush their hair, we will dress them in uniform, shower them if necessary, provide breakfast if necessary, provide lunch if necessary. We have provided huge lunches, huge breakfasts, but obviously funding is tighter and, again, we want to put responsibility back on the parents, because we're taking on the parent role and we don't want to do that. We're educators. And we want the parents to start taking that responsibility. So again it's about addressing that with parents and communicating that with parents.

We've got children at the school here that are unsupervised. They go home and they free range. Indigenous and Caucasian. And then they bail up at school the next day expecting to learn, and it's just never going to happen. They're flat out trying to stay awake. And they haven't had breakfast, they haven't brought lunch to school, there's a whole range of issues there, and hence we then link in with providing them with things like food and other initial support. Some need a sleep sometimes. Sometimes it's saying 'go on up to the sick bay now and have a sleep'. When you wake up you'll feel better and then we'll get you back into class.

The schools used a number of strategies to address students' basic needs. However, as noted above, some schools felt a tension in trying to ensure that children's basic needs were met without then taking on the parenting role. These strategies included providing food directly – although the approaches varied from organised programs (for which everyone was eligible) to having students come to the office and ask for food privately when they were hungry to reduce the risk of embarrassment. In addition, teachers and staff would check with students to ensure that they had either brought or ordered lunch that day. Some schools sent food home with the children on weekends. Schools also provided uniforms and shoes where needed, or washed uniforms at the school.

All 9 of the schools in the consultations cited the acquisition of basic skills and school achievement as fundamental to students' overall outcomes, their engagement with school, and their attendance.

We're trialling some teacher's aides at the moment, because I think the one-on-one work is incredibly important. I mean a student feels that they're actively achieving and learning something. They will come more often if they're feeling that sense of success....We're getting students here that their literacy and numeracy is shocking. We ask ourselves, how did they miss it from pre-primary, primary... so what we're constantly hearing is that once they get into high school, and because they don't have those reading abilities, they're kind of like at the back of the class. When they're asked a question, automatically they become intimidated and then they play up...they put their protection mechanism on...so the one-on-one, they really appreciate it, because there's the shame factor that's not there anymore.

The strategies used to promote engagement and success at the student level included setting short-term goals that were mutually agreed (for example, through personalised learning plans), rewarding positive behaviour (through awards or incentives), dealing with students on a one-on-one basis to address literacy and numeracy issues, ensuring that materials were appropriate to the age group (for example, not giving activities aimed at young primary students to teenagers), and providing opportunities for success outside traditional academic routes (through art, sports or dance). Some schools had homework centres as well, but cited

difficulties with organising these when a number of the students lived an hour's bus ride away and the school then had to find alternate transportation home.

One of the schools had a newly established sporting initiative. While, in general, the staff emphasised the positive effect of the program, they highlighted that it had had some unforeseen consequences as well. It succeeded in its goal of bringing young Aboriginal men back to the school who had previously been disengaged with education. However, some of these young men had some behavioural issues which affected other teachers and students and was an additional challenge for the school to deal with.

As this staff member noted, the program increased their enrolment statistics, but may have decreased the attendance rates because the students still had attendance issues: *they engage very well in the [sporting] part of the program and need a little bit more encouragement in terms of the educational side of the program and our attendance figures are probably going to go down because some of those young people are sitting on 30/40% attendance, which is better than 0 which it was before.* There had also been instances where these returning students were encouraging other students with high attendance to 'cut school' with them.

In addition, because only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys were eligible for the program, there was some resentment both from girls and from non-Indigenous boys. This required the school to try to offer alternative programs for female Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; they would also have liked to have had a similar program for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, no matter what their Indigenous status. In addition, the initial attendance requirements for outings/excursions with the sporting program were lower than for the school's outings, which again led to some resentment within the school. The school then had to work with the program to ensure that the attendance goals were consistent.

The school leadership also had to 'sell' the program to other staff:

You have to contextualise that [this sports initiative] here on our site is still in its early days – talk to us 3 or 4 years down the track and there would be a significant difference in attendance and engagement... From a narrow-minded sort of blinkers-on perspective, a staff member might just perceive that [this sports initiative] has brought some feral kids back to their class and is then giving this kid rewards for coming to school, so they're like 'thank you ...', so, yes, that can be interesting.

In spite of the challenges, however, the program was already showing positive effects. As reported by the principal: *the head of police here made a comment at one of our last meetings, saying that for a particular individual, since he's been part of [this sports initiative], he has ceased to come to their attention. Okay, that's one individual. But that's a huge outcome for that individual.*

Schools also provided information and support for post-school options. This included trying to build students' aspirations about what they could achieve after high school (through formal programs and as a general priority within their teaching/counselling), and then helping make those post-school options a reality by providing information and direct links to the opportunities (including finding scholarships, filling out forms, helping prepare students for job interviews, and so on). Several of the schools also used school trips/camps as a way both to expose the students to opportunities beyond their current communities and to broaden their perspectives. This was felt to be particularly important for students in late primary/early high school as a way of developing aspirations that they could then work towards.

What I've learnt over the last couple of years is that you've got to start young. So the lesson I actually had with the kids today was exactly that. Think about our camps, what kind of jobs did

you see happening? The Year 6/7s was very focused on that this year. But just getting the younger kids talking...what are the jobs around? From that, that's when we're going to start doing a whole heap on just goal setting – 'that looks like an interesting job', but doing it young. I think they need to be focused. And they need to see there's more of the world, but you can still come back.

One school, however, felt that other agencies/organisations set the bar too low for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in terms of their expectations – for example, assuming that Technical and Further Education (TAFE) was a more realistic option for students to achieve than university. Schools also provided role models, with former students who had received tertiary education returning to the school as staff.

In terms of incentives, a high school was trialling an innovative online incentive program, whereby students bank reward points for attendance as well as good behaviour, academic achievement, and so on. They can then redeem these reward points for items such as Ipods or even bicycles. This program, as well as being a reward system, is also being used to teach students about budgeting: the students have to decide for themselves if they want to use fewer points immediately for a lesser reward or save them for something bigger. Another school found that these types of rewards or incentives at an individual level were less effective than having activity-based incentives that students could attend with their peers.

Aboriginal education/liaison workers were cited as an important element of a number of these strategies, both in the literature review and the consultations. One staff member described their position:

I work solely with the students – or I liaise with the teachers obviously – but I basically look after all their needs really, from liaising with the families, dealing with their health issues, dealing with day-to-day personality issues, behavioural issues, liaising with the principal and vice-principal regarding issues to do with family welfare, attendance, helping them with their day-to-day work, communicating with teachers of specific needs and the way that Aboriginal children learn and the issues that they face. For instance, the importance of family and travelling to funerals is a big one, and how important that is to Indigenous people. So basically, yeah, I work full time and I put on NAIDOC [National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee] days, I take children to the diabetes clinic. I pretty much cover everything. And I give the children a voice.

Family factors

There are a number of factors at a family level that have been linked with school attendance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Bourke et al. 2000; Purdie & Buckley 2010). Box 2.4 summarises these issues and presents options for strategies to address them; it is followed by a discussion of the issues.

Box 2.4: Summary of issues at the family level, and strategy options

Issues:

- Family's socioeconomic status
- Family members' experience with education
- Family views on education and attendance
- Parents' level of literacy and numeracy
- Family health/caring issues
- Family structure/stability
- Mobility/transiency

Strategy options:

- Relationship-building, including contact for positive reasons
- Notification of non-attendance
- Reinforcement of the importance of attendance
- Home visits
- School/family partnerships
- Parental consequences
- Aboriginal education/liaison officers
- Tri-border attendance strategy
- School passport

Family issues affecting attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students include:

- *Family's socioeconomic status:* Poorer socioeconomic status has been linked to unstable or overcrowded housing environments, poorer access to health care and early childhood education, inadequate food and clothing, and so on – all of which affect attendance. Indigenous families are significantly over-represented on all indicators of poor socioeconomic status (AIHW 2011).
- *Family members' experience with education:* Whether family members have had a positive or negative experience with the education system in the past may affect the family's level of comfort in dealing and engaging with schools.
- *Family views on education and attendance:* When education is highly valued in the family, children are more likely to attend school. This is also related to the extent to which family members condone absences from school for reasons other than illness.
- Parents' own levels of literacy and numeracy.
- *Family health/caring issues:* Caring responsibilities at home can potentially conflict with school attendance. This factor is especially pertinent for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, given the higher levels of ill health in the Indigenous population (for example, AIHW 2011).
- *Family structure/stability:* Issues related to family environment – for example, the stability of relationships, the presence or absence of substance misuse, mental health issues, domestic violence, whether the child is in out-of-home care, and so on – all affect students' overall welfare as well as their school attendance. A regional school reported that 30% of its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were currently in out-of-home care.
- *Mobility/transiency:* Two types of mobility affect attendance: permanent/semi-permanent moves between areas, and temporary absences (for example, a month or 2 spent in another area). The extent to which families move between areas can affect a number of factors related to attendance. These include having to enrol in a new school, make the transition to a new school environment and to develop supportive relationships with teachers and students. Temporary mobility disrupts attendance at school and may hamper the ongoing development of literacy and numeracy skills.

The literature review found a number of effective strategies targeted at these family factors. These included:

- School/family/community partnerships (for example, Communities for Children, Families and Schools Together – FAST program, Follow the Dream: Partnerships for Success)
- School Passport program
- Tri-border attendance strategy
- Parental consequences (for example, SEAM [School Enrolment and Attendance through Welfare Reform Measure]; Cape York Welfare Reform). It is important to note that parental consequences is a government-initiated strategy and not an option for schools to use themselves.

All the family-related issues and the strategies from the literature review (except parental consequences) were raised in the consultations. All 9 schools discussed the fact that breaking down barriers between families, communities and the school and developing a trusting relationship were fundamental elements for improving school attendance and for understanding the particular circumstances affecting individual students. For example:

We have a Year 11 student – I spent some time at her home the other night. There's been a death in the family, and sometimes that out-of-school support is part of, you know, just going along and being part of the community. Certainly her grandma appreciated both the chaplain and myself coming. She [the student] is overwhelmed at the moment. She has assignments that are outstanding, assignments are coming, she wants to move out of home, the family member who's died has had mental illness, there's been great stress in the family, and so school is just part of what you're dealing with. In order for them to be successful at school, you're actually dealing with their whole life. So you've got to be looking at creating that support network for all aspects of their lives.

One of the challenges schools faced was families' prior experiences with government agencies in general, and with education in particular. One school had a large number of students being cared for by grandmothers who were members of the Stolen Generation, and thus needed extra support to feel comfortable at school. Schools reported that it was important to recognise that these barriers are real, and work to bridge them.

The schools used numerous strategies to build relationships with families. This included having staff who were well respected within the local community, whether they were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or not. Some of the key strategies that worked for the schools included treating families and members of the community with respect, contacting them when the students had done well in school, inviting them into the school for positive occasions (assemblies, performances, barbeques, student awards, NAIDOC week) so that contact was not always focused on what was 'wrong' with their families or their children, and engaging with them on occasions outside of school. Schools reported that informal contact at the local shops, when staff members stopped to chat with families and students, was an effective way of building connections. Being present at funerals, at family events when invited and at community events were other useful practices, which had symbolic as well as practical consequences.

Schools were asked whether they had more formal processes in place for building partnerships, such as a working committee made up of parents, staff and community representatives. One school had tried this approach, but found that the people who volunteered to be on the committee were not necessarily representative of their communities, and that more personalised approaches to building partnerships worked

better in practice. However, another school that had developed a community partnership agreement found:

The creation of this has probably had more community involvement and actually had more success than the implementation of it. Because its creation was actually the thing that was bringing them up here and getting them involved in the school...now it's finished they're like 'oh well, we did that, we've done our part for that'. And new staff come in as well who read it and think 'oh well, this is interesting but what do I actually do?'...I would almost be willing to say that if you had something where we revisited it once a year or over a period of 6 months or something, you would probably have more community involvement than if you just try and implement what's on there.

Schools also used several strategies to work with families to develop goals and aspirations for the students, including the personalised learning plans, but also through home visits and meetings. *With the Indigenous family – it'd be the same with anyone, but particularly the Indigenous families because it's probably not something that's been done historically – [the important thing] is to engage with them as equals. So you're sitting down with them and being very direct with them and saying 'if you want your children to succeed then you need to partner with us'. It's not going to be one-way traffic, and we'll admit when we haven't got it right...just be up-front and honest with them, engage them as partners in their child's education.*

In addition to developing goals and aspirations, schools also worked to reinforce the importance of attendance using a number of strategies. These included incentives/rewards for good attendance as well as promoting its importance:

Through the newsletter, I certainly drum it in really hard about attendance – you know, if your child is away 1 day a week that equates to 2 years of their life, etc...So every newsletter there is something about attendance. If it's not in every newsletter that might just be one that was missed...School Council are aware of our attendance. That's presented all the time at School Council and our P & C [Parents and Citizens]...and this year what we've done is to write to every parent and tell every parent what their child's percentage is.

As another way of building early engagement with education, all the primary/combined schools ran playgroups, preschools or transition programs. These served several important functions: the early childhood education experience for the children (which affects their school readiness), a chance for families to build connections with each other, as a way to engage families early on with the school as well as promoting the value of education, and as an opportunity to run programs for the families (including parenting programs as well as arts and cultural programs):

The 0 to 4 program. That's where we've been doing it now for 2 or 3 years, officially. And this year is just seems to be clicking into place, and we had all the babies except 3 babies in the community. So we had 6 or 7 kids I think, which is pretty good, and all of the 4 year-olds, all the 4- and 3-year-olds were here, so we're just missing 2- and 1-year-olds. We had a baby and everything, and all the mums were here, and they were all engaged...And that I reckon is the key. When mums are involved at baby level, they can see that school is important for a baby, and the communication that you can get from a mothers' group and all that sort of stuff – whatever it looks like, because once again every school has their own deal. I think that's important. And we won't see that effect yet. We won't see the effect of what we've been doing for the past 3 years until next year when those 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 4-year-olds are enrolled.

One school has begun to hold an onsite group for pregnant women in order to deliver antenatal care services as well as to begin the engagement process:

It's just getting parents used to being there, and listening to school talk, too. Because a lot of the time we talk school talk...I talk school talk so they can get used to it, and sometimes they're getting letters home or whatever, they bring it to me to read, so you break it down for them, but a lot of our parents are fairly skilled, fairly skilled up. So they've had a lot of workshops – they've been workshopped right out I think.

While most families supported education and worked in partnership with the schools (even if they required extra supports to get their children to school), some families condoned their children's absence from school. This might be because the students didn't want to go, there were competing family or community priorities, or the students were helping to care for younger siblings or other family members:

One thing that happens with Aboriginal students especially is that you often find by high school some of the kids are starting to babysit [the children of] their often older brothers and sisters who might only be 21, 22, and then their parents and grandparents are either out, might not be around, may be incapable of looking after kids themselves, so those students might come in late, and it's important that staff understand in the school that it's not always (it is sometimes), but that it's not always that those kids are coming in late because they've spent the morning wandering town. They may have been getting breakfast for little Johnny, walking him to school, finding out Nan's got no money, sorting that out, you know, then coming to school not in a particularly good mood and late. That means our office staff too have to be quite resilient at the front desk. They deal with some quite confronting sorts of circumstances, but by them being welcoming it can really start the kid's day off. So if those kids are identified to the front office staff, so when the student arrives at school, it's not even the teacher that's prepared for them. It's admin, too, to say 'great to see you here,' 'oh, did you bring a note from Mum? It would have been good if you did bring a note. You know if you did bring a note it would help with Abstudy and all that sort of thing'. You know, all positive reasons, so that's very important, the arrival at school for those kids.

In some cases, families were happy for schools to take an authoritative role with the students; in others, conflict between schools and families continued over attendance, and other agencies such as the police or community services were required to intervene.

Two of the schools (1 metropolitan and 1 remote) reported that transiency was an important issue for their school. In the case of the remote school, it was short-term transiency where students would leave the community on weekends to visit relatives (often their parents) in another town where they were working or had housing, then return to the school for the middle days of the week. In this case, the school encouraged the students to attend schools in these other towns on the days when they were away from the community, and developed relationships with those other schools to check on attendance. (They also used the Tri-border attendance system to check their attendance.) As well, the school encouraged any child visiting the local area to attend their school while they were there.

The metropolitan school faced a different type of transiency where students moved areas for months at a time, and then re-enrolled in the school.

A pattern is appearing. There's certain schools in xxxx and xxxx where our families are starting to go and visit. Now we think we've worked out that housing around here is at a premium, whether it be government housing or rentals – it's very hard to get government housing. A lot of these families will go and stay with another family, then move with another family, then finally get caught up by the housing department or someone else, and time to move on. Then they have relatives in xxxx or xxxx,, so they go with them for a while. And vice versa. So it keeps swapping.

The school decided to go through the full enrolment process (including psychosocial assessments) every time the student re-entered the school:

We always meet with the parents before the kid starts, just so that we can get all the background information that we need. And something may have happened. It might be something quite extreme and at risk may have gone on in that time that they've been apart. So that's an area we continue to get better at, and we provide the staff with as much information as possible so that they're not going in cold, the students aren't going in cold. You know, tour of the school, make sure they've got the uniform, all the stuff to help them fit in. We find that's very important. Again, about the area itself—high incidence of domestic violence, high instances of drug abuse, alcohol abuse, sexual abuse...it's just all there. Out of our children, we assess the social, emotional and risk factors, and it's a high 90% of students that are affected by one or more risk factors that affect their education.

The vice-principal also planned to visit the other 2 schools to which students primarily moved in order to develop a partnership for addressing the specific needs of those children.

Structural/community factors

There are a number of structural or community factors that have been linked to school attendance (Barnes 2004; Purdie & Buckley 2010). Box 2.5 summarises these issues and presents options for strategies that address them, followed by a discussion of the issues.

Box 2.5: Summary of issues at the structural/community level, and strategy options

Issues:

- Geophysical characteristics
- Service availability
- Transport
- Community involvement
- Positive/negative experience of education
- Employment opportunities and post-school education and training

Strategy options:

- School bus/transportation
- Mobile classrooms
- Development of partnerships between schools/families/communities

Structural/community issues affecting attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students include:

- *Geospatial characteristics:* These characteristics include the physical location of the school in relation to where students live, weather-related factors, and the size of the community.
- *Service availability:* Better availability of health and community services can improve attendance by addressing the welfare needs of children and families.
- *Transport:* Availability of transport options can affect attendance levels.
- *Community involvement:* Relationships between the school and community services go beyond the simple physical or 'on the books' availability of services. They entail the nature of the relationship schools have with the community. Services may appear to be available; however, their true availability is affected by issues such as waiting lists and internal priorities. For example, a number of schools cited the priorities of the relevant Child Protection departments, which focused primarily on the safety needs of younger children.

- *Experience of education:* The level of community support for education is affected by the experiences (positive or negative) local community members had with the educational system in general, and with individual schools in particular.
- *Employment/training opportunities:* The socioeconomic context of the local community, and opportunities it affords for post-school education and employment are closely linked to the aspirations of students and to their perceptions of the value of education.

The literature review found several effective strategies for developing broader partnerships between communities, community service, families and schools which were discussed in the previous section. The literature review also found 2 effective transport strategies: the Walking School Bus and Mobile Classrooms.

The importance of community/structural issues was validated in the school consultations. All 9 schools were either in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas or the school population itself was disadvantaged compared with the surrounding community. About half of the schools were characterised by both historical and current levels of mistrust between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. For example, staff at 2 schools reported that their Indigenous students were subject to racist comments in the broader community and in local sporting events; staff at another school found it difficult to schedule sporting events against other schools because the other schools perceived their students as 'too rough'.

Transport was an issue in regional areas, where some students travelled 90 minutes one way to get to school (it was not an issue for the remote schools included in the consultations). One of the practical implications of this travel distance was that it was difficult for the school to organise after-school activities (such as homework clubs) because alternative transportation home was unavailable.

The development of partnerships between families, schools and communities was found to be an essential component of improved school attendance rates in both the literature review and the consultations. Creating a positive relationship between families, communities and schools led families to feel more comfortable at the school and to contact the school when issues did arise so that they could work in partnership.

As a way of developing relationships between the community and the school, a primary school runs a cultural program for students, families and community members:

It's been going for about 5 years now. It just aims to bring community into the school. Providing the opportunity for them to take traditional activities, I suppose, keep those traditions going...what have we had this year? We've had family tree days, we've had traditional cooking days, we had a damper making and jewellery making. It's run by all the AIOs [Aboriginal liaison officers]. So they have ownership of the program. They decide on what activities to run. I'm just there to make sure that all the paperwork side of things is done. Then keep them on task I suppose, not that that's hard. They're pretty good at it. These guys do all the work themselves. They have ownership of it. It belongs to them and to the community. It doesn't belong to the school so much. We just provide the facilities and the support and time.

Some schools reported that there were divisions within the local community about the importance and value of education that discouraged students and families from fully engaging in school. For example, some students faced negativity in their community from a small minority who accused them of thinking they were better than other people who had not gone through school. Several of the Aboriginal education workers reported receiving negative feedback themselves for their roles in the schools: *of the AIEO [Aboriginal and Islander education officer] at the other school, his family would say 'what, are you better than us because you work at the school?'...And he'd cop it from everybody.*

Family and community views on the value of education also affected the aspirations of individual students:

Children come to school with very low levels of expectations of themselves – they don't aspire to significant goals for post-school life – and I think a key element in that is simply the homes in the community that they're coming from, where parents to a large extent have left school in the junior years of secondary school. There's a very low level of tertiary education in the community and the children are just not being actively supported – you know, it exists in pockets – but across the board actively supported to aspire to something of significance after school. And for that reason, their view of themselves, their hopes for the future, what they see themselves as having the potential to achieve, it's quite diminished in comparison to their peers in a capital city or in another regional location where there's a different community flavour. For me, personally, as a principal, if I had to identify one key thing as being a limiting factor in terms of the potential success for students in the school, [it] would be that they're coming out of that kind of environment.

Counteracting that, however, were a number of community members who encouraged students to attend. In fact, this school was characterised by an extremely supportive community:

Within the community, there's an expectation that the kids will go to school, and that education is important and that it's the way forward. I've worked in a lot of communities and this is the only one where parents push kids to go to school every day. And I don't know why that is, or why it is different from other communities. But it is there and it's very noticeable...A lot of the parents here have been away for school themselves. The vast majority of our high school kids go away on scholarships to Perth or Darwin or we've had kids go to Melbourne for scholarships. So our kids go everywhere for scholarships. And the parents have as well, so there's that expectation of 'I went away for school so you're going to go away for school as well. So to do that you need to go to school every day, you need to do your homework, you need to make sure you're participating and attending every day'.

The staff member contrasted the experience at that school with the experience at a similar school where the community did not support education:

I'd have to say we do nothing different here from what we did at xxxx, which is where I was before. Over there, we would do home visits every day, we had incentive programs, we had prizes and attendance awards and all that sort of stuff. The attendance was still horrid. There they actually had a bus run that they did every morning, that would go and pick kids up from their house and take them to school. They got breakfast at school every day, they got clean clothes and shoes if they needed it. Everyone was still caring and, you know, all the same things you do no matter which kid you were teaching – interested in their lives, wanted to know more, wanted to help, school-based attendance officer. Teachers would still do home visits for both positive and negative, exactly the same thing. The only thing that I can point to is the community expectation about the importance of school.

What is important about this point is that changing how a community functions and views education is beyond the capacity of individual schools; it is directly linked to the broader issues addressed by the Closing the Gap policies. The approaches taken by schools in these situations has been to begin by developing positive relationships with individual families and community members, to set achievable goals for individual students, and to realise that the flow-on effects for the greater community are likely to take years before they come to fruition. Schools have also worked to connect community members with training and employment opportunities, not just the students at their schools.

As well as the relationships with and support of the broader community, the availability of – and relationships with – community services were vital to schools. A number of children were in out-of-home care, and some students were also dealing with issues of child abuse/child neglect, sexual abuse, domestic violence and substance misuse, and/or had family members in prison. The complex issues meant that schools were heavily involved with broader community services as well as with individual families.

I would say one of our big differences is our involvement with these outside agencies to the point where parents pick up on, and the community picks up on, us working together...Youth justice will come up and we'll give them a meeting room and they'll talk [here]...the community service people will pick up little Johnny and take him out cleaning walls or whatever and then bring him back to school, not leaving him wandering the streets for the rest of the afternoon. So that's worked. Child protection will come up. Instead of the kid having to go down there, they'll come up to see how they're going and they will use the meeting room...I keep an open communication with the police. We're out to sort of share information. I make sure to keep that open too. If I'm suspecting there's drugs in town or something I say 'you know we've got a few kids turning up with drugs'. If they hear that such and such is going to thump such and such they'll ring the school to say 'keep an eye out for this or that today'. That is behaviour, but it affects attendance because if the kids come and thump each other and get suspended for 5 days and then it's just ongoing and ongoing...When you say about the police, too, young xxxx was telling me yesterday, that she found the police really supportive. She was able to identify that police here were different to [another town]. That they will take you home, they won't just throw you in a holding cell. And they will go to your families and say 'hey look' to the matriarch of the family 'can you keep the girls in for the next week because of feuding with another mob'.

How well those relationships worked across areas varied. For example, in 2 areas, police were seen as a resource – they worked with schools, ran programs for Indigenous youth at the local Police Citizens Youth Club, and responded quickly to issues. In another area, however, the school stopped calling the police because of a perceived lack of appropriate responses. While all suspected cases of abuse and neglect were reported to the authorities, how well they were followed up varied.

The impact that non-response can have for families who are actively seeking help (and for schools) was discussed by one of the regional schools:

I notice the process, too, that parents and families seem to go through, which is just a difficulty so I'll outline it. What usually happens when a student – and this goes across the cultures and it's not just Aboriginal – when a student has some problems at school, the first sort of instance the parent can often be quite defensive 'oh, this is somehow the school's fault' you know. The second time around I usually manage to figure out a way to get the parent on side, and then they're like 'great, I'll help you with this. Yes, I suddenly see where you're coming from. Hang on a minute, 8 teachers have told me about this so it must be true. We'll pull him into line in no time at all'. And then the next stage, the third stage, is when the parent realises 'this hasn't worked, I need help with trying to get my son, daughter, cousin or whatever into line; how can you help me?' and they'll ring me. I can tell you what I think would work. But they don't have, probably, the emotional staying power to put it in place.

So then they'll ring DCP [Department of Child Protection]. DCP will say no-one's been beaten, no-one's being sexually abused, now we've got too much to do with 5-year-olds at the moment, so see you later. They'll ring the police to say 'will you bring my kid to school?' The police will go 'well, we're dealing with a murder case right now; we're not interested in your kid not attending school', so there's no-one to help them. Then they get really sad. The next time I see them, they'll probably be crying when they come up here to my office. Frustrated, tears, all the rest of it, don't know what to do. The kids say 'I'll run away if you don't back off and everything'. And then after

that, they'll cut all their phone numbers off...you can't contact them. They don't hate you; if they see you, they'll give you an embarrassed sort of 'hey, how you're going?' and huddle past into Woolworths, you know.

Schools used a number of different strategies to cultivate these relationships, including sitting on inter-agency forums, working groups and formal committees.

An additional community-related strategy that was present in several of the areas was an initiative by the local council/chamber of commerce that no students were allowed in local stores during school hours, as a way of discouraging non-attendance and truancy.

School factors

There are a number of school factors that affect school attendance (Barnes 2004; MCEECDYA 2010; Purdie & Buckley 2010). These school factors are critically important not only because they affect all students and parents/carers within the school, but also because they are amenable to change if backed by appropriate policies, funding, leadership and training. Box 2.6 summarises these issues and presents options for strategies that address them, followed by a discussion of the issues themselves.

Characteristics of the school which affect attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students include:

- the nature of the school environment – schools with an environment that students and families perceive as physically, emotionally and culturally safe encourage higher attendance. For example, this includes the language of instruction and the presence of visual symbols of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture
- classroom teaching practices in which teachers demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and culture, and encourage students' engagement in learning and achievement, as well as attendance
- a culturally appropriate approach to behaviour management issues
- a stable, highly skilled staff who are able to build relationships with both students and families (which promotes attendance)
- practices and policies around attendance monitoring and follow-up that identify students at risk early on and provide a structure whereby the issues underpinning non-attendance are addressed.

As well as the strategies initiated by schools, which have been discussed in the previous sections, the literature review identified several types of effective strategies that address these school issues specifically. These strategies included whole-of-school approaches (state-wide Middle Years reform), employing Aboriginal education workers or support officers, and implementing attendance monitoring programs (for example, Every Day Counts).

Box 2.6: Summary of issues at the school level, and strategy options

Issues:

- Culturally inclusive curriculum and school environment
- Staff understanding of culture
- Staff turnover rates
- Presence/absence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff
- Staff recruitment, development and engagement
- Language of instruction
- School policies on bullying and suspension
- School leadership

Strategy options:

- Attendance monitoring officer/program
- Staff development
- Whole-of-school approach
- Tri-border attendance strategy
- Communication between schools
- Aboriginal education/liaison officers

One of the most important factors cited by the schools and in the literature in this regard was the importance of having a strong leader who was committed not just to school attendance, but also to the overall welfare and wellbeing of the students. The impact of leadership was demonstrated in:

- the overall philosophy or vision for the school and the students; in particular, high expectations for student achievement and behaviour
- the allocation of resources/positions to focus specifically on the academic and welfare needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- the flexibility for staff to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families/carers in a culturally appropriate manner
- school-based policies, programs and practices that are culturally inclusive (for example, where an acknowledgement of country begins every assembly)
- strong attendance monitoring and follow-up policies
- identifying and dealing with issues such as bullying or the display of racist slurs/behaviour by other students
- policies that support parental notification for positive feedback as well as the raising of concerns
- ongoing staff development.

These issues were discussed by 3 staff members at a primary school:

I think what works too is having good principals...if you've got a good principal, it makes a huge difference. Especially when that principal will listen to the parent. Even if it's nothing to do with school sometimes.

I think it's also about supporting the programs that you guys come up with as well, trying to find the money so we can do it. And we get some money come in, we've got attendance money.

You can get airy-fairy principals where, you know, it's just pushed aside to the AIO and whatever, but when you've got a good principal, then you're on a roll really, you really are on a very good roll...xxxx was a very good principal, had a great understanding of Aboriginal culture, same with [the current principal].

The importance of well-qualified and committed staff to support the principal and implement these policies was also acknowledged. According to this principal:

If the teachers are enthusiastic and caring and create an environment that kids want to be in and learn – they see it's learning. I've really learnt at this school with staff I've had, that sometimes it doesn't have to be all bright and bubbly, it has to be real. And the kids have got to feel it. Kids aren't dumb. They know when it's just 'play away,' and it's like 'why are we doing this?' They can do all the fun stuff in the world, but it's got to be real, it's got to be relevant, and they've got to feel like they're actually achieving. And that's the thing I think that this school has been so blessed to have, for many years, even before my time: a number of quality staff is important. And it kind of goes in a cycle – you've got quality staff that care, then I think the parents want the kids to come to school. Because they can see it's being purposeful.

Thus, strong leadership and a cohesive, well-trained and committed staff are able to create environments that are physically, culturally and emotionally safe that children want to be in, even in the face of challenging circumstances.

The staff at this school, whether you're an education assistant, an Aboriginal officer, teacher, admin, there's no demarcation between, you've got your role, you're supported, and everyone works as 'a staff', and that's the beauty of this place. It's probably the best staff gathered in one spot that you would see anywhere. Chosen because of their skills. And they want to be here as well. So it works both ways. That's a snapshot of our community. It is challenging, but what we've tried to create is this little beacon in the middle of it, which is this school. So that the children want to come here. They respect the school. And when they arrive here they know that they've got to code switch. They're in school mode, and whatever's happening at home, we'll help them with it, but we don't want all the aggression in the school, we don't want that sort of stuff. So that's pretty much where we're at. And it is working. Five, 6 years ago it was a dysfunctional environment. Now it's not, but we still have the same challenges. And that's the difference. The challenges if anything have intensified.

According to another school:

Breaking through some of those barriers...it's almost like this invisible glass ceiling for some of the students to get them to think 'what is possible?' And I think for that reason, for us, the key element that we have worked on as a group of leaders within the school is, for us, culture is king. It's all about creating a culture here which is strong enough to withstand the diminishing impacts of the community and home life and other things, so when students come here they develop a deep sense of loyalty and appreciation of the school and its programs and the staff. I firmly believe that as a school we will only rise to the level that our staff allow us to, so it's about getting the right people onsite, and we work very hard at that, and all of those sort of intangible elements coming together to create a culture where the students feel safe, they feel at home, they feel as though this is a place where they can come and experience learning, but also be supported to have a dream, to have a hope and an aspiration for something beyond school.

Particular strategies that schools and staff have used to create a welcoming cultural environment have included involving the students in Aboriginal artworks, displaying names for things in traditional language as well as in English, putting up an Aboriginal seasons wheel, always doing a welcome to country before assemblies, and providing cultural-specific activities at the school (for example, dance, art).

One school provided a separate 'enclave' in an old demountable room, which was given a traditional language name. According to staff: *anything Aboriginal that happens, happens in that room.* This includes cultural activities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students once a week during school time, playgroups, parent meetings, artwork, cooking, the antenatal group, and so on. It is also where the Aboriginal and Islander education/liaison officers sit.

In addition, the school brings in a number of Aboriginal performers and sportspeople, flies the Aboriginal flag, has Aboriginal artwork by students and local communities members mounted on the buildings, and teaches the local Aboriginal language.

Attendance monitoring and follow-up strategies were not just present at each of the schools, but also their importance was emphasised in several key ways. The first was through dedicated attendance officers: *if you're looking at improving attendance in any school, if you don't have a dedicated person to look at that, the principal does not have the time to address the needs of every child in the school.* The second was setting up a process whereby attendance was the responsibility of the whole school, not just the attendance officer. One of the principals described the situation at the school when they arrived, and how they worked to change it. The nature of the following experience was also echoed by other schools:

But maybe we'll go back to the beginning to when I first arrived. So Mary [the Aboriginal education worker, not her real name] was doing the job off and on. She was sending out attendance letters because we have a system that you just send out letters, which is fine, and that's about compliance and I don't know if you were doing much follow-up from there... Mary and I had a conversation and we looked at the structure of what she was doing and we said 'can we take this on further?' And obviously I needed to ask the question about 'are you happy to do this across the whole school?' because the attendance was an issue across every child. Well, not every child but you know we've got high risk. We don't actually discriminate between the Aboriginal children and the non-Aboriginal children, we say they are our at risk group. So the children who are at risk... so Mary was fantastic in saying yes so we talked about attendance and we talked about the attendance policies.

When I asked about attendance, the response from staff was 'you make all the phone calls, and you do all this stuff' and I'm like 'no, this is a holistic approach about all of us and what are we going to do as a school'. And now they're really good with that aren't they? And that's when I felt, no, if we can allocate that time... so we ensure there's time allocated to Mary for that. And it is a priority, so if we have to pull her out of class for attendance, well then, that is, that's just how it is. Because if we don't get the kids to school and engaged, we're not going to lift numeracy and literacy. So it's that balance isn't it? So then from there we met with staff, then I started asking for individual attendance targets from all staff which they kind of freaked out about, didn't they? So then we sat down and went through and Mary and I would go through the attendance data and we started highlighting the children and saying 'well, these children are at risk'. If we knew any other issues regarding those children, we would then, you know, be looking at those issues. And then we would say 'okay, these are the children that we feel as a whole school we need to target', so then staff went 'okay, we can do individual targets'.

So I developed a proforma for them, sent it out, they did that and sent it back in, which is really good, and then I think that we sent them through the District Office. And that was great because I suppose the thing that we looked at wasn't necessarily those kids who are under 50%. I think we targeted those kids who were moderately at risk, those 50 to 79 and to move that forward. So every time we drew an attendance order, it goes out to staff, they see it, and then we look at a whole school and say 'look, let's move this target from 75 to 80, let's get that ...' – and that's a huge target. They moved 2 points which is great in the year, 2 percentage points. But everyone's aware and it's part of people's conversations now... When staff set individual targets, they go and work with the children regarding those individual targets. We then send letters out and have meetings with parents whose children have attendance issues. We haven't got to an attendance panel yet but I don't have an issue with going to attendance panels.

When we look at targets, we also look at strategies to support the children with those targets. And it's not just about you will come about 80% of the time. It's about 'well, little Johnny, if we want you to be here 80% of the time, well, how am I, as a classroom teacher, going to try to get you

there?’ How are we as a school going to support this family to get them there? And so we do spend a lot of time and effort engaging and trying to do all these strategies. So that first meeting is about looking at the strategies and saying ‘well, this is what we’re doing as a school; what are you doing as a parent?’ And, again, trying to empower the parent to take more responsibility for their decision making [in] not getting the children to school.

The specific role of Aboriginal education/liaison/support workers was discussed with each school. Staff at all 9 schools believed that this was an important role and that, particularly where students had home lives that were characterised by high levels of stress and disruption, the staff member provided stability in the students’ lives. Staff also felt that, in addition to home visits and building connections with families and the community, the role was to support other staff members’ learning and development about Indigenous issues, culture, practices and ways of communication. This then also provided key symbolic value to the schools (and was highlighted in the discussion of factors at the student level). These issues were illustrated in the following discussion between a vice-principal and an Aboriginal teacher who also fulfilled the role of support officer:

The school embraces it from within...from K1 right through to Year 12. I’m in the different classrooms teaching...bringing an Aboriginal perspective in there, so that’s coming across loud and clear all the time: that we do acknowledge Aboriginal people here, and we have got high regard for that. I noticed that at some of the assemblies, there is a lot of the Aboriginal community who will come and watch that, so they obviously feel comfortable coming into the school and all that sort of stuff [unlike] in previous schools I’ve been in that wasn’t the case.

There were differences of opinion on whether the Aboriginal education/liaison/support worker needed to be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and whether they needed to come from that particular community. What they felt was important was that the person who filled that role had some form of qualification, that they had the ability to communicate well, and that whether or not they were from the community they were able to stay neutral in any community disputes.

In the case of a particular school, in fact, a deliberate decision was made by the school to hire someone who was not Indigenous, but who was well known and respected in the community. The reason for this was that the local community was extremely divided by skin and family groups, and the school felt that it was more important to have someone who was seen as impartial than someone who was Indigenous. In other schools, however, having someone of Indigenous background was seen as essential to develop the connections between school, family and community because of the racial divides between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. These differing strategies reinforce the importance of schools understanding their own local communities.

Variations

An important question is whether there was any discernible variation in any of the following: the issues underpinning non-attendance; the particular strategies used (or their effectiveness) according to school size, school location (remote, regional, metropolitan); the percentage of students who were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; whether the school was primary, secondary or combined; and the sector to which the school belonged (for example, independent systemic, independent stand-alone, or government).

An analysis of these factors demonstrated several key points:

- Issues hypothesised to be most relevant for remote areas were sometimes more relevant for regional areas. For example, in the 2 remote schools that took part in the

consultations, transportation/ distance was not an issue because everyone lived close to the school. It was the regional schools whose students had to travel the greatest distances. Similarly, 1 of the remote schools and 2 of the regional schools were the only ones to report a particular lack of services (in these cases, of the regional areas: services were physically there, but not accessible because of waiting lists, priorities, and so on. One of the remote schools experienced both a shortage of services and problems with their accessibility). Transiency was a key issue for 1 of the metropolitan schools and 1 of the remote schools.

- An issue which was faced only by remote schools was that many students left the area to go to high school. They could either go fairly locally and board during the week, or go to cities that were far from their homes. Hence, the remote schools put a great deal of effort into working with families to make the arrangements.
- Because of age/ developmental differences in the students, high schools faced different issues regarding attendance than primary schools. Hence, they used different types of strategies, more directly related to aspirations and post-school options. However, the importance of creating a safe and welcoming school environment existed for both types of schools. Both primary and high schools also discussed that the transition period from primary to high school was a critical time for students and families, and that the attendance of some students who had high attendance during primary school dropped off during high school.
- In general, independent schools had more freedom in allocating resources and choosing staff. Furthermore, because their students had elected to go there, the schools had slightly more leverage with the students' families.

Feedback on policies/funding

The schools recognised the importance of the Closing the Gap initiatives broadly, and the Smarter Schools National Partnership agreements in particular. One of the schools had used their National Partnership funding to hire its Indigenous support officer.

However, schools also raised concerns about policies and funding in general (not just related to the National Partnerships). One concern was frustration in getting short-term grants or funding initiatives rather than recurrent funding. Three (3-) or 5-year funding cycles meant that by the time a strategy was working in practice, its continued funding was threatened. Jurisdictional funding rules often meant that resource allocations were uncertain; this sometimes made staffing decisions difficult.

Schools believed that attendance monitoring and Aboriginal education workers/liaison officers were essential to the success of their attendance programs, and thought these positions should receive specific, ongoing funding: *I think they need to fund a school-based attendance officer permanently, because it's only a 1-year rolling contract. And if the funds are there next year then there will be a position, and if there's no funds then there's no position.*

Some participants noted the importance of broader social policies. For example, one staff member referred to the importance of alcohol management policies: *a few families [who are our parents], they had their names down for housing here because it was a safe environment. We're meant to be dry, at the moment we're not so dry, but that does help, too. That's actually really big – you know, the community values kids' safety.*

Key lessons

The key lessons for developing and implementing strategies that are effective in improving the attendance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the long-term are presented in Box 2.7. These lessons represent the key underpinning factors that the schools have said are essential to have in place before specific strategies can be implemented successfully; they are backed by findings from the literature review (for example, Boulden 2006; Bourke et al. 2000; Purdie & Buckley 2010). They can be viewed as a set of necessary, but not sufficient, factors for improving attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. According to a principal, these elements represent the ‘what’, while the individual strategies represent the ‘how you get there’.

For example, this school felt the key to its success was: *Fundamentally it's a multifaceted approach that we have and it's predominantly built on relationships, and that's relationships with young people and relationships with the parents and the community...we have an aspirant program and a sports program for Aboriginal students, and an engagement program, plus a case management approach, and attendance officers and home visits...It's a very welcoming school and predominantly our young people seem to be happy to come here.*

Working from a supportive (rather than punitive) approach was also characteristic of the 9 schools. One school discussed its approach to home visits when students were having attendance problems: *how can I help you get him back into school? And they might say 'we're embarrassed because we've got no food.' 'Oh right, I'll organise a food parcel through such and such a group, and we'll organise lunch, and we'll do this, we'll do this, we'll see your kid tomorrow, won't we?'*

These lessons were developed using an iterative process. An analysis of the transcripts from the first set of consultations yielded several key themes stated by all 3 schools as being critical elements in developing effective attendance strategies. These themes were then matched against the findings from the literature review. Schools in the second set of consultations were asked the same open-ended questions about issues they would highlight/lessons learned for other schools. The key themes that had emerged to date were also checked with them to ascertain whether our understanding of them was correct and whether there were any additional factors. These lessons were then discussed in detail with the principal of the final school who confirmed their importance.

Box 2.7. Key lessons for developing and implementing effective attendance strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

- Improving/maintaining attendance requires strong leadership from the principal, who not only allocates resources and priorities, but also sets the tone that attendance is an important whole-of-school issue. Following on from this is having highly skilled, well-trained and committed staff.
- Ongoing collection and monitoring of attendance data at an individual student level (as well as at a school level) with dedicated processes in place for follow-up is vital to identifying attendance patterns as well as at risk students. This includes having at least 1 dedicated staff member whose role is to follow up attendance issues with students and families.
- Improving attendance among at risk students requires a focus on the whole child, including their physical and mental health, their family situations, their literacy and numeracy skills, their social skills and their aspirations. Addressing these issues requires close working relationships with services outside the school.
- The school environment needs to be a safe and welcoming place where students want to be. This includes cultural safety, physical safety and emotional safety (for example, no racism and bullying), as well as having appropriate teaching and behaviour management practices.
- The school needs to have a culture of high expectations that all students can achieve, balanced with appropriate individual goals and supports to develop academic and social skills.
- Developing a trusting relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, their families, the local community and the school is essential to maintain and improve attendance levels. It requires commitment from all staff, and needs to be viewed as an ongoing and long term process. A key element in this process is open, honest and respectful communication.
- Schools, students and families need to be 'on the same page' with regard to the importance of education in general and attendance at school specifically, which, particularly for high school students, involves building the connection between education and post-school options.
- Improving attendance requires a multifaceted approach, and what works in certain schools may not be as effective in others because of particular local circumstances.
- Once policies, staff, programs and/or structures are in place that are effective in improving attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, they need to be embedded within the school in order to be sustainable (which may require ongoing funding). Long-term sustainability requires that they not depend upon a single individual who may leave that role.

These key lessons can be distilled into a set of 6 key elements for improving attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Figure 2.2). These 6 elements were present in all 9 of the schools selected for inclusion in the consultations. It is important to note that the schools were selected precisely because they either had consistently high levels of attendance among their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students or because they had managed to raise their levels of attendance.



These key elements relate directly to the 6 priority domains of the ATSIEAP:

- readiness for school
- engagement and connections
- literacy and numeracy, leadership
- attendance
- quality teaching and workforce development
- pathways to post-school options.

For example, the readiness for school domain affects students' engagement with and success at school. The engagement and connections domain has a direct link to building good relationships with families and the community, and the quality teaching and workforce development domain affects whether students view particular schools as safe places that they want to be.

The reason why these 6 elements are essential to successfully improving and maintaining attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is that they address the factors underpinning non-attendance. For example, schools that have been successful at building relationships with families and communities have demonstrated an understanding of the reasons why relationships may have been strained in the past and have chosen strategies to address those issues specifically.

How schools might use these findings

There are numerous ways that schools and school communities can use these findings. As well as using the key lessons in Box 2.7 as a 'starting point' for an initial discussion about attendance in their own school, schools could also:

- use the 4 domains to begin to identify the particular barriers to school attendance that are relevant for their communities
- use the 6 key elements in Figure 2.2 as a framework to identify strengths/areas of improvement for their school
- assess whether any of the strategies in the report might be appropriate for their school.

3 Case studies

The purpose of the case studies is to highlight the key elements in the experiences of schools that have either raised or maintained high levels of attendance among their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Three case studies are presented, covering regional and metropolitan schools; primary, secondary and combined schools; and both the government and independent sectors. No case study for remote schools is presented because the unique attributes/challenges of the 2 remote schools included in the Project could lead to their being identified (which contravenes the conditions of the ethics agreement).

Each of the case studies includes:

- a description of the school
- a description of the community
- a description of the key issues facing the school related to attendance
- a description of the strategies used to improve attendance
- key lessons/mechanisms for other schools
- a description of ongoing issues/future plans

Future case studies could be based around a template to ensure that information is collected against the 4 domains affecting attendance (Box 2.1), each of the 6 key elements for improving school attendance (Box 2.7) and the specific strategies (Box 2.2).

The case studies in this chapter provide coverage of:

- 8 of the 9 strategies from the literature review (with parental consequences being the only strategy not to be covered). Following the case studies, is a summary table that provides an overview of examples of the types of strategies used in the case study schools
- all 4 categories of factors affecting school attendance:
 - student factors
 - family factors
 - structural/community factors
 - school factors
- all 6 key elements for improving school attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students:
 - make school a place students want to be
 - build good relationships with families and communities
 - reinforce value of attendance and education
 - monitor and follow up attendance
 - take a holistic approach to identifying and meeting children's needs
 - increase students' engagement with and success at school.

To take full advantage of the richness of the information provided by the schools, the case studies are provided in narrative form.

School 1

School 1 is an independent, faith-based school with between 300 and 500 students, a quarter of whom are Indigenous. The school consists of a preschool, primary school and high school. It is located close to a major highway but in bush surroundings, a short drive from the closest town centre. Some students travel up to 1.5 hours by bus to attend the school.

The school has undergone a growth in enrolments in recent years. This includes a doubling in the number of Indigenous students, a factor partly attributed to a change in housing policy which has seen a number of community members returning to the local area.

Approximately 11% of the local population is Indigenous, and there is a large difference in the highest year of school completed (17% of Indigenous adults in the local area completed Year 12 compared with 28% of non-Indigenous adults). The area is characterised by high levels of Indigenous unemployment (approximately 30%) and reported tensions between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, which have a historical legacy. There is also friction within the Indigenous community itself. While health and community services are available, they are not always accessible, with long wait lists for basic services.

The situations of the Indigenous students at the school reflect those in the broader community. Staff report that a number of the Indigenous children have challenging home situations, with an estimated 20% of the students facing issues of alcohol or drug abuse within their families.

The school has several key philosophical principles (described below) that reflect the ways in which it structures its staffing, invests its resources and addresses issues related to school attendance by its Indigenous students. These principles align well with the 6 key elements for improving attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. These principles include:

- The school, the teachers and the families need to believe in students' potential. Students are given a '*fresh start*' when they enter the school – although previous behaviour/issues are recognised, they are not allowed to define the student. Staff need to be seen as '*agents of change*'.
- Part of the role of the school is to work with the students and families to '*create dreams*'. The school sets high expectations for both behaviour and schoolwork, but also provides supports to ensure that students can meet those expectations. Practical paths need to be provided to higher education, traineeships, jobs, and so on.
- School needs to be a '*safe place*', particularly for those with difficult home lives. School also needs to be viewed as a safe place for families, which requires '*intentional*' efforts to break down barriers and make families feel welcome.
- In order to be effective, schools need to deal with the '*whole child*', which means addressing their basic needs (food, shelter, clothing, safety, health, sleep), their emotional needs (for example, to have a stable adult in their lives who cares about them and to provide counselling when appropriate), and their academic needs (many students have come to the school who are illiterate). Students will have difficulty concentrating and learning if they come to school hungry, ill or with a lack of sleep: *sometimes welfare comes first and school second*.
- Building engagement, loyalty and pride in the school is an important goal, and can be fostered by making students and families feel valued and accepted.

On a practical level, the school uses a number of strategies to achieve these goals. The school used National Partnership funds to employ an Indigenous support officer whose role is to liaise with families and teachers, help teachers understand the ways in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children learn and work, and give children a voice. The officer focuses on all aspects of children's welfare, and will do home visits, pick children up and take them to school, take them to health appointments (for example, the diabetes clinic), and liaise with community services.

The school provides the Indigenous support officer with discretionary funds to address students' needs in ways that respect students' dignity. For example, the officer keeps a supply of healthy food; students who come to school hungry or don't have lunch are provided with food discreetly. Some students have had issues with their uniforms and school shoes being taken by others at home or are unable to wash them because they don't have a washing machine; those students can keep their uniforms and shoes at school. The Indigenous support officer will wash the uniforms, and the students will get dressed at school.

The staff also work on the practical aspects of developing and encouraging post-school options by investigating scholarships and opportunities, completing paperwork/application forms, and helping navigate practicalities (for example, housing).

A large part of the Indigenous support officer's role is to build bridges with the local community. Importantly, this task is seen as an important component of all staff members' roles, not just something done by the Indigenous support officer. This has required an understanding of the issues underpinning the reluctance on the part of some families to engage with the school. For example, a number of students were living with grandmothers or aunts and uncles who were members of the Stolen Generation. Staff had to work together to recognise this issue and to develop ways of creating a safe environment for these children at the school.

The strategies for developing these relationships and creating a safe environment have included formal occasions such as NAIDOC week, assemblies, barbeques, contact with families to let them know when things are going well with the students, informal contact outside school, home visits, and spending time with families on occasions such as funerals.

NAIDOC week celebrations indicate the thought and effort that went into making it an important symbolic event for the whole school and community. The celebration went on for the whole week, and included events such as Indigenous games, an art display by a prominent Indigenous artist, dance performances, lunch, the construction of a tent embassy, and a special NAIDOC week uniform designed by the students.

Staff members work to identify the best contact person for each student, which may be an auntie or grandmother. The school also reaches out to community leaders before events to invite them personally so they are aware of the event and are encouraged to attend.

Examples of incidents that show families do see the school as a partner included an occasion when a family felt that they couldn't say no to their children staying home from school; they wanted the school to say no. Another example is when a new child from the community came to the school and displayed inappropriate behaviour with other children (that is, fighting/bullying); the other families said that they sent their children to this particular school precisely so that their children would not be exposed to that type of behaviour (which many had experienced in the community).

Students' individual academic needs are met through tutoring and one-on-one work with teachers and academic aides. Because of the extent of hearing problems and the lack of

community-funded services to address them, the school is considering hiring a speech pathologist on a part-time basis.

Attendance data are collected electronically and monitored daily, with phone calls to families when children do not attend. When students miss 30 days, the schools are required to report them to Child Protective Services, which often then refers them back to the school for management.

The principal and staff acknowledge that these successes have required long-term and ongoing effort. It has taken time over the years to develop the culture of inclusion within the school staff, and has required some changes in staff.

The factors that have enabled this success have included:

- strong leadership
- flexibility to select staff with both the appropriate skills and philosophy. Part of this philosophy includes treating everyone with respect and dignity
- an Indigenous support officer who is highly skilled and highly respected within the school and community
- evidence that, at a basic level, families believe in the school and its goals by virtue of the fact that they chose to send their children there
- commitment on the part of staff and a willingness to go 'above and beyond'
- the ability to expel students who, after repeated attempts to work with them and their families, continue to display disruptive behaviour
- the return to school, as role models, of students who have completed Year 12 and gone on to employment or higher education
- the National Partnership funding, which enabled the school to hire the Indigenous support officer.

In spite of their successes, however, the school continues to struggle on several fronts. One is the small set of family and community members who do not engage in education and actively discourage attendance and achievement. The second is the lack of partnership from other community services/organisations which should be working together with the school to address students' welfare needs—in particular, with the police, Child Protective Services, and local health services. The school believes this stems from several factors—lack of resources, a view that the school can/should be able to deal with the issues on their own (particularly as they are a non-government school), a view of low expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families, and the historical legacy of poor relationships between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

School 2

School 2 is a medium-sized (between 100 and 200 students), government-sector primary school in a metropolitan area, and is in a residential setting. Physically, the school is bright and welcoming. Approximately half the students are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. The school is located in a low socioeconomic area, which is characterised by high unemployment rates, high rates of government housing, high numbers of children with English as a second language and a 'super transient' / mobile population. According to the principal, the area also has a high incidence of domestic violence, drug abuse, alcohol abuse and sexual abuse, all of which affect the students in the school. The school has an onsite

social worker, child psychologist, chaplain and school nurse to address these broader welfare issues.

When the current principal and vice-principal came on board, the school had extremely poor attendance among its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, poor relationships with the families and larger community and low staff morale. The school had a local reputation as 'dysfunctional' and went through a period of decline in student numbers.

Recently, however, it has experienced a resurgence. Attendance is a priority for the school: *this has been our mantra for a long time. You get the kids into school and they can actually learn something.* Although the challenges in the students' family lives have remained (and some have intensified), the way in which the school has dealt with them has become '*proactive, not reactive*'. Attendance has increased among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, relationships with families have improved, staff morale is high and the school has seen a large increase in enrolments, with more (middle class) families from surrounding neighbourhoods choosing to attend. The principal attributes the change as follows:

I think it was just having staff who wanted to be here. Selecting them because of the skill set that we needed. We don't have any 'in your face' staff; their behaviour management, classroom management, is fantastic. They take care for every child, not just the ones in their classroom. Which is really nice to see. A staff member will be walking past a child and can see that they're upset about something, and they will take the time to find out why. And you'll have 5 or 6 different staff actually know about that 1 child within a very short time. And the children get that, I think. They know that they're going to be helped. So I think if you could have a top 5 that would be 1 of them. How do you get the children into school? Well, create that environment that they want to be in. We'll show you some of the visual stuff as well. Some of the hands-on stuff, because it's not all about us being nice people and smiling. There is another side to it as well.

Unlike most other government schools, school 2 was given the ability to select its own staff by the state Education department approximately 6 years ago. This factor, together with the skills and commitment of staff and the school leadership, has led to zero staff turnover in the past 5 years (with the addition of more staff as well).

The school identified that relationships between the school and the community had previously been adversarial in nature and were not productive for the students, families or staff. Hence, improving relationships with families and the community has been a key priority. The school has focused on being proactive, with ongoing one-to-one communication between staff and families: *The more they work with us, the more they got to realise that they were valued and their opinions were valued.* In addition, the school leadership emphasises the importance of treating the community with respect and displaying an attitude of helpfulness not blame. Part of this positive atmosphere is created in the front office, where the staff are friendly and well liked by the children and the families.

The school also employs 3 Aboriginal officers who are all well regarded in the community and by the school staff. It has used part of its Focus Schools/Next Steps funding to hire a community liaison officer who works with the vice-principal and his team. Some of her functions include going out to families in the community to discuss personalised learning plans in students' homes rather than requiring the parents to come into the school. The school is also using its funding for literacy and numeracy specific programs to address the needs of its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who require extra, individualised assistance.

Attendance is monitored regularly, and the school emphasises to both students and families that if a student's attendance drops below 90%, they are at risk. Staff phone the parents and

then the vice-principal and 1 of the Aboriginal officers will go out together to make home visits. Again, however, the school emphasised that these visits are done from the following perspective: *how can I help you get him back into school? And they might say 'we're embarrassed because we've got no food'. 'Oh right, I'll organise a food parcel through such and such a group, and we'll organise lunch, and we'll do this, we'll do this, we'll see your kid tomorrow, won't we?'*

The school uses a system of positive rewards for students and families for both attendance and behaviour. One point the school emphasised was that they reward children who are constantly doing the right things, not just the children who have been struggling and then do the right things. Some of the programs/incentives include:

- Passport system where families get 'paid' for their children attending school (they can then use the credits for uniforms, lunches, excursions, incursions, school resources such as books, pencils, pens). The feedback has been that this has been particularly empowering for parents who may be unemployed and thus are unable to contribute 'financially' to their child's education
- children getting 'paid' in sports equipment when they improve their attendance
- a 'prize wheel' that gets spun at assembly for the children with high attendance
- students who behave well or improve their attendance getting a pass to go to a special 'activities room' during the day
- a healthy pizza lunch with the principal once a term for students with 100% attendance (or less than that but with reasonable cause).

The 'reasonable cause' recognises that sometimes factors affecting children's attendance are beyond their control – that it is not their fault that they could not get to school on particular days. For example: *we've had situations where mum and dad have gone missing for 4 or 5 days, and it's the kids actually trying to get the siblings to school.*

The school also offers the Count Us In program. This program offers gym memberships to parents involved in the exercise program and conducts weekly workshops with parents. In addition, the school runs a playgroup for children aged 0–3, as well as a formal preschool/pre-kindergarten program.

One of the unique characteristics of this school is the extent to which it has developed relationships and partnerships with other community organisations/educational institutions to support the school's academic and welfare roles. For example:

- Half of the social worker's time is paid for by school funds, the other half through an outreach program.
- Half of the school nurse's time is paid for by school funds, the other half by the Health department.
- The school works closely with local universities to:
 - bring third-year speech pathologist students in to screen all children in the school. Another groups of students will then come into the school to do their pracs with the at risk students
 - present behaviour management workshops to students in the teaching program
 - hand pick teaching students to do their third-year and fourth-year pracs at the school; if a job becomes available they can offer it to that graduate
 - have nutrition students present classes and programs (including cooking) within the school with students and with parents at playgroup.

The school continues to deal with the litany of challenges faced by the students within their own families, but does so from a perspective of strength and optimism: *we know we're doing some really good programs, social, emotionally and academically – we know that. The results don't always show through immediately [in NAPLAN]. But if we had a child from K through to 7, for that 9 years, I tell you what: they'd leave this school well equipped. But I think, maybe, there's 2 children who have been here from pre-primary to Year 7, probably less now.*

School 3

School 3 is a large (>300 students), culturally diverse senior high school located in a regional centre. Approximately 15% of the students are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and another 20% are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Students can travel up to 60 kilometres to attend the school. According to staff, not all the Aboriginal families in the community get along, but this is not reflected in the relationships between the students at the school. Being away from school for 'sorry business' and for extended family reasons is an issue for the Aboriginal students.

The area itself is socioeconomically disadvantaged, and the local community experiences high rates of domestic violence and drug and alcohol misuse. To address these issues, the school has a strong student services team (seen as essential to the functioning of the school, as well as to the students' welfare), which includes year coordinators, a chaplain and a school psychologist. In addition, the school has extremely strong connections with local community and health services, and works closely with the local police.

The school's leadership worked to ensure that teachers understood the impacts these issues had on the students and adjusted their behaviour accordingly. For example:

I think one of the things is helping staff getting an understanding of generational poverty and the impact of generational poverty. We do have staff who demand 'hand over your mobile phone, because that's the policy'. Well...some kids from some backgrounds will tell them to shove it. They'd never see the phone again if they gave it to anybody at home. And it's understanding those sorts of impacts and generational poverty and a low SEI [Socio-economic Index] school obviously impacts on a whole range of kids in different ways, but impacts on Aboriginal kids as well because they know that what they have right now is what they have, and they're going to protect it...whereas we would use the strategy of 'you know the deal, I know you need your phone but I'll make sure, I'll personally make sure, you get it back at the end of the day and if you need to call somebody, then we can get you to a phone – or I'll let you use your mobile phone'. We obviously have policies in that area but it's also...as we say to staff, there's a lot of grey between black and white.

The school also pointed out that, in general, the strategies it used for its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are: ... *more like low socioeconomic strategies, and I think if you spoke to schools where they had no Indigenous kids or very low percentages, but it was low socioeconomic, you would probably find very similar strategies serving the same function.*

The school also emphasised the importance of having a multifaceted approach:

I don't believe any one approach suits all the young people that you might have in your school. I think you have to look at the full spectrum. I do think also...you need to work on the progress of getting your teachers within the school with better understanding, particularly to the teaching and learning adjustments...and so the classroom is a welcoming environment and an environment where the young person can engage. And that's really not very profound. That's my practical experience.

Also underpinning the multifaceted approach was developing productive relationships with young people and with the parents and community. Staff found it essential that students have access to both trusted male and female staff members. The importance of front office staff in building relationships with both students and staff was acknowledged.

The school found that families want to be engaged, and that communication early and often can often not only head off confrontations but also lead to parents and the school working in partnership.

The parents seem to really want to be on board. They want to know that admin is involved in things, not just the teacher...when a student's been suspended or stormed off, I always try to get hold of the parent before the student gets home, to explain what's happened, what's in place, and what's going on before they get some sort of twisted one-sided view of what's happened, which can also cause big dramas. And 99% of the time that really gets the parents or grandparents or extended family, guardians, on side dealing with the actual problem. It doesn't actually usually solve the problem, because often that student won't have been used to the guardian or parent or whoever's been proactive in actually stepping in, and when they do the student can be very resistant to that, for example run away from home or that kind of thing, but it does sort of start to keep a gentle but firm pressure on from all directions to keep attending, keep behaving, keep following...

It's also giving staff the confidence, too, to make contact with Aboriginal parents. A lot of the time they'll come and say to me [the principal] 'so and so hasn't been coming to school' and they're their form teacher. I've said 'well, have you rung the parents?' 'Oh...I'm not doing that.' 'Why not? Why come and tell me? You'd ring someone else's parents.' We're trying to get staff to be confident enough in ringing up.

The school developed a school and community partnership document. It felt that the development of the document itself was a useful strategy for building relationships and breaking down barriers, but: ... trying to make it a living document is an ongoing challenge. Staff don't seem to have huge ownership of this document. Making parents aware of what's actually in there [is difficult] – if you gave that to an Aboriginal parent they wouldn't sit there and read it.

Specific attendance strategies used by the school include:

- weekly monitoring of attendance with follow-up, which includes home visits by a combination of the Aboriginal and Islander education officers, the head of student services and the principal
- engagement strategy for all at risk students
- aspirant program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- sports academy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys
- behavioural contracts – termed A Plan for Success (which included setting individual targets and goals that could be as simple as being able to watch sporting team compete)
- requirement of 90% attendance for major school events (including the school ball as well as sporting activities).

One of the school's challenges has been how to reintegrate students who are chronically absent back into the academic setting. The student services team works closely with the teaching staff to ensure as smooth a transition as possible, using individual education plans (IEPs) as a tool.

Maybe their attendance is below 30% getting down to almost zero for some of them and even to get them here...if they did turn up on any one day I think, from my point of view, it's having something ready to roll for those kids. Whatever culture they come from, if their truancy is really,

really high, and they turn up to school one day, they have to walk into a welcoming environment and not some sort of confusion... 'oh, oh, what class have you got?', 'oh, so you haven't got a pen; so sit there and wait for half an hour while I sort it.' You have to have something like ready to go and have to encourage staff to do that, too. So, we've got all our IEPs done online on the server so staff can go in there and put their own bits in there. It's not only that they're in there, it's when I look at those IEPs I can tell if a staff member has missed a kid or what's in there is inadequate. I can tell straight away that that staff member is not going to be prepared for that kid to come in to their class, and I know that when I turn up with that kid to macramé or something and the teacher's not ready for them, then that's going to cause an issue. The kid will feel embarrassment. They won't want to do the word sleuth. They will want to do what the other kids are doing. And so I have to make sure that staff have got something in place. It's an identifying method of which staff, I think, are going to have issues when those kids turn up and I can go and see them and encourage them to have something ready to go. And the heads of department can use that as a tool, too, to make sure there's something ready to go. Like I said, it's not just for Aboriginal kids but it's across the board.

Key areas that the school has identified for additional work in areas related to attendance include constructing an onsite community services centre, working with primary school students to improve their transition into high school, developing programs specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls, continued staff development and developing a resiliency program.

Summary

Table 3.1 aligns examples of the types of strategies used by the case study schools to improve the attendance of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with the 8 types of strategies found to be effective in the literature review (the ninth, parental consequences, was not reflected in the consultations as it is a government, not a school-initiated, policy). The table shows that, between them, the 3 schools cover the strategies, and that there is some overlap between them.

Table 3.1: Examples of the types of strategies used by the case study schools

Strategy	School 1	School 2	School 3
Student engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personalised learning plans • Link to post-school options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personalised learning plans • Playgroup and preschool program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sporting program • Personalised learning plans
Literacy/numeracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-on-one tutoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-on-one or small group tutoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-on-one or small group tutoring • Ensuring learning resources meet students' needs
Whole-of-school approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall philosophy • Teaching and behaviour management approaches • Staff development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall philosophy • Teaching and behaviour management approaches • Staff development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall philosophy • Teaching and behaviour management approaches • Staff development
Nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide food when required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide food when required • Nutrition program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food program
Incentives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awards, rewards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awards, rewards, chocolate wheel • School passport program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awards, rewards • Level of attendance required for extracurricular activities
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School organises/coordinates bus transport for all students • Will pick up individual students from their homes when there are attendance issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School coordinates bus transport if necessary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School coordinates bus transport for all students
Attendance monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily monitoring, follow-up by Indigenous support officer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily monitoring, follow-up by vice-principal and Aboriginal education workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily monitoring, follow-up by principal, welfare team, teachers, and Aboriginal education workers
School/family/community partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inviting community into the school • Home visits • Respect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community partnership agreement • Home visits • Community liaison officer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspirational program which involves the community • Community partnership agreement

4 Sharing the evidence—a web-based strategy

Participants in the consultations were enthusiastic about the development of a potential website dedicated to improving school attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students:

You know what I'd like to see? Having a website as a resource. As a one-stop resource [for example] here's a list of scholarships that are going this year...this is the website to go to, this is the email address, because these things are hard to find...or health. These are the resources, these are the issues, so you might have a school that's new to Indigenous education – these are the issues that you will confront, these are the things that you need to look out for...

Case studies – for me as a school leader, those are what I'm looking at and reading, that's what's useful to me. So any common threads that are across schools, pulled into some kind of paper, that's something that I would read myself with the leadership team and then I'd share with the staff, and then get ideas...say okay, here's some broad principles – you know, respect, partnerships with the communities, with the families, you know, whatever it is – what do you think that could look like in our context? So to take whatever the broad principles are that is success, and then, here's some examples of how it's worked at other places – how do you think we could apply that to our context?

I would use that, definitely, as a principal. And I'm sure our attendance officer would if she knew that there was something out there. You know, it's about sharing and it's about 'oh geez, look at what they did there'.

I'd want success stories, research, attendance, breakfast, whatever it is, like the whole ramification of things that you're going to tackle if you have any issues with attendance, government initiatives, funding, programs, even PLPs [personalised learning plans] for schools. Like a toolbox that schools can say: here's a model one, and here's a case study of how this school does it, they do it through this process so I can take it and modify it...and there's many facets, and maybe schools might not have thought about 1 facet or 2 facets, you know what I mean, unless they actually see it they might not think about it...An ideas forum. Like the Department of Rec [Recreation] – I would never have thought of that but for the fact that I sat next to this guy and we got chatting about it and they ran a traditional Indigenous games session for us.

The key messages were as follows:

- Staff would like a 'one-stop-shop' website of issues/information/ strategies/ resources related to school attendance.
- Staff thought it could serve an important 'educational community' function; that is, the website could be a place where they could ask for help from other schools/experts if they had a problem and where they could also share their experiences and ideas.
- Staff would like the website to be a place that highlights success stories.

In short, staff thought that a searchable evidence base of strategies should be a key component of the website, but that including the other elements would make it more practical and useful for them.

They felt the primary users would be principals, Aboriginal education/liaison officers, teachers, school administrators, policy analysts and those from related community services who deal with students. To a lesser extent, they felt that some parents and students might find it useful as well.

However, participants also had questions about whether the website would/should be focused on issues and strategies for improving attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students **only**, or whether it would be broader in its approach, while including content that was specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This issue will be addressed later in the chapter.

Guiding principles

The consultations provided clear guiding principles for the development of a website:

- It needs to be clear in its purpose.
- It needs to be easy to navigate and should be checked carefully for broken links.
- It should include information/links to the factors related to attendance issues (for example, health, housing, domestic violence, substance use).
- In order to be useful, it would need to be updated regularly.
- The assessment of the underlying evidence needs to be seen as reliable, valid and transparent.

Content

Feedback on the potential content and layout of the website was sought from participants using an iterative process. A clear set of elements emerged from the consultations regarding website content. Participants wanted:

- a case study highlighted on the front page
- links, particularly to attendance policies, resources, staff training/professional development opportunities, funding sources/opportunities, scholarships, and post-school options. Participants were particularly keen to have links to universities with strong transition programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (for example, Charles Sturt). They also wanted links to Department of Recreation sites or other sporting organisations/opportunities
- information on the issues ‘behind’ non-attendance, with links to resources for dealing with them (for example, health-related issues such as eye and ear problems and how to organise screening, and so on)
- an opportunity for linking up or engaging directly with other schools. This could include an ‘ideas forum’ with specific topics (for example, ideas for NAIDOC week) as well as a moderated bulletin board where they could ask for help from other schools
- a separate section where Aboriginal education/liaison officers could connect directly with each other to share their experiences
- the searchable evidence base itself, which would include relevant articles, resources and practical tips
- summaries of key articles or issues that principals could use to foster discussion with their staff.

In addition, it was suggested that online professional development could be provided directly through the website.

Participants also wanted to be able to sign-up for notifications (either email or text) for when new content went up on the website.

High-level requirements for website development

If a website were to be developed, the AIHW recommends adopting the following good practice principles in relation to its establishment and management:

- clear identification of the website's functions and intended users
- establishment of ongoing processes to identify users' information needs
- quick and easy accessibility to information and materials for intended users, in formats and distribution modes that are appropriate for their individual and workplace contexts
- provision of information that is valid, reliable, current, comprehensive and useful for intended users
- establishment of robust quality assurance mechanisms, including quality standards and criteria for material acquisition, review, synthesis, research (where applicable), publication and dissemination
- engagement of a range of personnel (both internal and external, as needed) with an appropriate mix of qualifications, experience and expertise to undertake the website's identified functions for its target audiences
- implementation of stakeholder satisfaction surveys.

It is imperative that any website development occurs in accordance with the 2000 Government Online Strategy that requires all departments and agencies to comply with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 (World Wide Web Consortium), and with web policies and guidelines set out in the Australian Government Web Publishing standards <webpublishing.agimo.gov.au>.

Purpose/potential users of the website

Based on the feedback from the consultations, the purposes of an attendance strategies website would be to:

- house a collection of successful strategies for improving the attendance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in a manner that provides ease of access and practical support to users
- provide resources or links to resources that support these successful attendance strategies. This may include funding opportunities for schools, toolkits for particular strategies, professional development opportunities for staff, scholarship opportunities for students, and post-school training/education opportunities
- provide an opportunity for schools to support one another. This can be through facilitated topics or sharing of key issues and potential solutions
- provide an opportunity for Aboriginal workers/liaison officers to share ideas, support one another and to overcome issues of working in isolation.

One issue requiring further consultation with stakeholders is the extent to which an attendance strategies website should be branded as being specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. By definition, the evidence base would include strategies relevant to all students (and international as well as Australian evidence), as well as strategies that are specific to the needs/circumstances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The preference of the participants in the consultations was that the website be branded as a general attendance strategy website, with highlighted content that was specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Functionality

The specific functions that would support the purposes/content desired by the participants in the consultation are described below.

Main navigation

A front screen should categorise content by both audience segment (principals/schools, Aboriginal education/liaison officers, communities, parents) and topic/concept-based information (links, policies/resources). This would give visitors a choice on how they want to find information between audience segment and kind of content.

Each of the navigation items could then be supported by a 'pop open' menu that would show the pages at the next level down. This would not only speed access to these pages, but also reinforce the visitor's mental map of the site's structure.

Each section should contain site content selected for that audience (written articles, 'pre-prepared' search results), but the search form present on every page would allow users to find their own way through the collection.

The next screens for principals/schools and for Aboriginal education/liaison officers could provide an option for joining a closed, moderated community. Only recognised education providers/employees would be permitted to join these groups.

The next screens for links and policies/resources would take visitors to the pages with relevant material.

Search for strategies

The searchable collection should include assessed articles and the key practical tips/things to think about for each of the strategies. For example, if a user clicked on 'engagement programs – sporting programs', it would bring up:

- a description of the theory/mechanisms behind them
- assessed articles related to it
- links to organisations that offer the program/resources for starting programs
- case studies of schools that have used this strategy successfully
- practical tips/hints/things to consider, for example:
 - If a program is only for boys, will you provide another opportunity for girls?
 - What will you do if the standards for attendance in the program are lower than the school's attendance?
 - Be aware that if a program is for Indigenous students only, this may generate some resentment within the school.

Issues related to developing the online evidence base

The online evidence base could have features such as:

- a publications page that houses the issues papers, resource sheets and annual papers as they are released
- an Assessed Collection page that houses summaries of key research and evaluations on what works, or does not work, to improve school attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

As in other clearinghouses, the material housed in the online collection could be catalogued, indexed and classified by subject, by the 6 priority domains from the ATSIEAP and by type of publication to enable effective searches. An Assessed Collection could be searched by a range of additional criteria. Links to the original sources of the material in the online collections could be provided where copyright restrictions enable this. Links to certain material may not be able to be directly provided because of copyright issues, however.

An Assessed Collection is likely to focus on evaluations of programs and activities, but it could also include a broader range of documents, such as key policy or research papers. Other recommendations include:

- using sources from Australian and international literature
- including intervention and evaluation research of a program or activity, including both process evaluations and outcome evaluations
- including cost-benefit and/or cost-effectiveness analyses of programs and activities
- including research about adapting and implementing non-Indigenous-specific (mainstream) policies and programs for Indigenous Australians
- including research about programs, strategies and practices that specifically address traumatised individuals and communities.

Items could be categorised across a number of variables, including type of methodology, whether Indigenous people are included, and the country and region of the study.

The question of what material to include in the underlying database and how to ensure that only reliable and valid information is included are key issues. The AIHW recommends the following criteria for selection:

- Articles that appear in peer-reviewed journals are automatically eligible for inclusion.
- Government-approved reports/publications are automatically eligible for inclusion.
- Material recommended by the scientific advisors is automatically eligible for inclusion.
- Other potential material, such as searchable case studies, practical hints and resources, would go through a review process developed by the Board/Reference Group.

Moderated collaboration

One of the key functions that participants wanted from the website was the ability to engage in an online community of education practitioners. There are 3 main options for school-to-school support:

- The site manager provides a topic for discussion and moderates it.
- The site manager provides a 'topics for discussion' section, whereby a school could post a question and others could respond.
- The website provides a section where a school could seek more one-to-one discussions with personnel from other schools. (For example, a school could post its name/contact details and ask for schools that have had similar experiences to contact them directly and privately to discuss the issue.)

All these options are valid and provide different functions.

An additional issue relates to whether the discussions should be 'open' or 'closed'. Open discussions would allow any interested user to post on the website. While this approach would most likely attract more users, it would be resource intensive to moderate. The recommended approach would be to have closed discussions, where users have to register

to be part of the community (for example, they would have to be a verified school staff member); users would be assigned a user name/password to participate. This approach would still require moderation, but participants would have to agree to a set of rules for participation, and the moderation could occur after postings.

Communication strategy

Developing a communication strategy that outlines the key communications activities and tools to engage with key stakeholders and that promotes access to and use of the website will be essential to the success of the online tool.

The AIHW recommends that some of the key elements for the communication strategy include tools such as:

- regular e-newsletters (at least 6 per year) to a subscriber list that provide information on issues related to school attendance and additions to the online collection and website. Hard copies could also be posted
- tailored website metadata that are highly visible and retrievable by major and subject-specific search engines
- links from the attendance strategies website to other websites and resources on relevant Indigenous issues (both education-specific and more general), and arranging for reciprocal links
- an events calendar on the website covering relevant events such as research, evaluation and policy conferences
- engaging with teaching programs at universities to ensure that students are aware of the website and its purposes.

Potential outreach activities could include:

- organising a public conference/seminar to coincide with the launch
- representing the online evidence base at conferences to do with education, attendance, policy specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, research, and evaluation through means such as information booths, conference satchel inserts and poster/oral presentations as appropriate
- promoting any publications/resources developed as part of the project
- presenting to and meeting with Australian and state and territory government departments with responsibilities most relevant to improving attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Ways of seeking user feedback include a satisfaction survey, which could be conducted every 2 years and be distributed through the website, along with a small number of interviews with key stakeholders. In addition, feedback from users of the website could be encouraged through the Helpdesk and from those participating in seminars/conferences or other outreach activities.

Appendix A Information sent to state Education Department contacts for nominations of schools

Email sent to contacts

Thank you all so much for speaking with me about the School Attendance Project. As discussed, based on the literature review, the AIHW has put together a list of the strategies/interventions that have evidence showing their effectiveness at raising school attendance. We would now ask your help in putting together the names of some schools that match up with those types of successful strategies in your state.

There are 2 documents attached. The first provides an overview and examples of the strategies. The second asks for names of schools that you would propose for consideration for inclusion in the consultation phase of this project. We'd appreciate it if you'd be able to return the completed form to us on 1 May.

Document 1: Schools profile for school attendance project

The types of strategies/interventions selected below for the schools profile are based on the findings from AIHW's review of the relevant literature (both Indigenous-specific and mainstream) in Australia, the United States, New Zealand, and Canada. They represent strategies which have shown a demonstrated level of effectiveness in raising school attendance rates. Because the literature review was reliant upon published reports/evaluations, states/territories may be aware of additional effective strategies without published evaluations.

The final list of schools/communities selected for consultation will ideally include a mix of:

- Metropolitan, regional, and remote schools
- Early childhood, primary, secondary schools
- Small, medium, and large schools
- Schools with high, medium and low proportions of Indigenous students
 - Definitions of high, medium and low would need to be determined. One option is for AIHW to determine cut-offs based on a bell curve, if jurisdictions are able to provide information on the % of students who are Indigenous for each school.
- Government and non-government schools (Including Catholic and Independent).

Table A1.1: Overview of types of strategies, examples, and applicable school years

Type of strategy/ intervention	Examples (note—a guide, not an exhaustive list)	Applicable school years		
		Early childhood	Primary	High school
Direct incentive programs (for parents and students)	Specific rewards for good attendance Passport program No School /No Pool policy Bicycles for students		X	X
Non-academic achievement/ engagement programs	Participation in performing arts or sports (contingent upon attendance or where the aim is to increase attendance through mentoring)—for example, Girls from Oz, Clontarf Foundation After-school clubs, cultural activities within schools DRUMBEAT		X	X
Improving attendance by improving literacy/ numeracy skills of the students	Scaffolded literacy program ABRACADABRA Bilingual education Cultural awareness/ understanding training for school staff	X	X	X
Parental consequences for poor attendance	NTER intervention, Cape York reforms		X	X
Nutrition programs	School-based breakfast/ lunch programs, particularly those that involve parents, community members, and teachers	X	X	X
Attendance monitoring programs	Where attendance is monitored regularly, early intervention strategies are applied, and where monitoring is regularly reported on Tri-border attendance strategy		X	X
Whole-of-school approach (where the focus is on the school/staff and ensuring that the school is a welcoming place for Indigenous students)	Specialised teachers, outreach/liaison officers Strategies adapted to meet needs of the individual school Middle Years Reform program Indigenous education support structures	X	X	X
School/family/ community partnerships (broader than the whole-of-school approach listed above)	Transition programs that focus on both children and families Education programs that focus on the parents/carers School connectedness/engagement/outreach Moorditj Coolangars Community Hub FAST. Galiwin'Ku program	X	X	X
School liaison officers/ Aboriginal education officers/workers	Where increases in attendance can be directly attributed to these staff members and the particular ways in which they work (for example, community engagement, monitoring, and so on)	X	X	X
Transport to school	Community buses Walking School Bus program	X	X	X
Other effective strategies you may be aware of, but which may not have published evaluations		X	X	X
Individual schools that have been able to increase their attendance rates for Indigenous students but that do not necessarily fit one of the above categories.		X	X	X

Document 2 Template used to identify schools for the Project

Please provide the names of schools in your state/territory that have successfully employed the types of strategies/interventions listed below and which you think should be considered for consultation. The number of schools per strategy that you propose is at your discretion – for example, we are **not** expecting you to provide three schools for every strategy (for example, a metropolitan, regional, and remote/very remote school). We recognise that in some states there may be no schools that have used particular strategies, and that a single school may have used multiple strategies. In that case, please list the school under each applicable strategy. Please also tick the appropriate boxes for each school's characteristics. Once each state/territory has returned its suggestions, there will be consultation about the final list of schools to be contacted for inclusion in the Project.

Table A1.2: Template given to jurisdictions to provide examples of schools that use strategies/interventions to encourage attendance

Type of strategy/ intervention	Name of school(s)/town	Type			Sector		Size/population		Location		
		Pre-school	Primary	High school	Govt	Non-govt	No. students	% Indig.	Metro.	Regional	Remote/ very remote
Direct incentive programs (for parents and students)											
Non-academic achievement/ engagement programs											
Improving attendance by improving literacy/ numeracy skills of the students											
Parental consequences for poor attendance											
Nutrition programs											
Attendance monitoring programs											
Whole-of-school approach (where the focus is on the school/staff and ensuring that the school is a welcoming place for Indigenous students)											
School/family/ community partnerships (broader than the whole-of-school approach listed above)											

(continued)

Table A1.2 (continued): Template given to jurisdictions to provide examples of schools that use strategies/interventions to encourage attendance

Type of strategy/ intervention	Name of school(s)/town	Type			Sector		Size/pop'n		Location		
		Pre-school	Primary	High school	Govt	Non-govt	No. students	% Indig.	Metro.	Regional	Remote/ very remote
School liaison officers/ Aboriginal education officers/workers											
Transport to school											
Other effective strategies you may be aware of, but which may not have published evaluations											
Individual schools that have been able to increase their attendance rates for Indigenous students but that do not necessarily fit one of the above categories.											

Appendix B Matrix of schools for the consultation

Table B1 provides an overview of the coverage of strategies and locations that the 12 schools initially nominated by the state contacts provided. Nine schools were then selected from this list.

Table B1: Twelve potential schools for consultation by location and identified strategies

Location	Strategies									
	Incentives	Non-academic achievement	Literacy/numeracy	Nutrition	Attendance monitoring	Whole of school	Partnerships	Liaison officers/Aboriginal education workers	Transport	Other schools not fitting categories
Metro. areas	School 1		School 1				School 1	School 2	School 2	
	School 3	School 3	School 3	School 3	School 3	School 3	School 3	School 3		
					School 4	School 4				
Regional areas	School 5	School 5			School 6		School 7			School 8
Remote areas	School 9	School 9	School 10	School 11	School 11	School 11	School 12			
						School 9				
						School 10	School 10			

Note: No schools were given for the following strategies: parental consequences and other effective strategies without evaluations.

Appendix C Community profiles

Table C1: Community profiles of the areas in which the schools included in the consultations were located

Census 2011 profile	K-12 school 1	K-12 school 2	High school 1	Primary 1 ^(a)	Primary 2	Primary 3	High School 2	Primary 4	K-12 School 3
Classification	Regional	Regional	Metropolitan	Remote	Metropolitan	Metropolitan	Regional	Regional	Remote
Total persons ^(b)	<16,000	<15,000	>300,000	<500	>35,000	<5,500	<4,500	>30,000	<6,000
Indigenous (%) ^(b)	<9.0	<17.0	<3.0	<92.0	>3.0	>2.0	<10.0	<2.0	<26.0
Indigenous (no.) ^(b)	<1,500	<2,500	<8,500	>300	>1,000	>100	<400	<500	<1,500
Family composition (persons in families)									
Couple families (%)	75.9	70.6	82.0	71.4	80.8	82.7	84.0	86.9	81.0
One parent families (%)	23.0	28.2	17.0	22.4	16.6	14.0	14.7	12.6	17.9
Other families (%)	1.1	1.2	1.0	6.1	2.6	3.3	1.4	0.5	1.1
Total families (persons) ^(b)	<12,000	<11,000	>260,000	>60	<25,000	<4,000	<3,500	<24,000	<4,000
Highest year of school completed (%)									
Year 12	25.5	22.2	50.7	23.7	49.2	56.1	31.9	41.6	41.2
Year 11	6.0	5.5	4.8	17.7	9.0	9.3	11.3	11.9	11.8
Year 10	34.0	33.8	23.2	36.4	19.1	15.3	26.0	28.8	22.5
Lower than Year 10	23.3	24.6	13.4	20.7	11.1	9.5	20.9	10.2	12.7
Not stated	11.2	13.9	7.8	1.5	11.6	9.8	9.9	7.5	11.8
Count of persons aged 15 and over who are no longer attending primary or secondary school ^(b)	<12,500	<11,000	<220,000	<200	<30,000	<4,500	>3,000	<23,000	<4,500
Labour force status^(c)									
Employed (%)	88.6	88.3	93.2	93.5	95.7	94.8	95.9	96.6	97.9
Unemployed (%)	11.5	11.7	6.8	6.5	4.3	5.2	4.1	3.4	2.1
Total in labour force (number) ^(b)	<6,000	>10,000	<130,000	<100	<15,000	<2,000	<2,000	>12,000	<2,500

(a) Labour force status data for Indigenous persons only. Additionally, the total number of families includes multiple family households. There were 49 one-family households.

(b) Approximate numbers have been provided to maintain confidentiality of schools.

(c) ABS Census 2006 data, as 2011 Census data for unemployment are not yet available.

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Attachment A: SCSEEC successful school attendance strategies evidence-based project: Literature review

This report presents detailed findings from the SCSEEC successful school attendance strategies evidence-based project. Bringing together information from a literature review and a series of consultations with schools, it presents key lessons for developing and implementing effective strategies for improving school attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.



Australian Government

**Australian Institute of
Health and Welfare**

SCSEEC successful school attendance strategies evidence-based project

Literature review



Australian Government

**Australian Institute of
Health and Welfare**

*Authoritative information and statistics
to promote better health and wellbeing*

SCSEEC successful school attendance strategies evidence-based project

Literature review

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
Canberra

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Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ATSIEAP	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DEEWR	Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
EATSIPS	Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives in Schools
ETP	Effective Teaching Profile
FAST	Families and Schools Together Program
LOTE	Languages other than English
MCEECDYA	Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NAIDOC	National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee
NIRA	National Indigenous Reform Agreement
NTER	Northern Territory Emergency Response
SCSEEC	Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood
SEAM	School Enrolment and Attendance through Welfare Reform Measure
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training

Summary

Governments, schools, and communities throughout Australia are working to improve school attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students using numerous strategies. Currently, however, little is known about the effectiveness of these strategies and the key factors which underpin programs and strategies which are successful.

This report forms a key element of a larger project (the SCSEEC Successful School Attendance Strategies Evidence-based Project) designed to fill the current gap in the evidence by bringing together published data on effectiveness with the on-the-ground experiences of schools and communities who have been successful in improving the attendance of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Reviewing literature from Australia and internationally, this report has found evidence for the effectiveness of 9 types of strategies for improving school attendance:

- engagement programs, including extracurricular and out-of-school activities
- literacy and numeracy programs
- whole-of-school approaches
- nutrition programs
- incentive programs
- parental consequences for poor attendance
- transport
- attendance monitoring programs
- school/family/community partnerships.

This report provides an overview of the different programs reviewed, along with the main findings for the programs with respect to student attendance. It describes each strategy, the reasoning behind the strategy (for example, what barriers to school attendance it tries to address) and provides detailed examples of programs within each strategy. Where available, the key mechanisms that make the programs and strategies successful are also discussed.

In addition, the report also discusses key government policies and highlights the ways in which jurisdictions and schools have gone about trying to improve attendance.

1 Introduction

For a number of years, closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage has been a priority area for governments across Australia. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has committed to improving the lives of Indigenous Australians and, in particular, to providing better futures for Indigenous children. COAG set 6 Closing the Gap targets relating to life expectancy, child mortality, early childhood development and to education and employment that aim to reduce or close the 'gap' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. In order to achieve these targets, a number of national agreements have been made by COAG. These include the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) and the National Partnership agreements for Indigenous Early Childhood Development, Indigenous Economic Participation, and Indigenous Health Outcomes.

Reflecting the importance of education, 3 of the Closing the Gap targets relate specifically to educational opportunity and attainment:

- ensuring all Indigenous 4-years-olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within 5 years
- halving the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for Indigenous children within a decade
- at least halving the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 attainment (or equivalent attainment) rates by 2020.

In the long-term, achieving these 3 goals is expected to contribute to the employment target of halving the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade. Given the well-established relationship between educational attainment, socioeconomic status and overall health and wellbeing, improved educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians should also lead to improved health outcomes and to closing the gap in life expectancy and child mortality.

A key element to achieving these targets is regular school attendance (including attendance at early childhood educational programs). Improvements to schools, the curriculum, teacher qualifications and teaching approaches will have little effect on children's learning if they are not at school. Attending school is also important for developing key social skills, relationships and overall social capital; it is not only about educational attainment per se.

The influential 'Little children are sacred' report asserted that a key factor preventing Indigenous Australians from participating confidently in both their own culture and mainstream culture was their poorer educational outcomes compared with those of non-Indigenous Australians (Wild & Anderson 2007). Although there are many complex reasons for the poorer educational attainment levels, the lower attendance of Indigenous children at school is critical. Data continue to show this poor attendance. For example, the Northern Territory Emergency Response Review Board found that, in 2008, only 27% of children in remote communities attended school regularly (NTER 2011).

Given the importance of school attendance, the Australian and state and territory governments have collaboratively set out to improve attendance rates among Indigenous students. They have done this through various national agreements – both by requiring the monitoring of attendance as a performance indicator and by providing financial support and resources/guidance/tools for increasing attendance (either directly or indirectly) through improving educational experiences at school. For example, to monitor the target of closing

the gap for Year 12 attainment by 2020, the NIRA uses school attendance rates for Indigenous students in years 1 to 10.

Through the 3 Smarter Schools National Partnership agreements (Low Socio-economic Status School Communities, Literacy and Numeracy, Improving Teacher Quality), funding has been provided to implement evidence-based strategies at local levels to improve the quality of education in a number of Australian schools, with a specific focus on those serving large numbers of vulnerable children (including Indigenous children). Education departments in the states and territories have also provided their schools with practical tools and guidance for identifying both the issues underpinning non-attendance and ways to try to improve attendance (for example, the Western Australian Department of Education's web resource 'Improving Attendance: A Resource Package for Schools').

One of the key policies providing specific support and guidance for meeting the educational targets in the Closing the Gap initiatives and in the NIRA is the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (ATSIEAP) for 2010–14 (MCEECDYA 2010a). As in the NIRA, the ATSIEAP explicitly acknowledges that schooling and educational outcomes are not independent, but are linked to other 'building blocks' such as health, healthy homes and safe communities.

The ATSIEAP provides a set of agreed actions, outcomes, targets and performance indicators centred around 6 key domains that are likely to lead to improved outcomes for Indigenous students and close the gap in educational outcomes. These domains are:

- readiness for school
- engagement and connections
- attendance
- literacy and numeracy
- leadership, quality teaching and workforce development
- pathways to real post-school options.

With respect to school attendance specifically, the ATSIEAP aims to have all compulsory school-aged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people enrolled in school and progressing through schooling at the same rate as that for non-Indigenous students and to increase the retention rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (MCEECDYA 2010a:17). One target for achieving this outcome is that attendance rates of Indigenous students are equivalent to that of non-Indigenous students.

National Collaborative Action 22 dedicated National Project Funds in 2011 to further develop a better evidence base of what works in improving attendance among Indigenous students. The AIHW was engaged to conduct this work, and staff from the Indigenous and Children's Group undertook the SCSEEC Successful School Attendance Strategies Evidence-based Project (the Project).

The Project consisted of 3 key tasks:

- an expert literature review of attendance strategies and policies that successfully increase school attendance among Indigenous students
- a coordinated stakeholder consultation process on effective school attendance strategies and assessment of community engagement requirements for an effective online tool
- detailed recommendations for an online evidence-based tool.

This report constitutes the expert literature review component. It first provides an overview of the context in which the Project was developed, then discusses the complexity of factors that have been linked to non-attendance among Indigenous students. An overview of state and territory policy follows.

The report then turns to the literature review itself, by first describing the methodology underpinning the literature search, the selection of material and how the material was synthesised.

Analysis of the material yielded 9 types of strategies or interventions with demonstrated evidence of effectiveness. The report discusses each of these strategies, presenting examples of successful programs and the mechanisms that appear to underpin their effectiveness. The report concludes with a discussion of the findings.

Attendance data

Before discussing the factors affecting non-attendance it is important to measure the extent to which attendance differs between Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students. This exercise is hampered, however, by data quality issues. For example:

- Attendance data are not currently collected and reported on in a uniform manner across jurisdictions and cannot be aggregated from school sector data.
- Care needs to be exercised in relation to the data for Indigenous students, particularly due to the small population size in some jurisdictions, as the percentages may represent attendance at school by a small number of students. Relatively small populations in some states and territories, or at certain disaggregation, can promote apparently large movements in rates that may be based on relatively small movements in absolute numbers.
- Efforts made to increase the identification of Indigenous students in data collections make analysing trends over time difficult. For example, the programs implemented in Victoria in 2010 to increase identification of the Indigenous status of students and decrease the use of not-stated Indigenous status may affect comparisons of students by Indigenous status from 2010 to previous years.
- Aggregate rates may hide important variations in attendance patterns within and between schools.
- Aggregate attendance rates do not distinguish between excused and non-excused absences and are not able to distinguish between school refusal, truancy and condoned absences.

In spite of these caveats, the most recent data illustrate some important patterns in student attendance rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Table 1.1).

In 2010:

- Non-Indigenous students in government primary schools had student attendance rates above the benchmark of 90% in all jurisdictions. Indigenous students in government primary schools in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania had attendance rates varying between 86% and 94% (depending upon the year of schooling).
- Indigenous students in government primary schools in Western Australia and South Australia had attendance rates between 81% and 84%. The rates were particularly low in the Northern Territory, ranging from 72% to 75% in government primary schools.

- In government schools, there are considerable differences in attendance rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory.
- In all jurisdictions, notable decreases in attendance rates among Indigenous students were observed from Year 8 onwards. For example, in the Northern Territory, for years 1 to 7, there were differences in attendance rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students of about 20 percentage points. This gap increased even further between years 8 to 10, to approximately 30 percentage points, with the attendance rate among Year 10 Indigenous students being only 61%.

Absenteeism rates also vary with remoteness status, with data showing that 14% of children in remote and very remote areas have missed school without permission compared with 6% of children living in non-remote areas.

Table 1.1: Student attendance rates, government schools, by Indigenous status, 2010, by jurisdiction (per cent)

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Primary ungraded	Secondary ungraded
New South Wales												
Indigenous	90	90	90	90	90	89	85	81	78	78	87	76
Non-Indigenous	94	95	95	95	95	94	93	91	90	89	92	86
Total	94	94	94	94	94	94	93	91	89	88	91	84
Victoria												
Indigenous	90	89	89	89	89	89	87	82	81	80	83	83
Non-Indigenous	94	94	94	94	94	94	93	92	90	90	89	89
Total	94	94	94	94	94	94	93	91	90	90	89	89
Queensland												
Indigenous	86	87	87	88	88	88	88	83	79	77	na	na
Non-Indigenous	93	93	93	93	93	93	93	91	89	87	na	na
Total	92	93	93	93	93	93	92	90	88	87	na	na
Western Australia												
Indigenous	81	83	83	84	83	84	81	75	68	62	na	27
Non-Indigenous	93	94	94	94	94	94	93	92	90	88	na	94
Total	92	93	93	93	93	93	92	90	88	86	na	94
South Australia												
Indigenous	81	81	83	84	84	84	81	76	70	70	83	81
Non-Indigenous	92	93	93	93	93	93	92	90	88	86	92	89
Total	92	92	92	93	92	92	92	89	87	85	92	89

(continued)

Table 1.1 (continued): Student attendance rates, government schools, by Indigenous status, 2010, by jurisdiction (per cent)

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Primary ungraded	Secondary ungraded
Tasmania												
Indigenous	93	93	94	94	93	92	91	85	85	82	na	na
Non-Indigenous	94	94	95	95	95	95	93	91	90	87	na	na
Total	94	94	95	95	95	94	93	91	89	87	na	na
Australian Capital Territory												
Indigenous	87	88	91	89	88	89	83	79	75	72	na	na
Non-Indigenous	94	94	94	94	94	93	92	90	87	87	na	na
Total	94	94	94	94	94	93	92	89	87	86	na	na
Northern Territory												
Indigenous	72	72	73	74	74	75	70	65	60	61	81	78
Non-Indigenous	92	93	93	93	93	94	92	91	90	87	76	89
Total	83	83	83	84	84	85	81	79	77	77	80	89

na not available.

Student attendance is defined as the number of actual full-time equivalent student days attended over the collection period as a percentage of the total number of possible student days (ACARA 2012).

Source: ACARA 2012.

Factors affecting non-attendance

The factors underpinning the higher rates of non-attendance among Indigenous students are complex and multifaceted, vary over time and between locations, and interact with each other. Figure 1.1 illustrates this complexity, where individual, family and community aspects; school structure; and teacher training/approach all affect attendance (Barnes 2004). Although not shown in the figure, these factors are further affected by larger political, social, structural, economic and cultural factors.

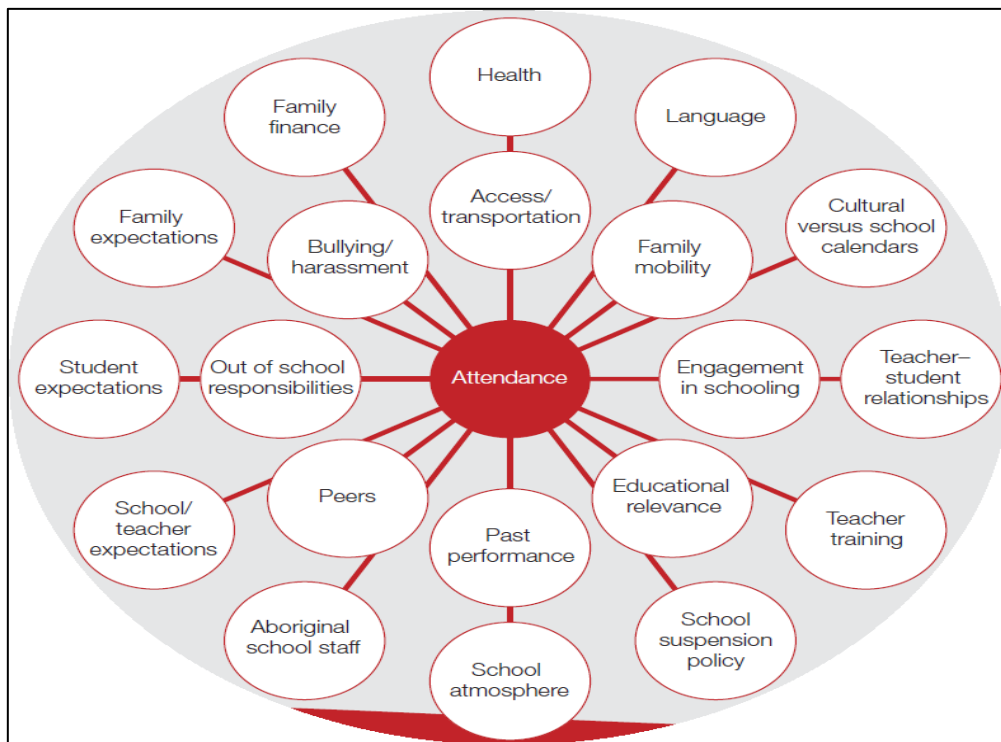


Figure 1.1: Summary of issues relating to attendance

Source: McRae 2007

These factors can be categorised into 4 core domains:

- school factors
- structural/community factors
- family factors
- student factors.

In the past, much of the 'blame' for the poorer attendance rates of Indigenous students was assigned to students, families and individual communities who were thought to be less supportive of education in general and who thus assigned lower priorities to attending school than parents from other backgrounds (Bourke et al. 2000; Wilson no date). More recent work, however, has stressed the importance of the interaction between **all** of these factors. For example, if parents had poor experiences (as students) with the education system, they may feel uncomfortable in their children's school unless the school actively encourages and engages them in a welcoming manner and demonstrates a positive understanding of and commitment to Aboriginal culture.

Understanding these factors provides opportunities for clear and targeted interventions. For example, if a barrier to school attendance is physical (for example, transport) or financial (for example, the cost of uniforms), strategies can be adopted that target these barriers specifically. If a barrier is a lack of cultural understanding on the part of school staff, appropriate interventions may consist of staff development, training and mentoring.

School factors

Previous research has identified a number of school-based elements that have been linked (both positively and negatively) with the extent to which children and young people attend school (Bourke et al. 2000; Purdie & Buckley 2010; Wilson no date). These elements are critically important not only because they affect all students and parents/carers within the school, but also because they are amenable to change if backed by appropriate policies, funding, leadership and training.

Relevant school characteristics that affect the likelihood that children will attend school include:

- whether the school is a welcoming environment for Indigenous students
- whether the school has a culturally appropriate and inclusive curriculum
- having school calendars that align with cultural practices
- classroom teaching practices through which teachers demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of their Indigenous students
- staff turnover rates, which affect relationship development
- whether the school engages with parents on a ‘problem-based’ model or actively encourages engagement throughout the school year
- the match between the language of instruction and students’ language spoken at home
- whether the school monitors attendance and how it follows up with families
- punitive policies for non-attendance versus positive rewards systems for good attendance
- whether the school employs Indigenous staff members
- whether schools communicate with each other regarding attendance issues when students move schools
- school policies regarding suspension and bullying, which affect how safe children and young people feel in their school
- the quality of leadership in the school
- whether there is an attitude that non-attendance is an inherent and unmalleable issue within the Indigenous community that cannot be fixed and is therefore assigned a lower priority in the school.

Structural/community factors

Schools are embedded within communities and there are a number of structural or community factors that have been linked to school attendance. These aspects include physical or geographic issues, community engagement in education and socioeconomic factors:

- the distinct issues faced by schools and parents in remote areas. Schools in remote areas may have trouble attracting experienced and qualified staff and may find it harder to engage with families who live further away. Difficulties in getting to school because of lack of transportation or issues such as weather or flooding also affect attendance
- the effects of living in a remote area on health care, which, in turn, has a flow-on effect on children's health and non-attendance
- community level of involvement and support for education
- history of positive or negative experiences by community members with the education system
- availability of employment/education opportunities following school completion.

Family factors

There are a number of family factors that have been linked with school attendance, including:

- *Socioeconomic status:* Poorer socioeconomic status has been linked to unstable or overcrowded housing environments, poorer access to health care and early childhood education, inadequate food and clothing, and so on – all of which affect attendance. Indigenous families are significantly over-represented on all indicators of poor socioeconomic status (AIHW 2011).
- *Past experience with the education system:* whether family members have had a positive or negative experience with the education system in the past may affect the family's level of comfort in dealing and engaging with schools.
- *Literacy and numeracy:* Parents' own levels of literacy and numeracy will affect whether they are able to read to their children or help with school work.
- *Perceived value of schooling by parents:* When education is highly valued in the family, children are more likely to attend school.
- *Condoning of school absenteeism:* The extent to which family members condone absences from school will affect school attendance.
- *Level of family stability:* The stability of relationships, presence or absence of substance misuse in the family, mental health issues, and so on are linked with levels of family stress and school attendance.
- *Mobility:* Two types of mobility affect attendance: permanent/semi-permanent moves between areas and temporary absences (for example, a month or 2 spent in another area). The extent to which families move between areas can affect a number of factors related to attendance such as having to enrol in a new school and make the transition to a new school environment, including developing supportive relationships with teachers and students. Temporary mobility disrupts attendance at school and may hamper the ongoing development of literacy and numeracy skills. National and regional estimates of movements indicate that while there is a relatively high level of Indigenous mobility, children are predominately sedentary and that absence from a home base could account for only one-third of non-attendance at school (Taylor 2011).
- *Caring responsibilities at home:* These responsibilities can potentially conflict with attendance at school. This factor is especially pertinent for Indigenous students given the higher levels of ill health in the Indigenous population (for example, AIHW 2011).

Student factors

While parents are ultimately accountable for their child's attendance at school, there are a number of factors at the student level that affect whether they attend school on a daily basis, including:

- *Health:* Indigenous children have significantly poorer health than non-Indigenous children, which may directly affect their attendance at school through levels of illness. In addition to illness, issues such as higher rates of otitis media and consequent hearing problems affect school performance and the willingness of the child to attend school
- *School readiness:* Level of school readiness when entering school and whether the student has attended an early childhood education program affects the student's achievement at school as well as their attendance.
- *Prior success at school:* Students who perform poorly (or feel they perform poorly) at school may be more reluctant to attend.
- *Nature of relationships at school:* Attendance is higher when students feel safe and secure with teachers and other staff members as well as other students.
- *Attachment to school and education:* When students feel that attending school will have long-term benefits for them personally and when they feel personally engaged with their school attendance is higher.

The complexity of these factors has clear implications for policy and practice. A number of resources have been developed to assist schools and communities with identifying and addressing these issues, including worksheets on identifying issues, general types of solutions and case studies (for example, Bourke et al. 2000; Partington et al. 2009; Commonwealth of Australia 2014). To date, and as noted in the ATSIEAP and by Purdie & Buckley (2010), these efforts have been hampered by the lack of evidence not only on effectiveness, but also on practical aspects of what makes programs work so that they can be replicated.

2 State and territory policies

State and territory governments have all committed to accelerate improvements in the learning outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across the country by implementing a range of policies specific to each jurisdiction. Examples of state and territory policies contributing to this reform are presented below. A description of the attendance strategies for the Education department of each state and territory can be found in Appendix Table A1.

New South Wales

The New South Wales Department of Education and Communities supports the ATSIEAP through its Five Year Strategic Plan 2012-2017 and its Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy 2009-2012 and the current Aboriginal and Training Policy. A key action area, attracting a heavy focus and regularly reappearing in strategies, is the commitment to engagement and connections. This is reflected in the Partnership Agreement between the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and the Department of Education and Communities, which has led to an agreement on parental and community engagement at the local, regional and state level. This ensures that these two bodies participate as equal partners in planning and decision making for Aboriginal education and training.

The 4 key focus areas in the Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy are:

- leadership, planning and accountability
- ongoing learning for staff and students
- relationships and pathways
- teaching and training.

Victoria

Victoria has a number of current plans and strategies in place, including:

- the Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework 2013-2018
- Wannik: Learning together – journey to our future, Education Strategy for Koorie Students
- Dardee Boorai: the Victorian Charter of Safety and Wellbeing for Aboriginal Children and Young People.

Wannik, the Education Strategy for Koorie Students, represents a commitment from the Victorian Government to ensure every Koorie child receives a first-class education in Victoria's government schools. Within the strategy is a summary of actions for Victorian focus schools that clearly outlines the outcomes, targets and performance indicators, along with actions at the systemic and local levels.

Queensland

In Queensland, the Closing the Gap Education Strategy and the National Partnership agreements are the 2 main strategies in place to achieve the actions in the Plan. The Closing the Gap Education Strategy focuses on the life course from early learning through to

employment. The National Partnership agreements have a strong focus on educational theory through pedagogy and personal development of teachers.

The 4 National Partnership agreements on Literacy and Numeracy, Low Socio-economic Status School Communities, Improving Teacher Quality, and Youth Attainment and Transitions are strongly reflected in the school plans. The partnerships include specific accountabilities to Indigenous students. Accountabilities include (but are not limited to):

- improving Indigenous student attendance and retention
- building the skills of teachers and school leadership teams to enhance Indigenous student achievement in literacy and numeracy
- improving in-school support for teachers and leaders, particularly in disadvantaged Indigenous, rural/remote and hard-to-staff schools
- improving reward structures for teachers and leaders who work in disadvantaged Indigenous, rural/remote and hard-to-staff schools
- improving outcomes through enhanced access to digital teaching and learning opportunities.

Accountability is also entrenched in the Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives in Schools (EATSIPS) to ensure personal and professional accountability when incorporating Indigenous perspectives into school culture, curriculum and pedagogy. EATSIPS is a core initiative of the Closing the Gap Education Strategy and is focused on embedding Indigenous perspectives across personal and professional accountabilities, community engagements, the organisational environment, curriculum and pedagogy. It is a major responsibility of the Department of Education, Training and Employment as stated in the Queensland Government Reconciliation Action Plan.

Western Australia

The Department of Education's Aboriginal Education Plan for Western Australian Public Schools 2011–2014 is the key policy for Aboriginal education, and aligns with the ATSIEAP. Consequently, the key focus areas are the same. These are readiness for school; attendance; literacy and numeracy; pathways to real post-school options; engagement and connections; leadership, quality teaching and workforce development. The focus schools and Aboriginal Network of Schools are key strategies that Western Australia is using to help empower schools to close the performance gap for Aboriginal students. The Aboriginal Network of Schools are schools with high proportions of Aboriginal students who have the opportunity to be part of a network of schools that have increased scope to work with their communities to draw upon the key elements of the most successful local initiatives. Accountability is also a key factor to be emphasised and incorporated into school plans. This will ensure that the effectiveness of strategies is evaluated to enable any required changes.

South Australia

Targets and priority actions for Indigenous children and students were outlined in the Aboriginal Education Strategy 2005–2010 of the Department of Education and Children's Services. Other organisations and education sector's policies included the Association of Independent Schools of South Australia Indigenous Education Action Plan 2010 and the South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools Indigenous Education Policy.

A new and current Strategic Plan 2012–2016 for South Australian Public Education and Care contains overarching education and early childhood development priorities, plans and strategies. Strategic directions exist for every child to achieve their potential (encompassing social inclusion, safe environments and high standards of learning and achievement), excellence in education and care (via quality teaching), connection with communities, and a successful and sustainable organisation (which responds to the needs of students and the workforce).

Tasmania

The Tasmanian strategy for Closing the Gap in Aboriginal Education Outcomes 2010–2014 reflects the priority domains and actions of the ATSIEAP. Specialist Aboriginal Education Services staff and resources are available to support and assist schools with their School Improvement Plans to:

- increase Indigenous community involvement in student learning
- source appropriate interventions to maintain and improve Indigenous students' attendance, engagement, achievement and wellbeing
- build the cultural competency of their teaching and leadership staff
- access appropriate cultural resources for inclusive curriculum development and delivery.

Australian Capital Territory

The Australian Capital Territory Department of Education and Training's Strategic Plan 2010–2013 – 'Everyone Matters' – instils a personalised approach to students' learning. This is reflected in a separate yet concurrent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Matters: Strategic Plan 2010–2013, which provides clear direction for closing the learning achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. The focus of this strategy is on learning and teaching, the school environment, student pathways and transitions, and leadership and corporate development. The plan provides a framework for committed action to meet the needs of Indigenous students, their families and communities. The strategy supports the ATSIEAP. It will assist Australian Capital Territory public schools in adopting a targeted approach to improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students through applying strategies to ensure high-quality curriculum, literacy and numeracy, engagement and connection, retention, pathways, relationship and leadership.

Northern Territory

The Northern Territory Department of Education Strategic Plan 2011–2014 – along with the Smarter Schools and the Closing the Gap National Partnership Agreements developed in collaboration with the non-government school sector – set out a number of policies that reflect the priority domains in the ATSIEAP to improve education outcomes for Indigenous students. These plans all have priority targets around student attendance and participation, improving literacy and numeracy, employing high-quality teachers and developing Indigenous staff.

The Northern Territory's Strategic Plan includes specific strategies and programs associated with its priority targets. Examples include:

- *Every Child, Every Day*: Schools, regions and the system will work with parents, communities, peak bodies and other agencies to implement this strategy which is designed to improve the enrolment, attendance and participation of young Territorians (including extended services through flexible timing of school programs).
- *National Alliance for Very Remote Indigenous Schools*: The Department of Education will work with other jurisdictions to explore a national approach to accessing, developing and supporting school leaders and teachers in remote Indigenous schools.
- *Growing Our Own*: This strategy promotes investment in Indigenous staff development through Growing Our Own Indigenous Teachers (including the Remote Indigenous Teacher Education program), early childhood practitioners, Indigenous leadership and workforce development opportunities.
- *Higher education*: The Department of Education will strengthen partnerships with Charles Darwin University and the Bachelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education and other tertiary providers to build a responsive tertiary system and improve the quality and range of teacher training opportunities (including Remote Indigenous Teacher Education and accredited English as a Second Language Professional Learning).
- *Literacy and numeracy*: All schools and regions will have an explicit literacy and numeracy component in their Improvement Plans, which includes negotiated targets. Schools and teachers will be supported to de-clutter and prioritise curriculum offerings (where appropriate) and to analyse data through in-class coaching and mentoring and other professional learning.
- *Understanding and celebrating our Indigenous Culture*: All schools will work with their community to develop programs that focus on building a better understanding and appreciation of territory and local Indigenous culture. The Department of Education will provide content and support to assist schools in developing these programs.

There are a number of other initiatives and policies that are working in unison with these plans including the Northern Territory Government Working Future Initiative, the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training Families as First Teachers (FAST) program and the Northern Territory Smarter Schools Implementation Plan.

Focus schools

Evidence indicates that improvements in educational outcomes for Indigenous students require a collaborative response to local needs. To address this, ministers agreed in the ATSIEAP to identify key schools – ‘focus schools’. These are schools with Indigenous students with the greatest need and, therefore, where efforts will be focused to make the greatest difference. Some of these schools have been identified for specific action under National Partnership agreements in order to target Indigenous students and to focus on Closing the Gap targets. The expected result is the accelerated implementation of the engagement and connections, attendance, and literacy and numeracy domains of the ATSIEAP.

MCEECDYA identified focus schools using a 3-tier process (MCEECDYA 2010a):

1. *Indigenous enrolment*: Potential focus schools were identified as the number of primary schools that cover 75% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary school enrolments in each state or territory. The 75% cut-off is derived by firstly ranking schools by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary school enrolments, in descending order,

and then marking the point where there is a minimum of 75% of enrolments. This cut will produce the list of potential focus schools for each state and territory.

2. *Program – literacy*: The most recent NAPLAN results are held by education providers. This stage involves identifying the potential focus schools with 25% or more of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students below the minimum national standard in any 1 of the reading, writing and numeracy domains.
3. *Special cases – adding or removing schools on the proposed list*: In determining the final list of focus schools, education providers and the Australian Government will reconcile and agree on ‘anomalous schools’ to be excluded from or included in the list.

In the first instance, primary schools are to be targeted as focus schools so that efforts are concentrated on the early years of learning. However, education providers in all jurisdictions and sectors can extend activities at their own discretion to include secondary schools, particularly those that have focus primary schools in their feeder areas and are identified under the Low Socio-economic Status School Communities National Partnership and/or the Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership.

Education providers were responsible for selecting participating schools. This process endeavoured to ensure that focus schools had access to additional Australian Government initiatives, reforms and support for the purpose of improving education outcomes for Indigenous students. Participating schools were each to develop a Local Activity Plan which must: identify the actions from the ATSIEAP that they are prioritising, provide detail of the strategies being used to progress and achieve the identified actions, contain a statement of the school’s goals or targets, provide the estimated cost of activity, and consult the respective Indigenous Education consultative bodies when developing the Local Activity Plan.

Focus school activities/strategies

A random sample of 3 focus schools from each state and territory were selected from a list of focus schools to provide a representation of the Local Activity Plans across the metropolitan, regional and remote areas. This small sample was selected from the 800 focus schools. Schools were selected randomly across the 3 regions when these were available; otherwise 3 schools were selected from the available regions. The information on each school was derived from the school website.

The sources accessed to provide school-specific information were strategic plans or annual reports. The schools included in this overview are not listed, as some departments and schools asked that they not be identified. These focus schools have no relationship to the schools nominated by the state Education departments for consultation described in the final report.

It should be noted that analysis of all focus schools is beyond the scope of this paper. The selected schools are examples only and are not intended to provide an exhaustive list nor to represent all focus schools or all jurisdictions.

New South Wales

There were 92 focus schools in New South Wales in 2010, comprising 88 government schools, 1 Catholic school and 3 independent schools. The majority of focus schools (62) are located in provincial areas, 19 are located in metropolitan areas, 9 are in remote areas and 2 in very remote areas. In 2010, there were 6,952 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in focus schools in New South Wales (MCEECDYA 2010b).

Examination of the 3 New South Wales focus schools – 1 metropolitan, 1 regional and 1 remote school – found that only 1 school provided a specific Focus School Next Step Initiative School Improvement Plan for 2012–2013; the other schools had developed a School Management Plan and a Strategic Plan for the period 2012–2014. Readiness for school was the only key priority that was not addressed, and this was in a regional school.

All 3 schools implemented ways to engage and connect with the community. The metropolitan school has established partnerships with a high school, a local TAFE (Technical and Further Education) and universities. Both the metropolitan and remote school have Aboriginal community engagement officers, while the regional school has developed a formal community partnership. The remote school uses the leadership team to meet with the Community Working Party and Aboriginal Education Consultative Group to discuss effective community engagement. Regular community forums are also held to communicate and collaborate around decision making within the school. Culturally inclusive quality units of work are developed by elders, the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and community members in the regional school, and the principal encourages and supports teachers to participate in a Cultural Immersion Program. Similarly, the remote school ensures all staff complete the Aboriginal Knowledge and Practice Centre programs. These programs help teachers to provide Indigenous perspectives in class, which should assist students to feel more engaged and connected with their culture and identity.

Strategies to address attendance were most comprehensive in the remote school which provided a bus, teacher training on the use of Millennium Roll Marking, negotiation of personal attendance plans, employment of an Aboriginal community engagement officer, a reward system and presentation at assemblies, and encouragement of attendance to the wider community through newsletters, local radio and the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group. The strategy for attendance at the regional school involved mentoring by employing community members and engaging high school students in peer programs. Attendance plans were also established at the metropolitan school, along with certificates and book prizes for attendance achievements.

Victoria

There were 125 focus schools in Victoria in 2010, comprising 116 government schools and 9 Catholic schools. Of these, 123 are primary schools and 2 are secondary. Focus schools had 2,807.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled at the time of the 2010 Census (MCEECDYA 2010b).

The geographical location of the focus schools in Victoria meant there were no remote schools to be assessed; therefore, 1 metropolitan school and 2 regional schools (1 inner regional and 1 outer regional) were examined. Through their respective Annual Reports and Annual Implementation Plans, these schools showed that they have many strategies relating to the 6 priority domains in place.

The 3 schools documented strategies for increasing school attendance, and linked these with strategies relating to student engagement. Individualised learning plans are used at the metropolitan school as a way to encourage student involvement in decision making and improve student engagement and connectedness to school. The Victorian Government's 'It's Not Ok To Be Away' initiative is emphasised at this school to build a school and community approach to the issue of student attendance. Reducing the absenteeism rate was also an indicator of attendance at the metropolitan school.

The inner regional school incorporated attendance strategies via their student engagement and wellbeing plans, with a focus on increasing student connectedness to school. Key strategies to achieve improvement in these areas include a positive behaviour rewards program, providing students with the opportunity to hold leadership roles in the college, formation of the whole college support group for wellbeing, camps and excursions, and continued monitoring of student attendance.

Achieving high levels of attendance was a priority at the outer regional school. Strategies in place to achieve this included weekly and monthly class attendance awards, attendance reports for parents each term, regular communication with parents about attendance, and end-of-year awards for individuals with outstanding attendance. Only the regional schools reported their attendance rates, while no school reported an attendance target.

Along with a Koorie education officer and homework class for Koorie students, the outer regional school strengthened its community engagement and connections with the Indigenous community through establishing a School Community Partnership Agreement with the Koorie community. This was viewed as a way to further encourage regular attendance. No formal school-community partnership agreements were noted in documents for the other 2 schools. However, both schools had steps in place to develop connectedness with the wider community. The metropolitan school assigned a parent representative for each class while the regional school had a Parents' Club in place.

Both the regional and metropolitan schools have strategies around improving the literacy and numeracy of students. Although for some schools the implementation of these strategies did not identify explicit programs or activities, it was evident that there was a wide range of activities undertaken in these areas, from improving teaching methods and program delivery (including the use of specialised coaches), to using new technologies and engaging students' families. In terms of Indigenous education, making links with regional Koorie strategies or Wannick tutoring for students were employed at these schools.

The 3 focus schools also had strategies for the professional development of their teachers, and, in particular, focused on developing teaching in the fields of literacy and numeracy. The metropolitan school outlines the use of Teacher Performance and Development Plans to support professional learning goals.

Queensland

In Queensland, there were 268 focus schools in 2010, comprising 206 government schools, 59 Catholic schools and 3 independent schools. The 206 government schools cater for just over 16,900 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary school students, which represent almost 72% of the total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary school enrolments. In 2010, 47,715 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attended Queensland schools full time, comprising 40,375 in government schools, 4,177 in Catholic schools and 3,163 in independent schools (MCEECDYA 2010b).

An examination of a metropolitan school's Four Year School Strategic Plan, a regional school's Focus School Next Steps Initiative School Improvement Plan and a remote school's Annual Report show that these 3 Queensland focus schools are addressing most of the 6 priority domains.

The metropolitan and regional schools did not cite specific policies addressing the readiness for school domain, while the remote school did not address the engagement and connections domain. Of the 3 schools, only the regional school has developed a formal Community

Partnership Agreement and has identified personal learning plans as a way to involve Indigenous families in decision making regarding their child's learning.

A number of professional development programs to improve teacher training and pedagogy in literacy were evident across the 3 schools. Implemented within the regional and remote school were the Principals as Literacy Leaders with Indigenous Communities program. This program provides personal development in literacy and leadership to enable principals and school leadership teams to work with teachers and the Indigenous community to improve literacy outcomes for Indigenous students, helping them to engage with the curriculum.

Attendance-specific strategies appeared to be similar across the 3 geographical locations. The strategy focused on dedicating a particular staff position to attendance (this included a cultural liaison officer, community liaison officer, enrolment officer and family support officer). The officers were responsible for making phone calls and following up with families when non-attendance occurred. Only the regional school reported on the benchmark attendance rate and progress towards target attendance rates.

Western Australia

There were 98 focus schools in Western Australia in 2010, comprising 70 government schools, 15 Catholic schools and 13 independent schools. Of these, 95 are primary schools and 3 are secondary. Many of these schools are receiving, or will receive, support through the Low Socio-economic Status Schools or the Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership agreements. Focus schools had 9,179 Indigenous students enrolled in Semester 2 in 2010, which is 54% of the total enrolment in these schools. These students represent 37% of all Indigenous students in Western Australian schools (MCEECDYA 2010b).

Analysis of a metropolitan school's Next Steps Initiative – School Improvement Plan, a regional school's Annual Report and a remote school's Operational Plan show these focus schools are addressing the 6 priority domains. Readiness for school was the only area that was not addressed and only in the metropolitan school. The strategies addressing readiness for school within the regional and remote school illustrate the connectedness between the 6 domains. This is evident in the regional and remote schools, whereby readiness for school is also associated with the engagement and connections, attendance, and literacy and numeracy domains. A focus in both schools is on increased regular attendance across the school, with the strategy of increasing attendance within the kindergarten groups to improve readiness for school. The strategy is designed to instil patterns of positive attendance in the early years that will, in turn, entrench regular attendance behaviour in later schooling years. The remote school offers playgroup on a weekly basis and targets Indigenous children aged 3 and 4 for kindergarten. Services to encourage attendance include a bus to pick up and drop off all kindergartens students, a transition program for kindergarten to preparatory and home visits by kindergarten teachers and Aboriginal and Islander education officers in the first 2 weeks of Term 1.

Other ways in which the remote school engaged and connected with families and the community was via a weekly Primary Health Clinic and the establishment of family forums. The metropolitan and regional school discussed the development and review of the School-Community Partnership Agreement. Specific to the metropolitan school was the employment of a community representative for 1 day a week, and a community survey enabling the Aboriginal community to raise any needs and issues.

All 3 schools addressed personal learning in various ways. The regional school intends to introduce personalised learning plans, the remote school uses personalised programs as a

measure of closing the gap, while the metropolitan school uses personalised learning plans on a weekly basis to review the plans with the Next Steps focus teacher. The remote school is also exploring the idea of personalised learning strategies for preschool children.

The 3 schools had unique approaches to attendance. The metropolitan school is involved with the passport program, whereby students who achieve an attendance rate of 90% or more, or those achieving their target as set in their personalised learning plan, are eligible for prizes. Students who improve their weekly attendance can access a rewards room featuring a Nintendo Wii, table tennis facilities, pool table and so on. The principal also holds a rewards lunch each term for students who have achieved 100% attendance. The regional school uses competition as motivation in the sense that attendance rates per class are publicised every fortnight and classes are encouraged to achieve the highest attendance rate in the school. The remote school takes action on 2 levels – classroom action and committee action. Classroom teachers follow up after 2 consecutive days of absence and distribute and collect letters as requested. The attendance committee monitors students who attend 80% of the time or less each fortnight, and students who attend 80%–90% of the time each term.

Across all 3 schools, evidence of best practice is focused on improving quality teaching and workforce development. The metropolitan school encourages staff to visit other school sites. The regional school conducts weekly meetings to share best practices and the remote school collaborates and explores 'like school' strategies.

South Australia

There were 97 focus schools in South Australia in 2010, comprising 83 government schools, 3 Catholic schools and 11 independent schools. Of these schools, 51 are primary, 18 are Aboriginal/ Anangu, 12 are combined to Year 12, 9 are secondary and 7 are area schools. Focus schools had 4,436.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled at the time of the 2010 Census, 14.6% of the total enrolment in these schools. These students represent 47% of all Indigenous students enrolled in South Australia. There are 4,181.4 Indigenous government school students within the focus schools, which make up 16.7% of total enrolment in these schools and 50% of all Indigenous government school students (MCEECDYA 2010b).

The 3 schools randomly selected in South Australia were all Smarter School National Partnership schools and mostly all addressed the 6 domains (other than the regional school which did not cite readiness for school). Literacy was the priority area addressed for improvement by all 3 schools and all used the Principal as Literacy Leaders with Indigenous Communities program to accelerate and sustain improvements for students. Overall, the strategies are holistic, with a strong emphasis on student engagement as a means to address student educational outcomes.

There was no formal School–Community Partnership Agreement in place at any of the schools. The metropolitan school did have an Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Committee in place, and the remote school identified relationships between the school and community as being critical. It has established School Governing Council meetings and regular home visits from teachers. In relation to formal strategies, the metropolitan and regional school are involved with the Innovative Community Action Network, which assists students at risk of disengaging by providing community partnership programs for students to participate in and individual student case management support. A form of mentoring existed across the 3 schools via either the Aboriginal Student Mentoring program or the Student Mentoring and Youth Development program. The mentoring

programs are intended to increase student engagement, wellbeing and learning achievement through one-to-one mentoring. The Aboriginal Mentoring program is planned in conjunction with students' individual learning plans.

The metropolitan school focuses on family engagement via the Aboriginal Turn Around Team and Family Learning Network, which both provide families with crisis intervention and intensive support. The Aboriginal Turn Around Team works with carers to reaffirm the importance of kinship and family life in developing well-rounded Indigenous people within the school. Similarly, the Family Learning Network engages families where parents have a range of barriers such as drug abuse, low literacy, and mental health issues, which contribute to children becoming disengaged from school and the community. The project aims to build strong family units through capacity and resilience by using early intervention strategies such as counselling, advocacy and referral to build family support networks and monitor development.

Only the remote school provided an attendance target. It also reported on increasing the number of explained absences. At this school, regular attendance was required to attend excursions. Outstanding attendance was acknowledged in fortnightly newsletters, weekly assemblies and with end-of-year class awards. Attendance tokens were in place for Term 3, which could be exchanged for 'goods' at the annual Expo Day as a reward. The metropolitan school detailed the attendance strategy as following up on all attendance issues by daily phone calls, and meeting regularly with the attendance officer about chronic non-attenders. The regional school's strategy is in-depth and includes a number of follow-up steps. Initially, the teacher contacts the family after 3 or more days of unexplained absence; the school counsellor contacts the family where lack of attendance is continued. The principal then contacts the family via a phone call, letter or in person and the student and family are referred to the attendance officer. The school is supportive in small milestones and encourages arriving late to school rather than not attending at all. Consideration is given to ease children into school part days, with a negotiated attendance plan.

Tasmania

Tasmania had 72 focus schools in 2010 which, together, account for 85% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments. Of these focus schools, 62 are government, 9 are Catholic and 1 is independent. Fifty are primary schools, 11 are high schools, with 11 combined schools catering for kindergarten to Year 10. The majority of the focus schools are regional schools (41) followed by 29 metropolitan schools and 2 remote schools (MCEECDYA 2010b).

The 3 schools for Tasmania included 2 in regional areas (1 government and 1 non-government), and 1 metropolitan school – all catering for primary and secondary students. These schools all indicated focused, strategically-planned activities with measurable outcomes for their students, with a notable emphasis on literacy. Both government schools had particular activities to assist their Indigenous students, including individual education plans for all Indigenous students. These plans are developed in conjunction with the Dare to Lead initiative. This initiative's primary goal is to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students by increasing and supporting effective school leadership. An underpinning belief of the Dare to Lead initiative is that principals are the people who can make most difference to the schooling outcomes of Indigenous students.

Indigenous perspectives have been incorporated into all curriculum areas across both schools. Other initiatives as part of the school's quest to have a positive impact on continuing gains in literacy and numeracy include the Raising the Bar – Closing the Gap literacy

initiative and the ongoing commitment to Count Me In Too and to Mental Computations in Numeracy.

One regional government school provided overall progress categories against literacy, numeracy, readiness for school, attendance and associated outcomes graded from 'acceptable' to 'concern', highlighted in red, and visible to the public on its website. These overall progress categories have been determined by looking at the achievement and the recent progress of the school in the areas measured. While every school has its own particular set of circumstances, this school works towards continuous improvement. This school implemented a 'Birth to Year 4' program to address some of the issues it had identified with children having little or no contact with school or education before their kindergarten year. There was limited information available on the website for 1 of the government schools and therefore difficult to deduce its overall application against the 6 priority domains.

The independent school offers an Intensive English Centre with specific literacy programs such as the Literate Practices Program for years 5–10 in response to the NAPLAN and Progressive Achievement Test (Australian Council for Education Research), a whole-of-literacy program in conjunction with the National Partnerships Smarter Schools Literacy Implementation Plan. Students are provided with a range of pastoral care, learning support and learning extension assistance to achieve their goals.

Australian Capital Territory

In 2010, there were 31 focus schools in the Australian Capital Territory, comprising 30 government schools, and 1 Catholic school. All focus schools in 2010 were primary schools. There were 543 Indigenous students enrolled in these focus schools, representing 1.7% of total primary school enrolments.

Due to the homogeneous geographic profile of the territory, 3 metropolitan focus schools were assessed. These schools all reported via their Four Year School Plan and Annual Board Report.

One of the identified focus schools was an early childhood school that operates as an early learning and development centre. It provides integrated services for children (birth to 8 years) and their families. As well as education, the school offers a range of services, including health care, family support and counselling to help parents and carers.

Another school was part of a cluster of schools that had in place an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Agreement. The last school had a Reconciliation Action Plan, and undertook a number of activities to engage and connect the Indigenous community. These included singing and dancing performances, a published book of artwork and writing from each Indigenous student at the school, and 2 additional flagpoles to enable both the Aboriginal and the Torres Strait Islander flags to fly with the Australian flag to further recognise and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

The early childhood school developed a Koori classroom, which is used as a centre for Indigenous culture. It is a place where Indigenous students, parents and community can feel comfortable and a resource that other schools can use to learn about Indigenous culture. Similarly, Koori preschool was underway at 1 school, which enabled the school to establish early connection between Indigenous families, students and the school. Individualised learning was mentioned at 2 schools, with 1 acting as a 'hub' school, working collaboratively with 2 affiliate schools in implementing personalised learning plans for all Indigenous

students. Professional development to enhance Indigenous cultural competence was undertaken by staff at 2 of the schools.

Attendance rates are reported at all 3 schools but no school has identified an attendance target. Non-attendance and late attendance were managed in a similar way at the 3 schools. Various staff were involved with following up on unexplained absences including teachers, administrative staff, executive staff members and a community development coordinator.

Northern Territory

Of the 152 government schools and 36 non-government schools in the Northern Territory in 2010, there were 63 focus schools consisting of 57 government schools, 5 Catholic schools and 1 independent school. The Indigenous students enrolled in these schools represent almost two-thirds of all Indigenous students in the Northern Territory and almost one-quarter of all enrolments. Thirty-five of the Northern Territory's focus schools were classified as very remote, 16 as remote and 12 as outer regional.

The Northern Territory schools selected consisted of 2 remote and 1 outer regional school. These schools focused on Indigenous students and 1 remote school focused on both Indigenous students and students from a non-English-speaking background. This remote school has 2 part-time English as a Second Language staff and 1 Indigenous Language Speaking Students teacher. The specific role of the latter teacher is to develop English oral language for early childhood Indigenous students, to ensure they have the skills needed to succeed in literacy.

Student needs and capabilities are catered for in a range of ways. For example, students are screened for possible giftedness; in this case, teachers cater for these students in their class with the assistance of a learning support teacher. Individual education plans are used in this remote school for students who are gifted and also for those students with identified learning needs. Parents, Student Service staff and the classroom teacher regularly monitor progress. Students who work with learning unit staff participate in a variety of programs tailored to individual needs: Quicksmart Literacy and Quicksmart Numeracy, Reading Works and Phonics First are some of the programs currently used.

One of the remote schools has a specific unit consisting of a transition, junior, middle and senior class offering programs to identified Indigenous students, generally English as a Second Language learners who require intensive health, wellbeing and education support to access school. This unit hosts family days every term, focusing on topics such as how children learn effectively, the importance of regular attendance, and pathways through school into secondary and tertiary education and the workforce.

The Aboriginal officer supports Indigenous students and parents in the school with attendance, welfare and access to education, and parents are encouraged to contact the officer to discuss their children's needs. The officer's role is focused on attendance, health, wellbeing and academic achievement. Attendance at school is compulsory and if a child is absent, their parent must notify the school in writing or with a telephone call or personal visit. Attendance is monitored and displayed on the front of the school newsletter.

One remote school has an Indigenous Education Working Team assisting all students to improve their literacy and numeracy outcomes, with a specific focus on Indigenous students. Other strategies to improve education and wellbeing outcomes include a homework policy, and a nutrition and healthy eating policy geared to ensure a consistent approach to the sale of food and drink across Northern Territory schools. The Northern Territory Government

provides free dental services to eligible children from infancy to the end of senior school, with services being accessed through school dental clinics. These schools also indicated involvement with the parents and the wider community in a variety of ways such as by encouraging attendance at school events and sporting events. As well, parents were invited to be involved with students' learning throughout the year and to attend parent-teacher conferences.

Summary

States and territories have in place specific policies and strategies in an effort to close the educational gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, and to meet the priorities identified in the ATSIAP. The focus schools discussed in this chapter were selected across metropolitan, regional and remote areas within all states and territories. Of particular interest was the diversity evident in implementing the 6 key domains. While it appears that the number of strategies implemented vary across the schools, it needs to be noted that the amount of available and up-to-date information on the websites varies considerably as does the amount of reporting and strategic detail included on some of the websites. This limits any conclusive results of this study.

Of the schools which were reviewed, the majority were all implementing the 6 nominated priority domains to some degree. The 2 priority domains with the highest rate of application were attendance, and literacy and numeracy – followed by leadership, quality teaching and workforce development. Of particular note, specific strategies used did not seem to differ between geographical locations nor did certain strategies apply only to 1 particular geographical location. Table 2.1 provides an overview of these results.

Table 2.1 Implementation of priority domains in sampled focus schools

		Readiness for school	Engagement and connections	Attendance	Literacy and numeracy	Leadership, quality teaching and workforce development	Pathways to real post-school options
New South Wales	Metropolitan	X	X	X	X	X	na
	Regional		X	X	X	X	na
	Remote	X	X	X	X	X	X
Victoria	Metropolitan	X	X	X	X	X	na
	Regional	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Regional	X	X	X	X	X	na
Queensland	Metropolitan		X	X	X	X	na
	Regional		X	X	X	X	na
	Remote	X		X	X	X	na
South Australia	Metropolitan	X	X	X	X	X	na
	Regional		X	X	X	X	na
	Remote	X	X	X	X	X	na
Western Australia	Metropolitan		X	X	X	X	na
	Regional	X	X	X	X	X	na
	Remote	X	X	X	X	X	X
Tasmania	Metropolitan			X	X		
	Regional	X		X	X	X	
	Regional		X	X	X	X	
Northern Territory	Metropolitan		X	X	X	X	na
	Regional		X	X	X		na
	Remote		X	X	X	X	na
Australian Capital Territory	Metropolitan	X	X	X	X	X	na
	Metropolitan	X	X	X	X	X	na
	Metropolitan	X	X	X	X	X	na

Notes: na = not applicable for primary schools

3 Methodology for literature review

This chapter describes the methodology behind the search and selection of documents included in the review, as well as the methodology used for analysing and synthesising the material.

Search process

Potential types of literature on the effectiveness of school attendance strategies that were appropriate for inclusion in the review included academic articles, project or program reports, policy documents and systematic reviews of school attendance. Thus, there were a number of potential sources to include in the search, including academic databases, government and non-government websites and the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse.

An initial broad search of these sources was undertaken using a selection of keywords. All programs that set out to improve attendance at preschools, primary schools and high schools were included in the search. Likewise, initiatives targeted at Indigenous and non-Indigenous students were included to reflect both Indigenous-specific and Australia-wide programs, with international programs/evaluations included as well. Articles before the year 2000 were excluded from the search.

Table 3.1 shows the initial databases searched, key words used to search, the number of search results and relevant programs and or articles on school attendance.

Table 3.1 Overview of literature search

Source	Keywords	No. of articles	No. of appropriate articles
Closing the Gap Clearinghouse	Increasing school attendance	109	15
Assessed Collection	Indigenous school attendance		
ProQuest	School Attendance AND programs	1,320	18
ERIC	Evaluations AND Indigenous school attendance	5	11
Google Scholar		15,300	30
Informit		4	17
Google (government jurisdictions)		30	25
Google		308,000	40
Total		324,768	156

The initial search returned a possible 324,768 results, of which 156 articles were potentially relevant for the literature review. Because the intent of this task was to review effective school attendance strategies, only those articles/reports that incorporated some form of evaluation or evidence were selected for further review. In addition, a snowballing technique was employed throughout the review whereby appropriate programs or evaluations referenced in the selected articles were then investigated for possible inclusion.

Review process

All 156 initial articles were reviewed by the AIHW against 2 main criteria: Did the program/policy/intervention claim to improve school attendance? Was there evidence to support this conclusion? A total of 48 articles contained evaluated evidence of a significant positive impact on school attendance.

The purpose of this review was to identify not only the strategies that have been successful in increasing school attendance of Indigenous students, but also the mechanisms underpinning their success and how those relate to individual and contextual factors. Hence, a template was used to capture the key information from each article. The template included information on:

- type of article
- program/intervention's location
- scope (for example, all children in a school or selected groups)
- target group (for example, Indigenous, school year, parents/students/staff, and so on)
- who initiated the strategy
- what the strategy was trying to achieve
- detailed description of the strategy
- key findings
- evidence used to support the findings
- the key factors leading to the strategy's success.

From this literature, 18 international, 16 Indigenous-specific and 14 Australia-wide programs were written up in template format. An additional 16 programs that did not have evaluations but were suggestive of positive outcomes were also summarised in table format.

The completed templates were used to create summary tables. Using both the templates and the tables, the programs/interventions were classified into 9 key types of strategies that were found to positively influence school attendance:

- engagement programs, including extracurricular and out-of-school activities
- literacy and numeracy programs
- whole-of-school approaches
- nutrition programs
- incentive programs
- parental consequences for poor attendance
- transport
- attendance monitoring programs
- school/family/community partnerships.

The details of these types of strategies are presented in the following chapter. The team considered whether Aboriginal education workers should be listed as a separate strategy; however, because their roles are embedded within a number of the other strategies, the decision was made to discuss their roles where appropriate within strategies.

4 Findings

Table 4.1 provides an overview of the different programs reviewed within each strategy, along with the main findings for each program with respect to student attendance. Where possible, data are provided on actual attendance rates. However, some studies report only the percentage increase or decrease in school attendance, not the actual percentages of students attending school.

This chapter then elaborates on this information, describing each strategy, the reasoning behind each (for example, what barriers to school attendance it tries to address) and detailed examples of programs within each strategy. Where available, the key mechanisms that make each strategy successful are also discussed. A reference index for all named school programs is included as Appendix Table A3.

Table 4.1: Summary of strategies and results

Intervention/ strategy	Programs	Impact on school attendance
Student engagement programs	<i>Extracurricular activity programs</i>	
	Jalaris Kids Future Club: an after-school club in Derby (remote Western Australia) which aims to provide culturally and contextually appropriate practices to introduce Indigenous preschool and primary school children and their families to the experience of structured education.	A 3-year evaluation found that school attendance among 41 children in the club increased from 69% in its first 6 months to 82% in the last 6 months.
	<i>Music and arts programs</i>	
	The Song Room: a tailored, long-term music and arts based program for children in disadvantaged and high-need communities. Delivers programs to around 250 schools each year.	Comparison of participating and non-participating schools found 65% less non-attendance, higher academic achievement and enhanced social and emotional wellbeing among students at participating schools compared with those in non-participating schools.
	DRUMBEAT: The 'Discovering Relationships Using Music—Beliefs, Emotions, Attitudes and Thoughts' (DRUMBEAT) program focuses on student–teacher relationships by raising awareness of fundamental skills and values that support healthy interactions and relationships.	Of 162 students surveyed, 10% reported an increase in self-esteem, 29% perceived a decrease in behavioural incidents and 33% reduced half-day non-attendance. Benefits of the program were maintained after 12 months.
	Girls from Oz: a program run in remote Western Australia, targeted at females. Participants undertake a series of performing arts workshops to help develop their confidence and self-esteem.	Increases in attendance was seen in weeks when the Girls from Oz program ran. For example, girls' attendance during a normal school week in 2010 was 62.35% and increased to 74.15% in a Girls from Oz week.
	<i>Sporting programs</i>	
	Sporting Chance Program: aims to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students through sport and recreation. It involves 2 elements: school-based sports academies for secondary school students, and education engagement strategies for both primary and secondary students.	Academies report higher levels of impact than schools participating in the education engagement strategies. In 2010, 2,300 boys attended the Clontarf Foundation which reported a Year 12 retention rate of 93% and an attendance rate of 76% compared with pre-Clontarf attendance rates which lie within the range of 25% to 50%.
	Kicking Goals: a curriculum-based initiative using a reward and incentive systems delivered by football players in the West Coast Eagles team.	From 2005 to 2007, the proportion of students who attended class 80% or more of the time increased from 25% to 62%, while the proportion of students who attended class less than 59% of the time decreased from 23% to 0%.

(continued)

Table 4.1 (continued): Summary of strategies and results

Intervention/ strategy	Programs	Impact on school attendance
Engagement programs (continued)	<p>Case management</p> <p>Youth Connections: an Australian Government strategy providing a service to support young people at risk of disconnection from education to attain Year 12 or equivalent and to help them make a successful transition through education to further education, training and employment.</p> <p>Personalised learning plans</p> <p>A form of an individualised approach that focuses on working with each student in partnership with the student's parents or carers to develop a plan that reflects the student's goals and current capabilities and includes specific learning targets. Where appropriate, students play an active role in the development of personalised learning plans.</p>	<p>Of the 16,410 young people who achieved an outcome, 15% improved their attendance rates consistently over the school term, 11% strengthened their engagement, 15% re-engaged in education and 21% commenced education.</p> <p>Ashmont Public School (primary school) developed personalised learning plans for all students in 2007. Between 2005 and 2007, Indigenous enrolments at Kinderstart increased from 7 to 12, with attendance increasing from 84% to 96%, and parent involvement increasing significantly, from 17% to 86%, for the same period.</p>
Literacy and numeracy	<p>Scaffolded literacy: pedagogy to help get students to perform at grade level by working with students at a level approximately equivalent to the full-expected potential for their year level.</p> <p>First Four Hours policy: in the Northern Territory, bilingual programs were delivered until 2009 when the Northern Territory Government brought in the First Four Hours policy. This policy required English to be taught for the first 4 hours of the school day. It aimed to improve the poor comparative performance of remote Northern Territory schools with bilingual programs in the national skills tests.</p>	<p>Among Indigenous children, students involved in the program achieve at a much higher level than students who are not involved in the program.</p> <p>The policy had a negative impact on attendance rates, which were significantly lower when literacy programs were delivered exclusively in English rather than bilingually. For example, at Willowra School, before the policy was implemented, the attendance rate was 66.4% in 2008 and 77.7% in 2009. In 2010, attendance dropped to less than 45.2%.</p>
Whole-of-school approaches	<p>State-wide Middle Years reform: this initiative was rolled out in all Victorian Government secondary and P–12 schools from 2001–2003. The program was designed to provide schools with financial support to employ additional classroom teaching capacity to develop and implement initiatives in the areas of literacy, attendance, the 'thinking curriculum', and retention.</p>	<p>In over 20% of schools involved in the reform, major outcomes included improvements in literacy and engagement with school (both pertaining to literacy and in other areas of the curriculum), increased awareness and/or improved pedagogical skills for teachers in the area of cognitive or thinking skills, and improvements in attendance</p>
Nutrition programs	<p>School Nutrition Program: a program funded and initiated by the Australian Government (but for which parents and carers are expected to contribute to the cost of food for each child), that also aims to increase student attention and engagement. A secondary aim is to contribute to employment opportunities by building parental skills in meal preparation and provision, and supporting greater Indigenous parental and community involvement in schools.</p> <p>Foodbank—Western Australian Government's School Breakfast Program: program in which food is distributed to schools in low socioeconomic areas to provide students with a nutritionally wholesome breakfast.</p>	<p>A total of 50.9% of parents believed the program had a positive impact on attendance, while 52.9% of principals perceived it to have had little positive impact on attendance.</p> <p>A total of 80% of parents and principals considered the program to have had a positive impact on parental engagement, and 58% of parents considered it to have had a significant impact on the community's understanding of the importance of good nutrition to assist children's learning.</p> <p>In 1 case study, the number of students who attended school 90% of the time increased from 22% before the program to 38%, and the number of students who attended school 70% of the time increased from 33% to 67%.</p>

(continued)

Table 4.1 (continued): Summary of strategies and results

Intervention/ strategy	Programs	Impact on school attendance
Incentives	<p>School Passport program: aimed at increasing parental and community member participation in local schools and increasing the attendance of children with low attendance rates. Parents are encouraged to become involved in an activity designated by the school.</p> <p>No School, No Pool policy: as an incentive for children to attend school, passes are given to those children in attendance, permitting them to use the pool after school.</p>	<p>At Neerigen Brook Primary School, average student attendance increased from 69.5% before the program began to 86.7%. Additionally, the number of volunteers and the amount of time they volunteered increased as the program progressed.</p> <p>Four surveys administered at 6-month intervals between July 2000 and March 2002 found the proportion of children with attendance rates of at least 70% rose from 42% during the term before the pool opened, to 51%, 65% and 67% during the terms preceding the second, third and fourth surveys, respectively.</p>
Parental consequences	<p>SEAM: The School Enrolment and Attendance through Welfare Reform Measure (SEAM) was introduced in several regional and remote schools in the Northern Territory and Queensland to see whether the suspension of income support payments, along with providing Centrelink social work services, are effective in improving school enrolment and attendance.</p> <p>Cape York Welfare Reform: Where a child is absent for 3 full or part days of a school term without reasonable excuse or where a child of compulsory age is not enrolled to attend school, the Department of Education and Training in Queensland submits a School Attendance Notice to the Families Responsibilities Commission. The Commission will convene to determine the outcome, which may include reprimanding the client using income sanctions, or referring the case to School Attendance Case Managers.</p>	<p>SEAM students increased their attendance in the Northern Territory from 74.4% to 79.9%, and in Queensland from 84.7% to 88.7%. However, it was determined that income support suspensions had no impact; rather it was the issuing of attendance notices and the potential threat of suspension from school that affected school attendance.</p> <p>The majority of schools in the Cape York Welfare Reform communities have achieved and are maintaining high levels of school attendance. Western Cape College —Aurukun had the most significant improvement, with an increase in school attendance of 14.3%, from 44.5% in 2008 to 58.8% in 2011.</p>
Transport	<p>Walking School Bus program: Children are picked up/dropped off at school following a set route. It is 'driven' by an adult at the front and an adult 'conductor' at the rear, the walkers in between make up the 'bus'.</p> <p>Shepherdson College: To engage children who are truanting, a mobile classroom is driven down the road to the town camp where the truants hang out. The school also picks up children from 5 homelands and flies teachers out to 4 homelands on the mainland, enabling children to be educated on the island.</p>	<p>Eagleby South State School in Queensland actively implemented this program in 2010. Overall attendance in 2009 was 85.3% compared with 90.25% in 2010.</p> <p>Increase in attendance rates from an average of 43% to almost 60%.</p>
Attendance monitoring programs	<p>Every Day Counts campaign: aimed at changing parent, community and student attitudes to school attendance by monitoring attendance and applying early intervention strategies.</p>	<p>Since the implementation of the Every Day Counts campaign, attendance increased from 80.2% in 2008 to 90% in 2011.</p>
School/family/ community partnerships	<p>Communities for Children initiative: aimed at parents, and promotes early literacy and numeracy awareness, parenting skills and knowledge of and access to community resources. Essentially, the program prepares families for school through creating a connectedness to school.</p>	<p>Since the program's inception in 2007, Indigenous attendance rates have fallen slightly, although they remain higher than the state average. In 2007, Mount Lockyer's Indigenous attendance rate was 83.3% compared with the state average of 81.2%. By 2009, this had fallen to 81.8% compared with the state average of 81.1%.</p>

(continued)

Table 4.1 (continued): Summary of strategies and results

Intervention/ strategy	Programs	Impact on school attendance
School/family/community partnerships (continued)	<p>Families and Schools Together (FAST) program: introduced in 2003 to build protective factors in children to enhance family functioning, to prevent school failure and to reduce stress that parents and children experience in their daily life situations.</p> <p>Follow the Dream — Partnerships for Success: aimed at successful Indigenous students to help them reach their potential through a promotion of partnerships to deliver tuition, mentoring and case management.</p>	<p>Attendance data for 15 children involved in FAST at Shepherdson College showed a slight increase in attendance: 48.4% in Term 4 of 2010 to 53.0% in Term 3 of 2011. The minimum attendance rate rose by 9.5%, from 2% to 11.5%, indicating attendance had increased overall. This is reflected by over half (53.3%) of students improving their attendance rate.</p> <p>Across 12 schools, attendance of Follow the Dream—Partnerships for Success students increased from 79.9% in 2005, peaking in the same year at 91% in Term 4.</p>
Aboriginal education workers	The role of Aboriginal education workers is to enhance the strategies discussed above.	An examination of the impact of Aboriginal education workers on Indigenous students' schooling found that the presence of these workers in schools was not, in isolation, positively associated with academic performance, and was negatively associated with the attendance of Indigenous students. However, using an Aboriginal education worker in a student-focused strategy (such as an extracurricular or out-of-school activities program with no academic outcomes) appears to have a positive effective on school attendance.

Student engagement programs

Engagement in learning is critical to academic achievement and provides students with the understandings, knowledge, skills and confidence to move to training, employment and higher education. Programs that are strategic in design, and focused on skill development and relationship development, may increase the likelihood that at-risk students remain engaged in education and school.

Engagement programs target multiple dimensions: behavioural (involvement), affective (personal attachment to others, such as teachers and classmates) and cognitive (application to learning). Engagement through extracurricular and out-of-school activities, music and art, sport, case management and personalised learning plans – with a focus on self-development through self-identity – is an effective influence on school attendance. These ways of engagement are discussed below.

Extracurricular and out-of-school activities

The theme of self-identity appears crucial to the success of engagement programs and this is evident in the literature. In a review of extracurricular and out-of-school activities, Eccles and Templeton (2002) demonstrated that participation in constructive after-school activities enables expression for self-identity and passion, providing opportunities to:

- acquire and practise specific social, physical and intellectual skills that may be useful in a wide variety of settings, including school
- contribute to the wellbeing of one's community and to develop a sense of agency as a member of that community
- belong to a socially recognised and valued group

- establish supportive networks of both peers and adults that can help in the present as well as the future
- experience and deal with challenges.

An out-of-school activities program that instils positive self-identity is the Jalaris Kids Future Club (Haviland 2010). Specifically targeted to Indigenous children, the club enhanced engagement in school through after-school activities. The club is conducted in Derby, a remote town in Western Australia. The program aims to provide culturally and contextually appropriate practices to allow Indigenous preschool and primary school children and families to experience structured education.

The club is staffed by 2 Aboriginal education workers, a family support supervisor and 2 childcare trainees. The cultural element to the club is run by elders and mothers, undertaking activities such as storytelling, bush trips, artefact making, painting and music. One of the major projects that children were actively involved in was a community garden. They participated in all areas of its development – the planning, planting, tending to plants and harvesting the vegetables and fruit. The garden was an activity the children were able to run themselves, instilling a sense of ownership, which increased their self-esteem.

A 3-year evaluation of the Jalaris Kids Future Club reports children participating in the club increased their school attendance from 69% in the club's first 6 months, to 82% in the last 6 months. Furthermore, the average self-reported school attendance per year (over the 3-year period of the evaluation for a sample of 27 children who attended the club for 10 days or more a year), showed a 1 percentage point increase each year of the program, increasing from 73% in 2007–2008 to 74% in 2008–2009 and 75% in 2009–2020. Although this is only a small increase, this reflects the literature, which shows that a linear association exists between the number of years a child participates in extracurricular activities and school attendance (Mahoney et al. 2003).

Problematic for engagement programs involving out-of-school activity is the lack of evidence regarding the successful characteristics of the strategy; this makes it hard to replicate the club program's success. However, the importance of Aboriginal education workers, the cultural elements of the programs, and the use of a family support supervisor are acknowledged.

Music and arts programs

Both music and sporting programs are effective in increasing attendance because they enable students to believe that they have the ability to succeed in an educational setting. This helps them develop an attachment and commitment to school.

Research shows that music education has the potential to contribute to the emotional, physical, social and cognitive growth of all students through the cultivation of factors such as resilience, self-regulation, self-esteem, identity, self-concept, self-efficacy and motivation. For at-risk students, music and arts programs may be a source of positive reinforcement for those who have not had positive learning experiences within the traditional classroom setting. Student involvement in arts and music programs has shown positive improvements in academic achievement (Bamford 2006; Wetter et al. 2009), attendance (Dreeszen et al. 1999), attitude to attendance (Uptis & Smithirim 2003), verbal skills (Spillane 2009) and literacy (Bamford 2006; Hetland & Winner 2001). For Indigenous students, music and arts programs may also provide an opportunity to engage with their own culture and history.

The literature review found several key examples of music and arts programs that have had a positive outcome on school attendance. Details of the Song Room (Vaughan et al. 2011),

DRUMBEAT (Faulkner et al. 2010) and the Girls from Oz (Women Donors Investing in Women and Girls no date) are presented below.

The Song Room

The Song Room is a not-for-profit organisation providing free, tailored, long-term music and arts based programs for children in disadvantaged and high-need communities. Delivering programs to around 250 schools each year, the Song Room tailors the program to the specific needs of schools and communities to build capacity for sustainable outcomes through a range of strategies. These strategies include:

- providing professional learning and mentoring for generalist classroom teachers
- supplying instruments, equipment and resources through music industry sponsors
- developing school-community-business links to increase access to other programs
- making the Song Room available online for schools without specialist arts teachers to access support and resources
- forming strategic partnerships and collaborations with arts and community organisations.

The Song Room also works with universities and research institutions to conduct major research into arts education and its impact on educational and social outcomes.

A study of the impact of the Song Room on student performance at government schools in relatively disadvantaged New South Wales communities showed that schools participating in the programs outperform those that do not. The study was of quasi-experimental design. It included both schools participating in the Song Room and those that did not, with the former group split into 2: schools at the start of the program at 6 months, and those having participated in the program for 12–18 months. The results were striking: those schools involved longer in the Song Room had 65% less absenteeism than those schools not involved in the program, higher academic achievement (the equivalent of a 1-year gain in NAPLAN literacy), and students with enhanced social and emotional wellbeing (The Song Room 2012).

DRUMBEAT

DRUMBEAT is an acronym for ‘Discovering Relationships Using Music – Beliefs, Emotions, Attitudes and Thoughts’. This program focuses on student-teacher relationships by raising awareness of the fundamental skills and values that support healthy interaction between people in relationships. This is important as relationships substantially determine the quality of people’s lives (Bandura 1977). Therefore, positive relationships influence behaviour by providing a context in which people develop moral judgements and social values and promote interpersonal competence (Smith-Christopher et al. 1993).

A flow-on effect influences attendance by reducing behavioural incidents. For example, there was a significant 10% increase in self-esteem, with a consequential significant reduction in behavioural incidents (of 29%) and a reduction of half-day absences (of 33%). Moreover, a 12-month longitudinal follow-up study found the benefits of participating in Holyoake’s DRUMBEAT program were maintained (Faulkner 2005).

Girls from Oz

One of the biggest challenges in providing arts and music programs is access. In a national review of school music education, action to improve the equity of access, participation and engagement in school music for all students has been declared a priority. This reflects the aim of all levels of government to ensure socioeconomic disadvantage ceases to be a critical determinant of educational outcomes (MCEETYA 2008).

The Girls from Oz program addresses this issue through ensuring gender access and equity in providing a program targeted specifically for women. Targeted programs provide the opportunity to develop self-confidence and self-esteem, enabling females to have the same opportunities as their male counterparts who have access to numerous programs such as council programs and crime prevention initiatives. Girls from Oz is conducted in the Halls Creek District High School in remote Western Australia.

The girls undertake a series of performing arts workshops encompassing song, dance, language and storytelling. Numerous excursions are undertaken during the program. An overall 2% increase in girls' attendance is directly linked to the program. It successfully engaged girls in the weeks over which it was held. For example, on a normal school week in week 4 of Term 4 in 2010, girls' attendance was 62.35%. This increased to 74.15% on a Girls from Oz week in week 5 of Term 4 in 2010. The importance of these results is further reflected by the fact the lowest attendance rate for a Girls from Oz week (68.58%) is higher than that for a normal school week (68.50%), even when falling on a NAPLAN assessment week, which traditionally has very low attendance rates. The success of the music and arts engagement program has clearly demonstrated the need for a focus on gender-specific projects.

Mechanisms underpinning success

Three key elements to ensure the success of music and arts programs are incorporating a performance element, recognising progress and accomplishment, and teacher training. All 3 programs (discussed above) incorporated a performance component. Performances are often affiliated with community events. For example, Girls from Oz performed at the Barramundi concert and danced at the Youth on Health Festival. Closely linked to performance is the need to recognise progress and accomplishment (Barry et al. 1990). Performance by participants in the Girls from Oz program gives girls an opportunity to recognise their skills. Girls from Oz further facilitates the recognition of girls' successful performances by including details in the schools newsletter, on the Girls from Oz website and, when possible, in various local Kimberley newspapers. This helps to heighten students' self-belief, motivating them to engage and achieve in their schooling life.

Providing teacher training was another key mechanism to success. This varied from providing formal training of community leaders (leading to a Certificate 4 qualification in group skills) to providing teacher assistants in classrooms and involving community members in mentoring. Consequently, training contributes to capacity building as teachers develop new skills. This helps them to become confident in teaching the performing arts, and uses the capital of the community.

Overall, music and arts programs build partnerships and a powerful means for forging bonds and strengthening relationships with the school, local community and participating families (Spillane 2009). This is important as quality relationships are central to quality pedagogy and therefore relevant to educational outcomes. Establishing pedagogical relationships involves connecting with students through challenging and interesting work,

implementing effective helping strategies and having positive expectations of students by teachers.

Music and arts programs achieve this by providing students with problem solving skills and team building skills. The performance is an opportunity for teachers to view students in a different light. This helps teachers to not only increase the confidence they have in students, but also to develop positive attitudes towards Aboriginality and respect for Indigenous culture. Evidence shows that quality teaching and quality relationships can overcome location and other disadvantages, making it a strong influence on student engagement and achievement. Therefore, music and arts programs influence student-teacher relationships and ease the fear of failure to positively impact on attendance.

Sporting programs

Sporting programs aim to use sport as a vehicle to increase the level of engagement of Indigenous students in school and to improve their educational outcomes. Research has found sport to be linked to the formation of self-concept for Indigenous students and, as explored earlier, in turn to attendance and retention at school (Kickett-Tucker 1999). Sport is an effective engagement strategy as Indigenous students view themselves positively when participating in sport because they enjoy it. Two programs were found to impact on education outcomes and are discussed below.

Sporting Chance

The Sporting Chance program is an Australian Government initiative. It aims to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students using sport and recreation. It comprises 2 elements: school-based sports academies for secondary school students and education engagement strategies for both primary and secondary students. Academies are intensive projects with regular staff-student contact throughout the year. (The Clontarf Foundation is an example.) Evaluation of the Sporting Chance program found that academies report higher levels of impact than schools participating in the education engagement strategies (Australian Council for Educational Research 2011).

The Clontarf Foundation delivers programs around the nation using football to attract young Indigenous males to school. The program acts as an incentive to increase and retain attendance. However, it is not solely focused on football development; it also teaches young Indigenous men good sportsmanship and healthy lifestyle practices and helps students to find employment or further employment. To remain in the academy, members must attend school regularly, apply themselves to study and embrace the academy's requirements for behaviour and self-discipline. The program has proven to be extremely successful in retaining members to Year 12, with an overall retention rate of 93% and an increase in attendance rates to 76% (which before Clontarf was between 25% and 50%) (Clontarf Foundation 2010).

Kicking Goals

Kicking Goals is a similar program to Sporting Chance, also using football as a vehicle to enhance educational outcomes, through the West Coast Eagles. The program is a curriculum-based initiative using a reward and incentive system delivered by West Coast Eagles players. Students are required to maintain key performance indicators to stay in the program.

The following outcomes are reported as a direct outcome of the Kicking Goals program: a 35% decrease in criminal activity, improvements in literacy and numeracy, reduction in

antisocial behaviour and a drop in truancy levels. Over a 3-year period, from 2005 to 2007, school attendance rates improved considerably. For example, the proportion of students attending class less than 59% of the time decreased from 23% to 0% and the proportion who attended class 80% or more of the time increased from 25% in 2005 to 62% in 2007 (DEEWR 2008).

Mechanisms underpinning success

The evaluation of the Sporting Chance program found that the following characteristics – which could be transferred to any engagement program – contributed to the most effective academies:

- highly skilled staff members
- engagement of communities in program planning and implementation
- support from school leadership
- an integrated curriculum
- effective communication between provider and school, school and community, provider and community
- sufficient resourcing and funding
- strong external relationships
- monitoring and evaluation of programs
- the perception of Sporting Chance as an education program and not primarily as a sports program.

Mentoring and role models, and an integrated curriculum, were characteristics that were specific to the Clontarf Foundation and Kicking Goals program and, in each case, helped to influence attendance outcomes.

Effective mentoring and role models depend on the ability and skills of staff involved in program delivery. This finding reflects the government's evaluation of the Sporting Chance program – that the quality of academy staff was the most critical factor reported by schools and providers in determining the effectiveness of an academy. Mentors and role models are people who have demonstrated positive achievements in their community. They are valuable within the school community as they encourage and advise the students, promote the value of education and training, help to develop career aspirations and provide valuable guidance for students who are at risk of dropping out (Purdie et al. 2000). Furthermore, role models, particularly Indigenous role models, contribute to developing positive self-identity. Having someone with skills whom the students can aspire to be – and feel that they can go to and discuss issues and receive encouragement and praise from – helps to ensure the program is a positive experience.

Both the Sporting Chance and Kicking Goals programs are integrated into the school curriculum and thus are part of the normal school week. This practice is beneficial over engagement strategies that are just added on, as students should not be disadvantaged by having to make up work they have missed by being withdrawn from class. Being curriculum-based, the programs engage students by creating an attractive, safe, welcoming and supportive environment. Attendance, participation and belonging are 3 important elements critical to engagement (McRae no date). Successful sporting programs help to engage students as they require physical attendance at school and participation in school activities; they also instil a sense of belonging in students by enabling them to be part of a larger group that has personal meaning and value to them. In targeting the 3 elements of

engagement, while assisting to increase self-identity, sporting programs successfully help to engage Indigenous students and consequently affect school attendance.

Case management

Case management takes an individualised approach to help engage students in education. This is an important element for re-engagement strategies aiming at achieving the goal of the National Partnerships on Youth Attainment and Transitions – to improve the support to young Australians to lift educational outcomes and levels of attainment, and to improve transitions to further education, training or employment (COAG 2009). The National Partnership contributes to developing a skilled and work-ready Indigenous workforce through Youth Connections, with 21% of participants identifying as Indigenous (Queensland Government 2011).

Youth Connections is an Australian Government strategy providing a service to support young people at risk of disconnection from education to attain Year 12 or equivalent, and to help them make a successful transition to further education, training and employment. The program acknowledges that there may be a number of complex issues in students' personal lives influencing disengagement, and that the school educational structure does not suit everyone. Youth Connections offers 3 levels of service delivery: individualised support services (where case management is delivered in a flexible manner), outreach and re-engagement activities (including activities such as motivational and life skills programs) and strengthening services in the region to build capacity among relevant education providers and stakeholders. National results demonstrate Youth Connections has resulted in improved behaviour, educational performance and employment. Specific to attendance, 15% of participants improved their attendance rates consistently over the school term, 11% strengthened their engagement, 15% re-engaged in education and 21% commenced education.

Mechanisms underpinning success

The success of this program stemmed from the focus it places on at-risk students to address individual barriers to engagement. The individualised approach is enhanced by using youth workers who are experienced in navigating the barriers to education and engagement issues that many young people face, and who have the knowledge and relationships with other stakeholders to enable access to other appropriate services. The success of Youth Connections highlights the need for more programs to provide access to alternative, flexible learning opportunities (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2011).

Personalised learning plans

Personalised learning is another type of individualised approach that focuses on working with each student in partnership with the student's parents or carers to develop a plan that reflects the student's goals and current capabilities, and includes specific learning targets. Where appropriate, students play an active role in developing these plans, allowing their voice to be clearly represented in its formulation. Giving a voice to students can also enhance student motivation and engagement, which increases the involvement of historically disengaged and underachieving students, and enhances personal and social education and development that assists students to become more confident and resilient (Cruddas 2005; Mohamed & Wheeler 2001). Personalised learning plans are therefore a strategy aimed at parents, students and teachers. They enhance student-teacher relationships through their underlying value of respecting each student's sense of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

identity, by involving the family in the formulation of the plan and by respecting parents and caregivers as the first educators of the student.

It was recommended that to improve Indigenous education outcomes, schools construct personalised learning plans in partnership with parents/carers for all Indigenous students. This includes targets against key learning outcomes and incorporates family involvement strategies (MCEETYA 2006). Based on the expectation that all students can learn to high standards provided the appropriate conditions are created, personalised learning recognises the individual strengths, needs and goals of students and that schools need to respond to those differences by tailoring learning to meet each student's developmental and motivational needs. Personalised learning is seen as a means to halve the gap in literacy and numeracy, and all education sectors have committed to implement it for Indigenous students; this is reflected in the ATSIEAP. While personalised learning plans are linked with literacy and numeracy development, the following case study highlights how they are also an effective tool to efficiently manage strategic outcomes.

Ashmont Public School is a government primary school located in the regional centre of Wagga Wagga (DEEWR 2011). The school has a rich cultural mix with a population of 340 students of which 138 identify as Indigenous. Early in 2006, the principal led an extensive consultation process with staff, parents and students to introduce and build an understanding and acceptance of personalised learning plans. With staff on side and parental support, a trial of these plans with 6 students was implemented in mid-2006, with full implementation for all students at the start of 2007.

Implementation consisted of providing general information in the school newsletter in Term 1, complemented by a follow-up letter sent home. A more personalised letter to parents was provided by the class teacher inviting parents to a meeting about the plans on a set date.

A casual teacher is employed by the school for 1 month in terms 1 and 3 of each year to allow teachers to take 2 relief days each term. This provides them time to organise and conduct meetings. Two meetings are held: the first in Term 1 to build relationships and set goals, and the second in Term 3 to review each student's progress and to set new goals. After the meeting, the teacher is encouraged to follow up with the parent/carer. This provides the parent/carer the opportunity to add any additional information to the student's personalised learning plan. The teacher is also required to inform other teachers about ways to better assist and engage the student in the classroom.

The personalised learning plan lists contact details and background information. It also contains a form documenting attendance data, literacy and numeracy priorities and targets, strategies, and actions and resources. It is signed by the teacher, parent and student. As part of Ashmont's strategic long-term plan, targets were set to have 100% of all Indigenous children starting school with prior-to-school experience and to increase the engagement of Indigenous parents and community members in the school by 40%. Between 2005 and 2007, Indigenous attendance at Kinderstart increased from 84% to 96% (only 4% off the target) and parent involvement increased dramatically from 17% to 86%. Additionally, for the whole school, anecdotal evidence confirms that student engagement was the greatest outcome of the personalised learning plans, with improvements in attendance and participation. Thus, the level of expectation and student participation in goal setting motivates students to strive for achievement and take ownership of their learning.

Literacy and numeracy

According to the Australian Council for Education Research (2007), attendance plays a critical role in literacy acquisition because many literacy-specific skills are taught only within the school context. This is important as Indigenous reading, writing and numeracy outcomes are far below those of non-Indigenous students. Failure to acquire basic reading skills in the early years makes it difficult to attain educational parity with the passing of each school year (Adams 1998; Dunn 1999). In addition, students with poor literacy and numeracy skills may feel uncomfortable in school because of their lack of progress in these areas and may be more reluctant to attend. Therefore, improving Indigenous literacy and numeracy skills may increase attendance and ties to schooling.

Two of the strategies used to improve literacy and numeracy skills are scaffolding and bilingual education.

Scaffolding

Scaffolding is a pedagogical approach that attempts to get students to grade level quickly by working with them at a level approximately equivalent to their full potential for their year level. An evaluation of a scaffolded literacy program for Indigenous children found students involved in the program achieve at a much higher level than if they had followed the normal course of events pursuing literacy skills (Cresswell et al. 2002). Interviews with teachers and principals found that they perceived students' attendance became regular due to the fact they were achieving; this affected their attitude towards school.

Scaffolding may also help overcome mobility issues. For example, a teacher in the Kimberley observed that: 'if they [students] come from somewhere that uses scaffolding they fit right in. The rules are the same and they know them and they can carry straight on' (Cresswell et al. 2002).

Bilingual education

Another barrier that affects both school attendance and the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills is the potential mismatch between the language spoken at home by families and the language used at school to teach. Bilingual education is a strategy in which the majority of instruction is delivered in the children's native language, with English being taught as a subject. Acceptance and promotion of bilingualism and multilingualism have several social benefits including that speakers of minority languages can keep and develop their traditions, self-esteem and identity (UNESCO 2003).

Studies in the Northern Territory and internationally provide evidence that bilingual education achieves higher levels of outcomes, including literacy outcomes in the mainstream language, than non-bilingual programs (Department of Employment Education and Training & Northern Territory 2005). However, there is also evidence that supports English immersion approaches. The issue of how best to teach children whose first language is not English remains a political and an educational issue.

Bilingual programs in the Northern Territory were delivered for 3 decades until 2009, when the territory government brought in the First Four Hours Policy that requires English to be taught for the first 4 hours of the school day. This policy aims to improve the poor comparative performance of remote Northern Territory schools. A study comparing the enrolment, attendance and engagement rates before and after the First Four Hours Policy found attendance rates were significantly higher when literacy programs were delivered 50/50 between English and Warlpiri, rather than exclusively being taught in English.

Willowra School provides an example of the difference in attendance rates. In 2008, when the First Four Hours Policy was implemented, the highest rate of attendance was 66.4%. Attendance peaked at 77.7% in 2009, and then was consistently below 50% in 2010, with the highest rate being 45.2% (Dickson 2010). Hypotheses for this decline suggest that the difference in attendance may be due to the heavier workload created under the First Four Hours Policy, as students had to learn both English and literacy and numeracy concepts at the same time. A sense of frustration and lack of achievement may also have caused students not to attend.

Mechanisms underpinning success

Professional development was critical to the success of both the scaffolding and bilingual programs, particularly for program delivery. For example, four bilingual schools in the Warlpiri-patukurlangu Jara network undertook 'learning together' sessions, enabling networking opportunities for staff to build capacity in delivering the two-way curriculum. Furthermore, the scaffolding program found that commitment to the program – by the school leadership and via continuous assessment and delivery of outcomes in line with the Indigenous literacy and numeracy strategy – was imperative to the success of the programs. Moreover, inclusion of the 'mother tongue' in program delivery helps to move educational practice from teaching about culture to teaching through local culture in order to bring depth, breadth and significance to all aspects of the curriculum. Scaffolding programs help to overcome the barrier of mobility, and bilingual schools help to overcome the barrier of language to assist children to attend school.

Whole-of-school approaches

Strategies for the whole-of-school, such as providing a broad curriculum, help to maintain student engagement, improve learning outcomes and lift school completion rates. Research describes the years from 5 to 9 as critical for achievement, engagement, attendance and retention of students. This represents a major challenge for Indigenous students. A study of Indigenous young people's education in the Goulburn Valley found that the 'one size fits all' curriculum for years 7–10 is problematic in attracting and retaining Indigenous students (Alford & James 2007).

Middle schooling is a means to influence school structure as it acknowledges that young adolescents have unique needs. It consequently delivers a pedagogy and curriculum specifically for the school years 5–10. Although few investigations of the impact of middle schooling on Indigenous students exist, a review of the Australian literature infers that middle schooling can lead to better educational outcomes for Indigenous students. Based on conceptual grounds, Chadbourne (2001) argues the benefits of middle schooling: it reduces cultural discontinuities between Indigenous homes and makes school more compatible with Indigenous learning styles; it fosters the development of characteristics of effective teachers of Indigenous students; it places high priority on equity and social justice; it is compatible with full service community schools; and it has been successfully implemented in schools with high Indigenous student enrolments.

A state-wide Middle Years Reform was rolled out in all Victorian Government secondary and P-12 schools over 2001–2003 (Elsworth et al. 2003). The program was designed to provide schools with financial support to employ additional classroom teaching capacity to develop and implement initiatives in the areas of literacy, attendance and the 'thinking

curriculum’ in years 7–9. Four major outcomes were identified by over 20% of the schools involved in the reform. These were:

- improvement in literacy for students in general
- improved engagement with school for students in general
- increased awareness and/or improved pedagogical skills for teachers in the area of cognitive or thinking skills
- improved engagement of students in general areas of the curriculum other than literacy.

Improved attendance and retention – and curriculum development – were other outcomes identified by a smaller percentage of schools; however, the four major outcomes are all linked to increases in attendance as previously discussed.

Mechanisms underpinning success

The Middle Years Reform program used models from the research base including the Habits of Mind, Strategic Intentions and the Hill-Crevola models. Although the models are classified differently, they have 6 overlapping themes: system-level reform; school structures, organisation and governance; school leadership; school personnel (development of capacities, understandings and beliefs); curriculum and assessment; and teaching and learning. This is imperative to generate a distinctive vision, organisation and pedagogical approach for the middle years.

Similarly, teacher development through improved pedagogical skills and improved teaching strategies and teacher knowledge was reported by a smaller percentage of schools. This is a critical outcome as poor teacher quality is reported as being a contributing factor to Indigenous student’s non-attendance (DEEWR 2006). The quality of classroom teaching is a determinant of student learning outcomes and an important in-school factor in improving outcomes for Indigenous students. Consequently, through a focus on influencing the school atmosphere by targeting the needs of young adolescents and improving teacher training, middle school programs appear to be a successful strategy to enhance attendance.

Nutrition programs

Poor nutrition is linked to Indigenous school attendance in a number of ways. Children who suffer from poor nutrition have poorer health, which directly affects attendance through the number of days they are off sick. Nutritional intake also affects children’s energy levels, their levels of concentration and their ability to learn at school, and has been linked to disruptive behaviours within the classroom (Wikicki & Jemison 2003).

Previous research has shown that Indigenous children, particularly those in remote areas, have significantly higher rates of under-nutrition and food insecurity than non-Indigenous children (AIHW 2011). For example, in 2004–2005, 24% of Indigenous Australians reported that they ran out of food at least once in the previous year, compared with 5% of non-Indigenous Australians – with higher rates for those living in remote areas (36%).

A number of policies and programs have been initiated to improve Indigenous Australians’ access to healthy food and consequent nutritional levels overall, including the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan 2000–2010, as well as for all children regardless of Indigenous status (e.g. the National Child Nutrition program and the School Nutrition program). Providing food at school may also act as an incentive for attending.

National Child Nutrition program

There is mixed evidence on the impact of school-based nutrition programs on school attendance specifically. For example, the National Child Nutrition program was a community grants program targeting the nutrition and long-term eating patterns of children aged 0–12 years of age and pregnant women. Miller et al. (2004) conducted a cluster evaluation of 11 school-based projects funded in Indigenous communities in Western Australia by the National Child Nutrition program and concluded that they did increase nutrition awareness and attitudes, access to nutritious foods at school, school attendance and attention in class and Indigenous development. However, no data were provided on the size of the increase.

School Nutrition Program

The Australian Government-funded and initiated School Nutrition Program funds service providers, but expects parents and carers to contribute to the cost of the food for each child they support via income managements such as Centrepay or electronic funds transfers (Office of Evaluation and Audit Indigenous Programs 2009). The fundamental aim is to increase student attention and engagement.

A School Nutrition Program was an element of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) in 2007. This program aimed to improve attendance and engagement by providing breakfast and lunch to school students in Indigenous communities. It was introduced in 2007 and, by July 2008, 68 out of the 73 NTER communities had implemented it. Evidence suggests that the program had a positive impact on student behaviour, increased parental engagement with schools, increased enrolment and led to some improvement in attendance (NTER 2011).

A survey of stakeholders' views on the impact of the School Nutrition Program on student attendance showed that 50.9% of parents believed it influenced attendance, while 52.9% of principals perceived it had little positive impact. Therefore, the findings of this outcome are inconclusive, particularly as the NTER Review Board's analysis of the performance of the project reported that schools which had been running the program for 6 months or longer reported a decrease or no change in attendance rates (NTER Review Board 2008).

However, a secondary aim of the School Nutrition Program is to contribute to employment opportunities by building parental skills in meal preparation and provision, and supporting a greater Indigenous parental and community involvement in schools. This outcome was viewed favourably, with over 80% of parents and principals considering that it had a positive impact on parental engagement. Furthermore, 58% of parents considered the program had an impact on community understanding of the importance of good nutrition to a child's ability to learn.

The Foodbank program (Western Australia) sources surplus food from the food and grocery industry and then donates and distributes it to schools to provide students with a nutritionally wholesome breakfast (O'Donoghue et al. 2010). The program reported a substantial change in school attendance. For example, the number of students attending school 90% of the time increased by 74%, and the number of students attending school 70% of the time increased by 102%. Thus, participation in a school breakfast program can reduce absenteeism.

Mechanisms underpinning success

A successful element of the School Nutrition Program and Foodbank (although this outcome is not a formal component of Foodbank) is nutrition awareness and education in schools. This influences both the community and the students. Students participating in Foodbank reported that learning life skills, and being assisted in living a healthy lifestyle – coupled with the social aspects of the nutrition program – were the main reasons for enjoying the program. Additionally, the School Nutrition Program may fit and enhance broader school policies such as ‘no junk food’. Furthermore, nutrition programs help to build the capacity of parents and the community to provide nutritious meals for children. DEEWR, the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training and the Red Cross all view an increase in the accessibility and awareness of the benefits of nutrition as a success of the nutrition programs. Health, of which nutrition is a component, is viewed as a barrier to school attendance. Thus, access to sustenance is a key success factor of nutrition programs and to attaining a high school attendance rate.

Incentives

A preliminary investigation into attendance with students identified that traditional methods of punishment for non-attendance are unlikely to connect with young people; rather, students saw that incentives and rewards for attendance would be more worthwhile (Parliament of Western Australia 2012). For example, the Western Australian Government has recently rolled out the It All Starts at School program, which is a rewards and recognition program promoting the importance of going to school every day. Two programs with demonstrated evidence that rewarding students for attendance was effective were found: the School Passport System, and the No School, No Pool policy.

School Passport System

The School Passport System is an incentive program run in Western Australia aimed at increasing parental and community member participation in local schools and at increasing the attendance of children with low attendance rates (Young 2011). Parents are encouraged to become involved in an activity designated by the school. This could be involvement on the parents and friends committee, helping teachers in the classroom and on excursions, volunteering at the canteen or uniform shop, coaching school sporting teams, and so on. One hour of parental involvement earns 10 points, equating to 1 school dollar which can be redeemed for school items such as school uniforms, food and drink at the canteen, stationery, payment towards an excursion and other items such as school photos or swimming lessons. Children are rewarded with a 50 cent voucher for every second day of attendance and more substantial rewards – such as sporting equipment, movie tickets, fishing nets or bikes (depending on their interest) – for 25 days of consecutive attendance.

An example of the program’s impact was demonstrated at Neerigen Brook Primary School where average student attendance had improved from 69.5% before the program began to 86.7%. Data also indicate that the number of both hours and volunteers had increased with the start of the program. This is important as research shows that parental involvement in school and in children’s education is associated with positive educational outcomes (Zeltman & Waterman 1998). Furthermore, the School Passport System increases access to school by subsidising the cost of items, helping to alleviate financial barriers to schooling.

No School, No Pool

A different incentives program is the No School, No Pool policy in Western Australia, which was introduced because of parental concern about truancy (Lehmann et al. 2003). As an incentive to attend school, passes are given to those children in attendance, permitting them to use the pool after school. Results from four surveys administered at 6-month intervals between July 2000 and March 2002 show that the proportion of children with attendance rates of at least 70% rose from 42% during the term before the pool opened to 51%, 65% and 67% during the terms preceding the second, third and fourth surveys, respectively.

Furthermore, introducing the 25-metre swimming pools was associated with reductions in the prevalence of pyoderma and tympanic membrane perforations. These 2 health issues have serious ramifications for the Indigenous community. For example, the major pathogen of pyoderma is associated with chronic renal failure, which is highly prevalent among the Indigenous population. Furthermore, between 10% and 67% of school-age children have perforated tympanic membranes, affecting their performance at school and in employment and social circumstances in adulthood (Hoy et al. 1998; Morris 1998). Swimming in a saltwater pool is the equivalent of a nasal and ear wash-out and cleans the skin.

Consequently, swimming pools not only provide an incentive to attend school, but also help to improve health conditions essential to educational outcomes.

The main mechanism underpinning the success of incentive schemes is choosing an incentive that is highly valued by the students themselves.

Parental consequences

This strategy links parental welfare payments to students of compulsory school age who are not enrolled to attend school. Therefore, these initiatives sanction the payment of parental welfare support as a way of influencing school attendance and enrolment of children.

Research has shown that sanctions provide limited but positive results when combined with case management, supportive services and positive financial incentives (Campbell & Wright 2005). Furthermore, evaluations show that it is the case management, not the sanction, which is the most critical variable. Both SEAM and the Cape York Welfare Reform support this.

School Enrolment and Attendance through Welfare Reform Measure (SEAM)

SEAM was introduced in several regional and remote schools in the Northern Territory and Queensland to see whether the potential suspension of income support payments, along with the offer of Centrelink social work services, can be an effective motivation to improve school enrolment and attendance (Social Policy Research and Evaluation Section Research Branch 2012). Overall, SEAM students increased their attendance. In the Northern Territory, attendance increased from 74.4% to 79.9%, and in Queensland from 84.7% to 88.7%. It was determined that income support suspensions had no impact; rather, it was the issuing of attendance notices and the potential threat of suspension that affected school attendance. Also, enrolment notification letters appeared to have an impact on re-engaging students, as 69% enrolled in the month after the notification letters were sent out. Additionally, it is likely that contact with social workers helped to reduce the unauthorised absences of referred students.

Cape York Welfare Reform

The Cape York Welfare Reform established the Families Responsibilities Commission as an independent statutory body. It consists of a legally qualified commissioner and 6 local

commissioners for each of the 4 communities (Aurukun, Coen, Mossman Gorge and Hope Vale) (Family Responsibilities Commission 2010). The goal of this initiative is to influence the acceptance of socially responsible standards of behaviour, with increase in school attendance being a key performance indicator. This is achieved by implementing a school attendance notice. Where a child is absent for 3 full or part days of a school term without reasonable excuse, or where a child of compulsory age is not enrolled to attend school, the Department of Education and Training submits a school attendance notice to the Commission.

The Commission will convene to determine the outcome, which may include reprimanding the client using income sanctions or referring the matter to school attendance case managers. These case managers establish a community-wide expectation of 100% school attendance. They do this through working with students, parents, schools and the community to provide support, encouragement and guidance to help ensure regular school attendance. They visit parents if a student is late or absent from school and refer them to relevant services.

The majority of schools in the Cape York Welfare Reform communities have achieved and are maintaining high levels of school attendance. Western Cape College – Aurukun has had the largest improvement, with an increase in school attendance of 14.3%. School attendance rates increased from 44.5% in Semester 1 of 2008 to 58.8% in Semester 1 of 2010.

Mechanisms underpinning success

Both SEAM and the Cape York Welfare Reform mirrored case management methods by using social workers and commissioners, issuing of attendance notices and employing service collaboration. These factors led to the success of the initiatives. Additionally, they include the general principles that underpin the most successful strategies, as reported in the Australian Government's Strategic Results Projects. These principles include home visits and community liaison, emphasis on personal contact with consistent follow-up where absence occurred, personal planning and goal setting (Strategic Results Project National Coordination and Evaluation Team et al. 2000). The Cape York Welfare Reform initiative, however, undertook more of a collaborative approach; this allowed more impact with the community and, consequently, potentially more influence on stakeholders relevant to affecting attendance – parents, schools and the community. While parental sanctions influence family finances, it is through the work of social workers and case managers, and through service collaboration, that parent and community expectations of 100% school attendance are affected.

Transport

Access to school is an important factor that influences completion rates for Indigenous students (Helme & Lamb 2011). While access can be influenced by cultural, economic and informational factors, it is the physical factors – often to do with geographical isolation – that this strategy focuses on. Often communities are able to use the community bus to transport children to school; however, no quantitative evaluations of such an initiative were found. Instead, this section focuses on the Walking School Bus program and individual school strategies on Elcho Island.

Walking School Bus

A Walking School Bus follows a set route to and from school, 'picking up' or 'dropping off' children along the way (Travel Smart Australia 2005). It is 'driven' by an adult at the front and an adult 'conductor' at the rear; the walkers in between make up the 'bus'. International

literature suggests increases in attendance can be attributed to the Walking School Bus. This is likely as a higher level of physical fitness is reported to be linked with better school attendance and fewer disciplinary problems, as found by Trost (2009). Other benefits associated with the bus include getting to school safely and on time, being a part of a group or team, becoming more familiar with one's own neighbourhood and surroundings, and arriving at school alert and ready to learn.

The Walking School Bus has been operating in all states and territories. Eagleby South State School in Queensland actively implemented this program in 2010 to influence attendance and punctuality and as a means of communicating the school's commitment to high rates of attendance. At Eagleby, the route is coordinated to collect at-risk students and those who have had a poor record of attendance or punctuality. Staff operate this program and actively encourage students to 'join the bus' or refer students directly to the program during meetings with parents. The school provides breakfast on arrival for those participating in the program. Overall attendance in 2009 was 85.3% compared with 90.25% in 2010 (Queensland Government 2010; Social Policy Research and Evaluation Section Research Branch 2012).

Individual school strategies

Shepherdson College on Elcho Island provides a prototype for educating children in remote Indigenous communities by providing a number of different strategies to help access to school (Ferrari 2011). To engage children who are truanting, a mobile classroom is driven down the road to the town camp where the truants hang out. Furthermore, the school picks up children from 5 homelands and flies teachers out to 4 homelands on the mainland enabling children to be educated on the island. This is important given that a major barrier to education for those living in remote Australia includes higher transport and tuition costs (Biddle 2010). This approach prevents students having to be sent away to boarding school and increases the opportunity for students' skills to remain on the island where they can input their skill and knowledge into the community. Although not transport-related, the school also helps the Indigenous community connect to the school by ensuring influential community members are involved in the school. In this case, this is achieved by paying local elders to act as mentors and teachers, and a group of elders and strong women to form the school council. This initiative has seen attendance rise from an average of 43% to almost 60%. The success of this initiative can be attributed to the new principal who has implemented these strategies and who maintains that the key to school attendance is to work with the community.

Attendance monitoring programs

The Every Day Counts campaign is aimed at changing parent, community and student attitudes to school attendance by monitoring attendance and applying early intervention strategies. Introduced in Queensland towards the end of 2008, the campaign endeavours to endorse the message that every day counts (Queensland Department of Education Training and Employment 2010). This is important as Indigenous students miss around 26 days of school per year compared with 8 days for all students (Zubrick et al. 2006). Absenteeism poses as an even bigger challenge for students living in remote and very remote locations as children living in these areas are more likely to have missed school without permission than children living in non-remote areas (14% compared with 6%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012).

It is the aim of the Every Day Counts campaign to communicate that all children should attend on every school day, that truanting can impact future employability and life choices, that attendance at school is the responsibility of everyone in the community and that schools should monitor, communicate and implement strategies to improve regular school attendance.

The strategy acknowledges there is no 'one size fits all' approach to improving school attendance; instead, the Queensland Government provides a 5-step model as a guide to manage, identify and intervene on absenteeism. This involves:

- collaborating with staff, parents and students to develop a school attendance policy to promote high expectations of student attendance
- recording and following up student absences. This is essential as timely follow-up is a key preventative strategy in reducing absenteeism; it also enables parents who may not be aware that their children are absent to take action
- monitoring student non-attendance and patterns of non-attendance by analysing data to identify absenteeism trends and investigating absenteeism in relation to factors such as the day of the week, the class/subject/year level and gender/cultural groups
- developing a positive school culture by promoting positive relationships, including establishing positive home-school relationships to assist parents to support their child's attendance at school
- collaborating with other agencies to implement appropriate strategies/support mechanisms to address the trends in attendance, and to support individual students and their families to encourage attendance.

Although a formal evaluation of the overall strategy was not found, Woodridge State High School in Logan, Queensland provides a case study of the effects and success of the program. Using the Australian Government's National Partnership funding, an attendance team was employed to improve attendance outcomes and further endorse the Every Day Counts campaign (Woodridge State High School 2012). The team comprised a school-based police officer, guidance officers, a social worker, a community education counsellor, an attendance manager, and an attendance officer who all work collaboratively with the principal (at weekly meetings) to target and address attendance concerns. Since the Every Day Counts campaign was implemented, attendance increased from 80.2% (in 2008) to 90% (in 2011). The ability of the team to work with the community was a success of this program as it provided a coordinated approach to targeting truancy. Partnerships created with local businesses, community agencies, the Logan City Council and Logan Police have ensured that the community works together, with a focus for students on attending school all day, every day.

Mechanisms underpinning success

The Every Day Counts campaign builds community capacity through awareness of education and increased connectedness of the importance of attendance between the school and community. It does this via a linked approach involving coordination by the Queensland Government. The strategy's flexibility (whereby bottom-up initiatives take priority over solutions imposed from outside) and the importance of local identity, leadership, knowledge and management are recognised as critical components of this campaign's success (Howe & Cleary 2001). Although the government imposes the Every Day Counts campaign, it is the individual schools' processes, and the commitment of the community to make attendance a priority that are the critical success factors of this strategy.

School/family/community partnerships

Where barriers to school attendance exist across school, community and family domains, it is important that interventions focus on developing partnerships in all 3 areas. A number of these programs focus particularly on the early years and on strengthening transitions to school.

Studies show that children who are chronically absent in preschool education maintain low levels of attendance later in life (Attendance Works 2010). Consequently, attendance in the early years can predict attendance in later years and, as such, early education can help the transition to school. Successful transitions depend on the nature of relationships between all involved: peers, teachers and families. Therefore, children with a strong sense of connection with the community, and trusting those around them, are likely to achieve success at school.

In addition, research has shown that a rich childcare or preschool environment can have strong positive effects and create outcomes for children that are much better than would be predicted based on factors such as socioeconomic status and maternal education levels (Melhuish et al. 2008).

Moorditj Coolangars Community Hub

The Moorditj Coolangars Community Hub is a part of the Communities for Children initiative that aims to close the gap between the achievement of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students by increasing children's literacy and numeracy, and their attendance at a preschool setting (Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia no date). Delivered at Mount Lockyer Primary School in Western Australia, the program is aimed at parents and promotes early literacy and numeracy awareness, parenting skills and knowledge of and access to community resources.

Essentially, the program prepares families for school by creating a connectedness to school. Since its inception in 2007, Indigenous attendance rates have fallen slightly and are now equivalent to the state average. For example, in 2007, Mount Lockyer's Indigenous attendance rate was 83.3% compared with the state's average of 81.2%. By 2009, this had fallen to 81.8% compared with the state's average of 81.1%. However, it was not possible to disaggregate the data by which families participated in the program and whether their attendance was higher.

Some of the key elements of the program included the time and effort taken to develop relationships. A flexible approach was undertaken to establish relationships as a means to establish trust and mutual respect between Indigenous families and the school. This, in turn, helps to shape the expectancy that ensuring child attendance and learning is a shared responsibility.

Goonellabah Transition Program

The Goonellabah Transition Program targets children and families who need additional support with their transition into primary school (Newell & Graham 2008). The program was initiated by principals in the Goonellabah area (New South Wales) due to concern that some children were starting school at a disadvantage. It aims to provide a culturally sensitive program in a family-friendly environment to ensure Indigenous and other children, identified as requiring additional learning support, have the best possible start to their primary school journey. Children who present with development issues, and are aged between 3 and a half to 5 years, are referred to attend the program for 2 days a week.

It is a criterion of the program that children attend other local preschool and Family Day Care services for the other 3 days of the week. A number of operational working parties help to implement and support the program: a multidisciplinary advisory group helps with and oversees program implementation while a working party provides operational support to the coordinator and a subcommittee of the advisory group meets to review and prioritise referrals for recruitment and placement. Individualised education plans – in respect to literacy, numeracy and behaviour resources – are developed weekly by the coordinator, ensuring a tailored approach. Furthermore, an Aboriginal support assistant and health promotion officer make home visits to families to help with performance monitoring of the child.

Data gathered from semi-structured interviews found the 41 graduating students averaged an overall attendance rate of 81%, with 41% of children achieving 90% attendance of possible days. Feedback from staff, teachers and families showed successful transition to kindergarten. This was also demonstrated by high attendance rates and lack of suspensions. Overall, the academic performance of children in the program comparably favourably with that of other children in the year.

Families and Schools Together (FAST)

FAST was first developed in North America in Native American and First Nations communities and has been used in Australia since 1996. An example of its implementation is described below.

Community leaders in the Daly region of the Northern Territory identified the need to strengthen young families as a means to give their children the best start in life. Consequently, the FAST program was introduced in 2003 to build protective factors in children to enhance family functioning, to prevent school failure and to reduce the stress that parents and children experience in their daily life situations (Mupotsa & Guenther 2011).

Requiring a 1-year presence within the community, FAST initially engages with schools, community sector peers, community members and parents to form a collaborative team who are trained to help run the next phase of the program: 8 weekly multi-family meetings.

A number of activities are involved in the meetings to create positive interaction experiences for families. These include a meal shared as a family, communication games played at a family table, time for couples or buddies, a self-help parent group, special play (one-on-one parent-child play time) and a fixed lottery in which each family wins once. At the end of the 8 weeks, graduating families participate in a monthly follow-up FASTWORKS meeting for a year, run by past parent graduate volunteers. This ensures sustainability of the program.

Attendance data for children involved in FAST at Shepherdson College showed a slight increase in attendance of 4.6%, from 48.4% in Term 4 of 2010 to 53.0% in Term 3 of 2011; however, this was not significantly different. Positively, the minimum attendance rate rose by 9.5%, from 2% to 11.5%, indicating attendance had increased overall. This is reflected by over half (53.3%) of students improving their attendance rate. A series of interviews and focus groups attribute the improvement to the awareness of the importance of attendance and, subsequently, to the desire of the community to see school attendance as a priority for families.

Follow the Dream: Partnerships for Success

A program focusing on transition in the later years, from secondary school to tertiary education, was also found. Such programs are imperative to help retain Indigenous students

and assist them to complete their secondary education, providing opportunities for a successful career. The Follow the Dream: Partnerships for Success program was designed to improve the educational outcomes of Indigenous students in secondary schools in Western Australia (Partington et al. 2009). It helps the successful completion of high school and transition to university by providing after-school tuition and individual mentoring, along with support and case management.

Follow the Dream: Partnerships for Success is an inter-agency program managed by the Department of Education. It delivers the program in 25 public schools. Eleven of the program sites are co-funded and co-managed by The Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation that brokers industry support and funding for program sites. Based on another successful partnerships program (Gumala Mirnuwarni), the Follow the Dream program employs the same selection process. Only students considered to have the academic ability, skills and aspirations to be successful are selected to participate in the program through a local selection process. The program also includes high-achieving and motivated students undertaking Vocational Education and Training school pathways. Student eligibility requires proof of parental/guardian support and requires the signing of a contract to this effect.

Learning centres are integral to students' experience of the program and generally operate 4 afternoons a week at most sites. Various centres provide afternoon tea as a relaxation period for students before starting their homework. Tutorial assistance was provided within a collaborative setting, with other students and tutors helping to enhance commitment to studies. Further resources to aid the centres included computers and internet access, and transport. Additional activities included camps and trips as a means to foster motivation, leadership, team building and career awareness. University visits were often common practice and were tailored to student interests. Similarly, excursions were a valuable addition to the learning program, providing cultural training, career knowledge and rewards for performance during the year.

A 5-year longitudinal study found that the Follow the Dream program had demonstrated higher numbers of Indigenous students being retained to the end of Year 12, graduating from high school and entering further education, or gaining jobs, apprenticeships, traineeships and cadetships. The study employed a collective case study approach, whereby 12 program sites were used as case sites to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Across these sites, attendance increased from 79.9% in Term 1 in 2005 and peaked at 91% in Term 4 in 2005. A de-identified site shows an increase for students in the program from 77.2% in 2006 to 79.9% in 2008. Although the school and state attendances are higher at every point, the attendance rates for other students declined. For example, overall school attendance at this site decreased from 86.3% in 2006 to 82.0% in 2008. Similarly, attendance rates for the state decreased, albeit only slightly, from 88.0% in 2006 to 87.6% in 2008. The program at this site demonstrates the ability of Follow the Dream program to help maintain and increase attendance over time while attendance decreases across the school and state.

Mechanisms underpinning success

Family, school and teacher expectations are influenced by a partnerships strategy to promote student success. Families are the first teachers of their children and continue to influence their learning and development during the school years and long afterwards. Therefore, it is important for schools to recognise parents as the primary educators while also providing educational foundations. Partnerships are essential as family engagement is a shared responsibility of families, schools and communities, and is continuous from birth to

adulthood occurring across multiple settings where children learn. All 3 programs discussed above were successful and contain elements of partnership strategies. Overlapping factors included an individualised approach, a safe environment and building community capacity.

A qualitative study on the perspectives of Indigenous Australian mothers engaging with early childhood education and care services showed the most important theme was the notion of trust (Trudgett & Grace 2011). Furthermore, for children, it was important that they feel connected with an adult worker at the centre. The home visits by the school liaison officers enable relationships to develop with both parents and children while facilitating the opportunity to discuss and resolve any attendance issues, and to help to establish an attendance pattern. This is imperative as studies have shown children who are chronically absent in preschool education maintain low levels of attendance later in life. Therefore, forming a positive attendance pattern early on helps to maintain high attendance levels later in life, thereby giving the best possible chance to fulfil potential educational outcomes.

Holding the program on the school grounds helps to engage families directly with schools. The Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education cited the work of teachers as the 'make or break' element in improving Indigenous student outcomes (New South Wales Department of Education & New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated 2004). This reflects Indigenous parents' perceptions on the issue of quality teaching which identified that a single teacher's personality gave students a sense of belonging and feeling of worthiness to continue with their education. Consequently, it is not just a matter of increasing cultural friendliness, but of understanding how families and community members relate. The Moorditj Coolangars program established a 'community room' (a space in the room of the Aboriginal and Islander education officer) where parents can drop in and have an informal chat. Initiatives such as this help to change parents' perceptions and shape their expectations.

Early childhood programs need to be developed in partnership with, and be responsive to, each individual community. A successful way to achieve this is by including community services in program planning and delivery. The FAST program ensures community presence by including a community-based mental health partner and a community-based substance abuse partner on the leadership team; this facilitates the weekly family meetings. Similarly, the Moorditj Coolangars program has input by health providers, and services that include community nurses, speech therapists, dieticians, health officers and social workers.

Engagement with families through partnership with schools and the community helps to increase communication. This empowers families with the knowledge of the importance of education, helping them to take charge of their child's attendance. Additionally, it is found that transitional programs are most effective when all populations and stakeholders are targeted and involved (Smith 1997). Therefore, effective partnerships with families, teachers and the community, based on trusting relationships, as well as the development of quality early childhood programs, will encourage continuity of learning and support transitions to primary school.

The coordinator role was central to the success of the Follow the Dream program. The coordinator manages the program for the centre. It is their role to identify students for the program, organise employment of tutors, consult with stakeholders to address site needs, set up and work with a steering committee, liaise with teachers about a student's educational program and ensure the general work of the centre is carried out. Support is provided by a steering committee (which advises the coordinator) and an operations committee (which provides professional educational support).

The contracts, or compacts as they are known in this program, were another approach taken to ensure program success. The compacts are signed by students, parents and program coordinators to acknowledge their responsibilities and commitment to the program. School attendance every day is listed as a responsibility for students; similarly, ensuring students attend school is described as a duty of parents. Some individual program sites incorporated a compact-signing ceremony night to motivate and encourage success. Overall, the program flourished in its expectations for success and this was fundamental to the program's selection process. The success of this expectation was summed up by a program coordinator who stated: *we didn't realise that once we put a program together saying to kids 'you're an achiever; we expect you to do well', they achieve.*

Aboriginal education workers

Because the role of Aboriginal education workers is to enhance the strategies discussed above, they have not been included as a separate strategy. However, given their importance to the success of some of the strategies, it is necessary to examine their role and impact. It must be noted that there has been conflicting evidence on the relationship between Aboriginal education workers and school outcomes. Aboriginal education workers is being used an umbrella term which may include Aboriginal education officers, Aboriginal liaison officers/workers, or Aboriginal inclusion officers/workers among others.

The major purpose of an Aboriginal education worker has been defined as 'enhancing the life opportunities of Aboriginal students and to give them parity with non-Aboriginal students' (Goddard & Anderson 1998). An examination of the impact of Aboriginal education workers on Indigenous students' schooling by Zubrick et al. (2006) found that the presence of these workers in schools was not positively associated with academic performance; moreover, these workers were negatively associated with the attendance of Indigenous students.

However, the authors speculated that this finding may be due to the fact that Aboriginal education workers may be held responsible for the attendance and performance of Indigenous students, without the rest of the school staff contributing to the underlying issue of attendance. Consequently, attributing an Aboriginal education worker as the sole strategy for attendance may be an ineffective initiative to influence school attendance; on the other hand, using such a worker in a student-focused strategy (such as in an extracurricular or out-of-school activities program, with no academic outcomes) appears to be an effective way to contribute to their having a positive influence on school attendance.

Furthermore, a review of Aboriginal education workers identified their main tasks as promoting cultural identity among students, conducting cultural activities in the school and organising parental involvement (Gower et al. 2011). These tasks are critical as they help Indigenous students to positively self-identify as Indigenous. Self-identity involves the components of knowledge and evaluation (Tajfel 1982); it is moulded by the perceptions one has of oneself and the value judgement a person places on themselves (Pederson 1994).

As discussed in the student engagement section earlier in this chapter, positive self-identity for Indigenous students means they will have positive conceptions as both Indigenous Australians and students (Purdie et al. 2000). This is important, as positive self-identity will enhance attachment and commitment to school, likely leading to successful school outcomes.

Identity is formed through personal factors and the contexts in which one operates. Four contextual domains have been identified as influencing identity formation. These are culture

and society, family, peers, and school and work environments (Grotevant 1987). An examination by Purdie et al. (2000) of the relationship between school outcomes and the self-identities of young Indigenous Australians found the following influences are the most important in shaping identities:

- key people within the school – teachers, principals, parents/carers, Aboriginal education workers, peers
- school systems – climate, homework centres, class groupings, discipline systems
- the curriculum – Indigenous studies, languages, alternative programs, vocational education, Indigenous cultural activities
- home/community – parents and other family members, Indigenous role models
- general Australian community – for example, the media, police.

An example of the impact of an Aboriginal education worker on almost every factor of self-identity was in the Jalaris Kids Future Club. The Aboriginal education worker is used in this program's delivery, helping to engage parents and teachers (who are other key people within the school) through the delivery of Indigenous cultural activities. These activities include learning of their kinship, traditional places and the Dreaming as well as arts and crafts, which involves parents, family members and other Indigenous role models.

Programs with anecdotal data

Numerous case studies, programs with anecdotal evidence and programs that look promising but have yet to be formally evaluated can be found in the literature. A sampling of programs suggestive of positive outcomes have been summarised in a table format in order to examine whether there were any additional strategies not covered in the previous section (Appendix Table A2). Only 1 program was found that did not fit into the previously identified strategies: the Grow Your Own program, which focuses on training Indigenous school teachers.

It is of concern to educators that there are few Indigenous school teachers, particularly in remote areas, and few enrolled in higher education institutions (Fordham & Schwab 2007). The lack of Indigenous teachers may inhibit student attachment to schooling as they may not see the English-speaking staff and curriculum as being relevant to their lives, decreasing their incentive to attend (Lewthwaite et al. 2010). Often, Indigenous staff members are the longest serving employees in a remote school and thus have extensive knowledge of the local culture, languages, families and environment, making them best placed to influence students' learning. However, they are often acting only as teacher assistants. The Grow Your Own program aims primarily at teachers in training, to integrate the pre-service teacher's academic studies with their daily work in the classroom. It seeks to create learning communities, which provide mentoring and peer support while providing mutual cultural understanding (Giles 2010).

Implementing the Grow Your Own program in Wadeye 2008 consisted of a lecturer from Charles Darwin University visiting once a week for the entire school year to deliver academic course content to oversee the pre-service teacher's planning as well as to liaise with the school coordinator. The school coordinator supervised the pre-service teacher's study and practical work ensuring that the mentor teachers in classrooms gave feedback on the pre-service teacher's planning and lessons. It is likely that, at the end of the course, the pre-service teacher will be employed in their community school. While the results of the

program are unknown, a measure of success could be the number of graduates from the program and improvement in learning outcomes for the students in their schools.

International

A review of the literature from the United States of America, Canada and New Zealand (the other 3 developed countries with Indigenous populations) was undertaken with regard to the current strategies used in these countries to improve the attendance of their Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. The intent was to identify if there were any additional strategies used there that were not covered in the Australian context.

The findings show that the same set of strategies is being used in the other 3 countries, and no other types of strategies were found. However, there were examples of different types of programs not cited in the Australian literature, and these are presented in Table 4.2 followed by a fuller discussion. Where possible, data are provided on actual attendance rates. However, some studies report only the percentage increase or decrease in school attendance, not the actual percentages of students attending school.

Table 4.2: Summary of strategies and results from the international literature

Intervention/ strategy	Country	Programs	Impact on school attendance
Student engagement	USA	Woodburn High School, Hydroville Curriculum project Uses an integrated curriculum which included a long-term project to help students stay in school and obtain academic credit toward graduation. The Hydroville Curriculum project runs for 9 weeks and is based on a framework that reflects how scientists and experts solve real-world problems by examining actual environmental problems that have an impact on human health.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School wide attendance increased at Woodburn High School, from 77% in 2004 (the year before the program was introduced) to 85% in 2005 when the project was implemented. 36% of students on the project reported that they kept themselves involved by coming to school every day (in order to successfully understand and contribute to their project).
Parental consequences	USA	Truancy Reduction Program: a community approach at Lac du Flambeau Tribe Created by the Lac du Flambeau Tribal Youth program to reduce truancy of tribal students and work with truant youth before they became involved with the Lac du Flambeau Tribal Court. This program is implemented by the attendance improvement team.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 65% success rate for reducing non-attendance. Since the attendance improvement team was implemented, non-attendance has been reduced by 85% for youth in the program.

(continued)

Table 4.2 (continued): Summary of strategies and results from the international literature

Intervention/ strategy	Country	Programs	Impact on school attendance
Incentives	USA	Count Me In! campaign An incentive-based program at Temecula Valley Unified School District which offers students a range of rewards, based on their attendance. Students are rewarded district-wide each trimester (at the elementary level) or each semester (at high school and middle school), as well as at the end of the year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance in the Temecula Valley Unified School District increased by 55%. The program was able to increase parent and student realisation of the importance of attendance to improve school performance.
Attendance monitoring program	USA	Minnetonka (Minnesota) School District's high school attendance policy In 2006, the attendance policy required that a student's class grade be lowered after 3 unexcused absences and again after each subsequent unexcused absence. Tardiness was also punished by lowering grades.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-attendance decreased by 4%. Number of disciplinary referrals dropped by 64%. Suspensions decreased by 37%.
Whole-of-school	USA	Chicago High School Redesign Initiative (CHSRI) An initiative that sought to improve educational opportunities and academic outcomes among under-served students in Chicago by creating high-quality small high schools. Between 2002 and 2007, the CHSRI opened and supported 23 such schools to serve populations of generally low-performing students in neighbourhoods in need of high-quality schooling options.	First-time freshmen attending schools set up under the CHSRI were absent fewer days than their peers at other Chicago public high schools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There were 9 fewer days in 2002–03 (15.3 absent days in CHSRI schools compared with 24 days at other schools). There were 6 fewer days in 2004–05 (20 days compared with 26 days). The difference was statistically significant in all 3 years (2002–03 to 2004–05). Juniors at CHSRI schools were also absent fewer days than students at other similar Chicago schools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The difference was only statistically significant in 2002–03 (16 absent days compared with 24 absent days). In 2004–05, this difference decreased to 4 days (25 days compared with 29 days).

(continued)

Table 4.2 (continued): Summary of strategies and results from the international literature

Intervention/ strategy	Country	Programs	Impact on school attendance
Whole-of-school (continued)	New Zealand	<p>Effective Teaching Profile</p> <p>The project commenced by gathering narratives of students' classroom experiences from engaged and non-engaged Year 9 and Year 10 Māori students in four mainstream schools. The students clearly identified the main influences on their educational achievement and explained how teachers, in changing how they related and interacted with Māori students in their classrooms, could create a context for learning where these students' educational achievement could improve.</p> <p>Based on this, the project team developed an Effective Teaching Profile. This, in conjunction with information from the literature, and narratives from parents, teachers and school principals, formed the basis of a professional development intervention.</p>	<p>Implemented with 11 teachers (4 non-Māori and 7 Māori) in 4 schools, the intervention resulted in improved learning, behaviour and attendance outcomes for Māori students in the classrooms of those teachers who had participated in the professional development intervention.</p> <p>School 1 (25% Māori)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance was not an issue as pre-existing systems closely monitored the attendance of all students. <p>School 2 (45% Māori)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over the year of the project, Year 10 average attendance increased by 8% and unexplained absences decreased from 8.3% in 2001 to 3.6% in 2002. <p>School 3 (21% Māori in years 9 and 10)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance was constant over the year (94% to 93%). Only 1 of the 3 teachers completed the program; therefore, this figure represents one class only. <p>School 4 (78% Māori)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance improved for some classes but not others. A high level of non-attendance (up to 25% of the class) had serious implications for the success of the program at this school.
School/family/ community partnerships	Canada	<p>Pathways to Education</p> <p>Provides academic, financial, social and advocacy support over 4 years of secondary school to young people from at-risk and/or economically disadvantaged communities.</p>	<p>Overall, the Pathways program improved attendance for students in all sites. The rate of 'high non-attendance', defined as being absent 15% or more of the time, decreased for Year 9 students across all Pathways program sites.</p>
	USA	<p>Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) mentoring</p> <p>Provides children facing adversity with strong and enduring, professionally supported one-to-one relationships. It aims to achieve measurable outcomes, such as higher aspirations, greater confidence and better relationships, educational success, and avoidance of delinquency and other risky behaviours.</p>	<p>A survey conducted in 2011 found that high numbers of youth participating in the programs demonstrated improvements from 2009–10 data:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 56.2% of youth participating in the BBBS community-based program maintained or improved non-attendance rates. 51.4% of youth participating in the BBBS school-based program maintained or improved non-attendance rates. 88.8% of youth participating in the community-based program maintained or improved in the 'avoidance of risky behaviours' strategic outcome area. 83.4% of youth participating in the schools-based program maintained or improved in the 'avoidance of risky behaviours' strategic outcome area.

(continued)

Table 4.2 (continued): Summary of strategies and results from the international literature

Intervention/ strategy	Country	Programs	Impact on school attendance
	USA	<p>PACT (Partnering to Assess and Counteract Truancy)</p> <p>PACT ensures there is a dedicated staff member at each school whose function revolves around attendance.</p> <p>Letters are sent home after a specific number of absences by the student, with messages ranging from concern about the student's attendance and the importance of education, to information about the compulsory school attendance law and consequences for violating it.</p> <p>Leading up to and after the second letter is sent, a school team (normally comprising a counsellor, teacher and social worker) undertakes a needs assessment of the family to determine if intervention is required.</p>	<p>The program has been successful for those who have chosen to participate. In about 80% of the families that took part, the children showed significant improvements in attendance and maintained it.</p>

Student engagement

An individual school program undertaken at Woodburn High School applied an integrated curriculum to increase attendance. Under a grant from the National Institute of Environmental Health Science, Oregon University developed an integrated curriculum which included a long-term project to help students stay in school and obtain academic credit toward graduation (Bloomfield & James 2007). The Hydroville Curriculum project runs for 9 weeks and is based on a framework that reflects how scientists and experts solve real-world problems (by examining actual environmental problems that have an impact on human health) and focus on 3 environmental health problems: a pesticide spill, an indoor air quality problem, and a water quality problem. Students work on the project for 3 hours a day in teams.

Students became engaged with the project through the presentation of a real world situation as a complicated problem with no right answers. School-wide attendance increased at Woodburn High School as a consequence of involvement with the project. Attendance increased from 77% in 2004, the year before the program was introduced, to 85% in 2005 when it was implemented. About 36% of students reported that they maintained their attendance so that they could help their team and not let their team down. Furthermore, research has found that an integrated curriculum can result in greater intellectual curiosity, improved attitude toward schooling, enhanced problem-solving skills and higher achievement, which is likely to facilitate attendance as exemplified by the Hydroville Curriculum project (Austin et al. 1997; Kain 1993).

Parental consequences

Truancy in Lac du Flambeau traditionally resulted in fines without an improvement in school attendance rates. To help rectify this, a Tribal Youth Program worked to prevent truancy to help keep youth out of court and in school.

All truancy cases for tribal students of the Lac du Flambeau Tribe fall under the jurisdiction of the Lac du Flambeau Tribal Court. Truancy cases customarily resulted in court appearances together with a fine of \$250–\$300. However, parents often remained uninformed and the root cause of truancy remained unaddressed. Consequently, the Lac du

Flambeau Tribal Youth Program created the Truancy Reduction Program to work with truant youth before they became involved with the tribal court (Tribal Youth Program no date).

The Truancy Reduction Program runs for 30 days, during which students cannot miss more than 3 classes. The program consists of 3 phases, with improved attendance being a requirement to move into the next phase. Program staff meet daily with students and work in close collaboration with the school, the tribal court and tribal professionals to monitor attendance, academic performance and disciplinary issues. Program staff also work closely with parents, providing weekly progress reports and meeting them once every 2 weeks.

Incentives are provided, such as gift cards at local grocery stores or vouchers for students to use at the school store, in exchange for 3 consecutive weeks of signed reports. An attendance improvement team consists of the school social worker, an Indian education mentor, a truancy officer and juvenile justice staff. The team develops a specific plan for each student, discusses and shares information and decides who will follow up with each family. Fines are retracted if students successfully reduce their truancy below their previous level within 9 weeks. The attendance improvement team has helped to reduce truancy by 85% for youth in the program, with an overall 65% success rate for reducing truancy. Through this initiative, parents are more aware of the issues in their children's lives enabling them to work with their children to better address truancy issues.

Incentives

A campaign titled Count Me In! running in the Temecula Valley rewards students with a range of prizes based on their attendance (Education World 2011). The program was started as a means to encourage students, who are able, to attend school, and those who are ill to stay home. The program does not differentiate between absences, with every absence being counted, regardless of the reason. The primary goal is to discourage non-emergency absences, such as leaving early for vacation, going on vacation and appointments during the day.

Students are rewarded district-wide at the trimester in the elementary level and at the semester's end in high school and middle school, as well as at the end-of-year draw for larger prizes. Many of the schools in the district also offer monthly prizes so a student who misses a day or more due to illness during the month can start afresh the next month. Currently, the program reports a 55% increase in attendance along with an increase in parent and student realisation of the importance of school attendance in relation to success at school.

Attendance monitoring program

Minnetonka High School, a high school in Minnesota in the United States, has seen a decrease in unexplained absences through changing its attendance policy by not punishing students for their absences (Reeves 2008).

The attendance policy of Minnetonka High School previously lowered school grades when 3 unexplained absences occurred and again after each subsequent unexcused absence. However, the superintendent introduced a new policy to disconnect grades from behaviour altogether. This meant that a student's parents are contacted within a few hours of the infringement. Parental contact via phone call or e-mail is coupled with an after-school detention resulting from every unexcused absence. Since the introduction of the new policy,

absences have dropped by 4%, the number of disciplinary referrals have dropped by 64% and suspensions have decreased by 37%.

Evidence shows grading as punishment does not work. In this case, disconnecting grades from behaviour increased student achievement and dramatically improved behaviour.

Whole-of-school approaches

Two whole-of-school programs were found. In the Chicago High School Redesign Initiative (CHSRI), high schools in Chicago created smaller school and class sizes to enable a more personalised approach to learning. The second program is the Te Kotahitanga, research and professional development project in New Zealand, which developed the Effective Teaching Profile. It is based on Māori theory, with explicit focus on raising the educational achievement of Māori learners.

Chicago High School Redesign Initiative (CHSRI)

Chicago undertook a reform of its public high schools to help alleviate low high school completion rates, particularly of low-income students. The CHSRI sought to improve educational opportunities and academic outcomes by creating high-quality small high schools to provide more personal learning (Kahne et al. 2006). The first phase converted 5 large high schools that were among the lowest performing in the city into 15 to 20 autonomous small schools over 5 years. The second phase consisted of opening 12 new high schools.

A study of outcomes was undertaken 3 years after the reform. Attendance rates of first-time freshman at CHSRI small schools were better than for similar students at other Chicago public high schools. This difference varied from 9 fewer days in 2002–03 to 6 fewer days during the academic year 2004–05, and was statistically significant for all 3 years. Juniors at CHSRI schools were also absent fewer days than similar students but this difference was statistically significant only in 2002–03, when juniors were absent 9 fewer days than their peers in other similar Chicago schools. The dropout rate for freshmen at CHSRI in the first year was not significantly different from that for similar students at other schools. However, by junior year, students attending the first cohort of CHSRI schools were 7% less likely to have dropped out than equivalent students at other public high schools.

The beneficial value of small schools depends on the degree to which they encourage factors such as personalisation, interactive and authentic instruction, and challenging curriculum, while also promoting equitable student learning opportunities. Improved student outcomes result from numerous factors, both inside and outside the small school. The theory of small schools assume that if a district provides appropriate resources and policies, this will lead to the creation of small voluntary schools, in which teachers and principals experience limited bureaucratic regulation. Advocates of small school reform also believe that it will enable creation of school communities in which all students are held to high expectations and receive both personal and academic support.

Effective Teaching Profile (ETP)

The Effective Teaching Profile (ETP), in New Zealand, represents an operationalisation of Māori aspirations for education (Bishop et al. 2003). Interviews with Year 9 and Year 10 Māori students about what did and did not work for them in school identified the quality of their relationships and interactions with their teacher as the main influence on their educational achievement. Subsequently, students suggested teachers could help improve

their achievement by changing the way they related to and interacted with the Māori students in their class.

The ETP was developed from the student narratives. It identifies ways that teachers and leaders in secondary middle school can develop a pedagogy that is culturally responsive and embedded in relationships of mutual trust and respect. It promotes teachers' capability to make a positive difference to Māori student learning, the development of caring and learning classroom relationships and interactions, and a shift in classroom practices to a predominantly interactive model. The profile, in conjunction with information from the literature and narratives from parents, teachers and school principals, formed the basis of a professional development intervention.

The professional development component creates a power-sharing context where individuals work together to share and construct new knowledge. An external research and professional development team and in-school professional development facilitators run the professional development component, beginning with a 3-day staff induction workshop, where staff learn about the ETP and how to implement it. Following this, in-school facilitators observe participating teachers in class, followed by a meeting to receive feedback and develop goals. Group meetings are also undertaken for teachers across subjects to meet with a facilitator and discuss data they have taken on student participation and achievement. Facilitators follow up on the individual and group meetings in order to help teachers achieve the goals set in previous meetings. Additionally, facilitators will hold 'new knowledge' meetings to update and inform on new approaches and information.

The ETP was implemented with 11 teachers across 4 schools. Impact on attendance was variable. For example, in school 2, where 45% of students identified as Māori, Year 10 average attendance increased by 8%, with unexplained absences dropping from 8.3% in 2001 to 3.6% in 2002. However, where schools had prior attendance problems, the ETP did not appear to have an effect on overall attendance. For example, in school 4, where 74% of students were Māori, a high level of absenteeism of up to 25% in some classes had serious implications on the success of the program at the school, although attendance was stated to improve for some classes. Similarly, where attendance was not a pre-existing issue, there was no change in attendance rates at school 1 (data were not reported) and attendance rates remained constant at school 3 (at the attendance rate of 93%).

Success of this strategy was due to the professional development of teachers, which enables them to critically reflect upon how their own practices may affect Māori students. This strategy demonstrates that teachers may effectively influence Indigenous students' outcomes and achievements when they are provided with the opportunity to implement and practise their professional development. When implemented by effective teachers, the ETP can thus create a culturally appropriate and responsive context for learning.

School/family/community partnerships

In terms of school, family and community partnerships, the results from 3 distinct programs are presented: Pathways to Education, Big Brothers Big Sisters, and the Partnering to Assess and Counteract Truancy (PACT) program. Although these programs vary greatly from financial support to mentoring mechanisms, they all support relationship development, a theme that is linked throughout the discussion on the individual programs.

Pathways to Education

The mission of Pathways to Education is to work with and provide comprehensive support to low-income communities with high dropout rates, helping to give students the chance to graduate from high school and to access greater opportunities, including post-secondary education (Pathways to Education no date). The first community to implement the program was Toronto's Regent Park, in 2001. Since this time, the program has been delivered in 10 other Canadian communities.

The Pathways to Education program provides academic, financial, social and advocacy support over 4 years of secondary school to those from economically disadvantaged communities. Tutoring is provided by volunteers 4 nights a week, with sessions focusing on homework and assignments. Tutoring is mandatory twice a week if a student's marks fall below certain levels. Group mentoring is provided for Grade 9 and Grade 10 students with specialty and career mentoring being provided for Grade 11 and 12 students. Held on either a weekly or biweekly basis, group mentoring aims to provide pro-social and positive experiences where youths can further develop age-appropriate social skills, including problem solving, team building, communication and negotiation skills. In the later years, speciality mentoring focuses on the talents of students, helping to further develop their skills through group-based activities such as community groups, clubs and extracurricular programs. An advocacy role is undertaken by program staff members in order to facilitate healthy relationships and help develop the social capital required to succeed.

To assist with relationship development, each student is assigned a student-parent support worker who monitors school attendance, academic progress and program participation, also helping the student build stable relationships with parents, teachers and other students. The support worker advocates on behalf of the student when parents are unable to do so themselves. Reporting to parents, the support worker keeps parents connected with the program. Financial support consists of providing bus tickets and vouchers for school lunches; failure to attend classes will result in students losing their eligibility for these. Additionally, an incentive of a \$1,000 payment is provided for each year of participation in the Pathways to Education program to a maximum of \$4,000 for post-secondary education or training.

Overall, the Pathways to Education program improved attendance for all grades of students in all sites. The rate of 'high absenteeism,' defined as being absent 15% or more of the time, decreased for Grade 9 students across all program sites over the course of the program. No pre-intervention rates were available for comparison.

Big Brothers Big Sisters

The Big Brothers Big Sisters program provides a network of support for children and runs in all 50 states across America. The program is targeted at children most in need, including those living in single parent homes, growing up in poverty, and coping with parental incarceration. The program works with individual donors, foundations, corporations and others to fund and enable mentoring. This includes matching children with mentors and providing ongoing support to the child, volunteer mentor and child's family.

Community-based mentoring is the traditional program mentoring relationship, where one-on-one time is spent between a volunteer (Big) and young person (Little), undertaking small activities they enjoy together for a few hours a few times a month for a minimum of 12 months. The emphasis is on the gradual development of a friendship, rather than the activity itself. School-based mentoring is also an option as a mentoring method. In this

situation, Littles meet once a week with mentors in the school environment. While it is not designed to be a form of tutoring, some students do homework with their mentors; however, again, the focus of the relationship is about receiving friendship and guidance from their mentor.

Big Brothers Big Sisters hold itself accountable for each child in the program for achieving higher aspirations, greater confidence and better relationships; for avoiding risky behaviours; and for achieving educational success. Evidence on effectiveness is collected through the Youth Outcome Survey, comprising 32 questions and 8 measures used by program agencies to measure youth-related outcomes (Big Brothers Big Sisters 2012).

Truancy is a measure that falls within the 'avoidance of risky behaviour' strategic outcomes area. Results for the Youth Outcome Survey conducted in 2011 show truancy improvements for those participating in the program in 2009–10. The data show that 56.2% of all youths in community-based mentoring and 51.4% in school-based mentoring maintained or improved truancy. Similarly, 88.8% of participants in the community-based program, and 83.4% of youth in the school-based program, maintained or improved their avoidance of risky behaviours.

Compared with their non-mentored peers, Littles were less likely to have started 'skipping' school. Furthermore, a study of 200 adults who were mentored as children found that 64% of participants would describe their relationship with their Big as extremely important to them, confirming that long and enduring mentor relationships are possible and important. Additionally, 65% of participants said their Big helped them reach a higher level of education than they ever thought was possible, with 52% agreeing that their Big had kept them from dropping out of high school.

The success of this program was due to the focus on the relationship between Bigs and Littles. To develop a successful relationship, research stresses that mentors with goals of relationship development, as opposed to aiming to change or improve the student in some way, are more successful in building and sustaining effective relationships (Morrow et al. 1995).

Partnering to Assess and Counteract Truancy (PACT)

The Partnering to Assess and Counteract Truancy (PACT) program works with students and families within 2 partnering elementary schools: Kamaile and Maili, in the Waianae complex of the Hawaii State Department of Education (Nakamura et al. 2005). The goal of the program is to install a staff member at each school whose sole purpose is to focus on school attendance. The program's goals state that, ideally, this person should live in and have knowledge of the community, have an understanding of the education system and, importantly, be a community figure the students respect and therefore one to whom students are inclined to talk.

Project officers work with teachers and counsellors to identify students with attendance problems. It is then up to the school to contact the parent, via a letter exchange. The type of communication varies by the level of absenteeism and ranges from an expression of concern to reminders of the importance of education and regular timely attendance; it may include an explanation of Hawaii's school attendance law and possible consequences for violating it. If absences continue, a school team of program staff, the school counsellor and a social worker will assess the situation and the needs of the family, referring parents to appropriate community resources and services as required. In cases where the previous processes have failed to change attendance behaviour, the team prepares and submits a petition to the court for educational neglect as a last resort.

Results from an online database show that, on average, students improved their attendance, with unexcused absences dropping from an average of 19.55 days at intake, to 9.73 days 3 months after program implementation, and dropping further to 5.03 at 6 months.

One of the key elements of all the programs was relationship development. For example, in the Pathways to Education program, the student-parent support worker opened lines of communication between students, parents and teachers. In Big Brothers Big Sisters, the emphasis was on developing a relationship between Littles and Bigs, and the Partnering to Assess and Counteract Truancy program developed relationships between partnering schools. Therefore, as shown in the Australian context, relationships are an essential mechanism to success in school/family/community partnerships.

5 Conclusion

The findings from the literature review demonstrated that there were 9 types of strategies with demonstrated effectiveness in increasing the attendance of Indigenous students:

- engagement programs, including extra-curricular and out of school activities
- literacy and numeracy programs
- parental consequences for poor attendance
- incentive programs
- nutrition programs
- transport
- attendance monitoring programs
- whole-of-school approaches
- school/family/community partnerships.

The strategies addressed barriers across all key domains which affect attendance: school, structural/community, family, and student factors. The review reinforces the findings that no single policy or program will 'fix' the issues underpinning poor school attendance. Also, interventions aimed at individual students or families without concomitant change at the school or community level will not be able to sustain long-term change or improvement.

The general mechanisms that underpinned the success of the interventions fit with previous research suggesting that in order for strategies to be successful, they need to be clearly thought out; address identified needs; engage with staff, parents, students, and the community (where appropriate); be comprehensive (not piecemeal); be culturally appropriate; and collect evidence to evaluate their performance and impact (Bourke et al. 2000; Purdie & Buckley 2010).

Appendix A: Detailed tables

Appendix Table A1: State and Territory student attendance strategies

State/Territory	Strategy	Action(s)
New South Wales	Phone Intervention programs	<p>The Phone Intervention program involves teachers, school administrative staff or other personnel nominated by the principal making initial telephone contact with the parents or carers of students who are absent on a particular day. They:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • notify a parent or carer that their child is absent from school • ascertain whether or not the parent is aware of the absence. If parents or carers are unaware of the absence, the matter is investigated and appropriate disciplinary action taken • record any reasons offered by the parent or carer for the absence. Keep a written record of the reason provided and enter it on the school attendance register.
	Regional attendance programs	<p>Regional attendance teams are responsible for managing attendance issues in their designated areas. They are specifically responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monitoring levels of attendance at all schools in the region to identify areas of concern • assisting in the development, implementation and monitoring of regional Attendance Action Plans • managing and allocating Home School Liaison program resources within the region • implementing actions within specific timelines for student non-enrolment and non-attendance • monitoring the caseloads of home school liaison officers and Aboriginal student liaison officers so that if applications for support exceed program capacity, new cases are prioritised on a waiting list • maintaining a database of 'students whose whereabouts is unknown' following investigation by home school liaison officers and Aboriginal student liaison officers • providing support for the occupational health and safety of home school liaison officers and Aboriginal student liaison officers, by ensuring that safe and effective work practices are adopted and maintained by all attendance personnel • supporting the ongoing professional development of home school liaison officers and Aboriginal student liaison officers • reporting any concerns about risk of harm and/or any further information that may become available to the child or young person's school principal where the child is enrolled.
	Home School Liaison program	<p>Where schools have tried a range of strategies to address a student's poor school attendance, principals may apply to the Home School Liaison program for support. Home school liaison officers and Aboriginal student liaison officers work as a part of regional Student Services teams to support school practices that promote regular attendance. This support includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conducting periodic roll checks in schools, reporting outcomes to principals and recommending improvements where necessary • identifying safety, welfare and wellbeing concerns and reporting these concerns to the principal/work place manager

(continued)

Appendix Table A1 (continued): State and Territory student attendance strategies

State/Territory	Strategy	Action(s)
New South Wales (continued)	Home School Liaison program (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensuring regular feedback and communication with the principal/work place manager supporting schools interviewing students for whom attendance is an issue contacting and interviewing parents to resolve attendance issues developing student attendance improvement plans, in consultation with school personnel and parents, to resolve attendance issues supporting school attendance programs (for example, phone Intervention programs) participating in attending meetings with parents, students and school staff supporting the engagement of local communities related to student non-attendance issues working with other agencies (for example, NSW Police Force) on joint anti-truancy operations advising schools on additional strategies as an alternative to Home School Liaison program support.
	Strategies to support schools	<p>Joint anti-truancy operations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Home school liaison officers, Aboriginal student liaison officers and police officers conduct regular joint anti-truancy operations in areas such as shopping malls, parks, railway stations, internet cafes and amusement arcades. Students of compulsory school age detected during these operations without a leave pass are directed to return to school and their names provided to schools for follow-up action. <p>Non-attendance Interview programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Home school liaison officers and Aboriginal student liaison officers participate in non-attendance interview programs at the request of the school. The object of a non-attendance interview program is to reduce the number of unjustified absences by talking with the students concerned. They also provide students with an opportunity to highlight the impediments to their attendance (for example, relationships with teachers/peers, bullying (Intranet), curriculum). Schools then have the opportunity to address these issues.
Victoria	Whole-of-school strategies	<p>Successful whole-of-school approaches to attendance identify effective prevention and early intervention strategies such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> clear written and verbal statements made regularly to parents/carers and students about school and community attendance expectations promotion of awareness that absence results in quantifiable lost learning time and opportunities whole-of-school modelling of punctuality delegation of responsibilities to all staff, with a key member of staff leading attendance improvement initiatives regular discussions on student attendance in staff meetings and in the staff performance and development review process understanding of the causal factors of absence, and the need for targeted interventions implementation of effective and supportive transition programs, including student transitions between different learning areas and levels within the school, and pathways and careers support programs class and home group structures and environments that enable opportunities for increased connectedness to individual teachers and peers individual student learning plans, including attendance and punctuality goals

(continued)

Appendix Table A1 (continued): State and Territory student attendance strategies

State/Territory	Strategy	Action(s)
Victoria (continued)	Whole-of-school strategies (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provision of out-of-school programs, including breakfast, homework and walking bus clubs • structures and activities encouraging parents/carers' involvement in the life of the school • collaborative and cooperative programs with other schools, community groups and agencies • use of the 'student mapping tool', developed to help school students at risk of early leaving or disengagement. The tool can be used to assess and plan for whole-of-school needs, and to monitor individual student progress, evaluate the efficacy of the interventions being used, and assist schools in reporting and student management.
	Targeted responses for students with attendance issues	<p>When a more targeted response is required, effective intervention strategies for students with inconsistent attendance or chronic absence patterns include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • immediate follow-up of individual student absences • developing collaborative and empowering relationships between teachers, students and parents/carers • inclusive practices, such as the translation of materials, the use of interpreters and flexibility in meeting arrangements • organising attendance-focused meetings with parents/carers and students • forming student support groups to enable a coordinated response to support for individual students and parents/carers • individual student attendance goal setting and data-driven improvement plans • transparent and immediate follow-up of any problems identified by students and parents/carers • formal procedures for supporting the learning of a student absent for an extended period • positive and flexible support and follow-up with students on their return to school, including the use of Return to School Plans and modification of learning outcomes where required • referring of individual students and parents/carers to community agencies for additional support.
	Attendance follow-up	<p>If, within 3 days of the initial absence, the parents/carers fail to provide an explanation, or the explanation provided is deemed unsatisfactory by the school, contact must again be made with the parents/carers requesting a satisfactory explanation.</p> <p>Attendance meetings with parents/carers and students should be convened following initial contact with the parents/ carers, when a student's attendance pattern is of concern to the school. The purpose of these meetings is to review strategies initiated to support the student's attendance and to examine why non-attendance has not been resolved.</p> <p>The meeting should establish a shared understanding of accountability and strategies for improving the attendance of the student. Ideally, the student should be involved in the process of problem identification and improvement goal setting.</p> <p>When a school feels that it has exhausted all strategies for addressing a student's unsatisfactory attendance, the regional office should be contacted to provide additional advice and support.</p>

(continued)

Appendix Table A1 (continued): State and Territory student attendance strategies

State/Territory	Strategy	Action(s)
Queensland	Five-step model	<p>1. Develop a school attendance policy: Staff, parents and students collaboratively develop a clear, inclusive and simple attendance policy that promotes high expectations of student attendance. The policy, including clear expectations about attendance, is communicated consistently to students and the school community through the schools website, newsletters and in the school's enrolment package.</p> <p>2. Record and follow up student absences: Schools should have consistent and effective follow-up processes for unexplained student absences. Timely follow-up is a key preventative strategy in reducing absenteeism. It makes it harder for students to miss school without being caught. It also enables those parents who may not be aware that their children are absent to take action.</p> <p>3. Monitor student non-attendance and patterns of non-attendance: The school's attendance data should be analysed to identify absenteeism trends and individual students with high levels of absenteeism. Schools should investigate absentee rates and their relationship to factors such as the day of the week, the class/subject/year level and particular gender/cultural groups.</p> <p>4. Develop a positive school culture: Schools develop a safe and supportive school environment that promotes positive relationships and includes the implementation of programs which develop social and emotional skills, peer tutoring and mentoring, and anti-bullying strategies. It is also important to establish positive home-school relationships to assist parents to support their child's attendance at school.</p> <p>5. Collaborate with other agencies: Schools implement appropriate strategies/support mechanisms, including liaising with other agencies such as Queensland Police and local non-government organisations, to address the trends or to support individual students and their families to encourage attendance.</p>
South Australia	Educational programs that promote attendance and engagement for all children and students	<p>The South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services, through its offices, preschools and schools and in partnership with their communities, will provide an educational program that promotes attendance and engagement for all children and students enrolled in government preschools and schools.</p> <p>Educators at preschools and schools will actively intervene when attendance and engagement patterns indicate that learners are at risk of not realising their educational and social development potential.</p> <p>Policy outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improvement in children's and students' attendance and participation as shown in the data collected by each preschool and school • improvement in learning outcomes as measured by preschool, school and system assessment processes • increased understanding of the importance of regular attendance by the community of educators, learners and families of each preschool and school • each preschool and school reporting to its community and the Department of Education and Children's Services on attendance through the annual reporting cycle • ongoing analysis of attendance data which informs the review of each preschool's and school's policies and procedures • procedures based on the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data to improve attendance being implemented and monitored by the Department of Education and Children's Services through its offices, preschools and schools.

(continued)

Appendix Table A1 (continued): State and Territory student attendance strategies

State/Territory	Strategy	Action(s)
South Australia (continued)	Educational programs that promote attendance and engagement for all children and students (continued)	<p>Strategies to support the achievement of policy outcomes listed above include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • preschool and schools, in consultation with their communities, developing and implementing an Attendance Improvement Plan, which includes attendance targets • preschool and schools monitoring and analysing attendance data to enable sites to implement strategies to ensure that improvement targets identified in the Attendance Improvement Plan are met • monitoring and analysis of state-wide data to inform the Department of Education and Children's Services on strategic directions regarding policy and program development • coordination of interagency support by preschool, school or district support staff, as appropriate when intervention is required • engagement of children and students in their learning through quality curriculum, teaching and learning, relationships, and appropriate preschool and school structures and processes.
Western Australia	Better Attendance: Brighter Futures	<p>Better Attendance: Brighter Futures is a broad strategy that promotes the mutual responsibility of schools, parents and communities to address poor student attendance. It increases the flexibility of schools to tailor solutions to their local context.</p> <p>Key target groups are Indigenous students; truants; students from Kindergarten to Year 4; students moving from Year 7 to Year 8; Year 10 students; and Year 11 and 12 students not engaged in education, training or employment.</p>
	Ensuring all children are enrolled in school	<p>All children who are not enrolled in an education program will be identified through data matching between the department of Education and other relevant agencies including Centrelink, Medicare, the Office of the Attorney General and/or Department of Health.</p> <p>This strategy will be supported through the Tri-border Attendance Initiative, where students will be tracked across the borders of Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory. This will enable information to be shared and will engage agencies to support attendance and enrolment, particularly those of transient Indigenous students.</p>
	Giving direct support to schools and communities with the greatest need	<p>Each year, schools and communities or clusters of schools with the most serious non-attendance problems are identified using the annual attendance audit data, including attendance rate and percentage of students in each at-risk category disaggregated by Aboriginality. They are supported in establishing a committee to participate in an Attendance Improvement Measure to profile student attendance, and plan and implement improvement strategies for the whole school. Support includes profiling tools, strategic planning materials, training, funding and practical advice.</p>
	Ensuring strong support and action in the early years and at transition points	<p>All families will receive information to support attendance when they enrol in kindergarten, pre-primary and Year 1, or when enrolling in a new school. This information will promote the importance of attendance, give parents simple strategies to support regular attendance and outline parents' obligations in relation to attendance.</p> <p>This strategy will be supported by the universal access commitment under the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education, which provides all children with access to enrol and attend their local kindergarten and pre-primary school from 2013. Expanded kindergarten from 11 to 15 hours a week will also be rolled out over the next 3 years. Children from Indigenous, disadvantaged and/or culturally and linguistically diverse families will be supported and encouraged to enrol their children.</p>

(continued)

Appendix Table A1 (continued): State and Territory student attendance strategies

State/Territory	Strategy	Action(s)
Western Australia (continued)	Recognising initiatives that encourage student attendance and parent participation	<p>The Western Australian Department of Education will work with schools implementing attendance incentive programs such as Passports to monitor and assess their effectiveness and broaden the application of successful programs. The department will support schools to implement programs that encourage and recognise parent participation and involvement in school communities.</p> <p>Attendance Improvement Measure schools implementing breakfast and lunch programs will be supported through agencies such as Foodbank.</p>
	Notifying schools early where non-attendance is a serious issue	<p>All schools will be notified immediately through the School Information System of non-attendance patterns that are reaching critical levels.</p> <p>This will occur in 2 ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Establishing a non-attendance alert process:</i> This will immediately indicate to staff that an individual student or a cohort is at risk and may require support. • <i>Expanding the SMS communication tool:</i> This will be expanded to more schools likely to benefit from the instantaneous notification to parents of unauthorised absences. <p>The student attendance audit, conducted twice a year (1 voluntary audit and 1 mandatory audit), provides detailed comparative data to schools, clusters and system wide; it will be further improved to give schools and clusters greater access to attendance information that supports effective planning and appropriate allocation of resources.</p>
	Supporting parents to take responsibility for their child's attendance at school	<p>Under the <i>Parental Support and Responsibility Act 2008 (WA)</i>, the Western Australian Department of Education can instigate responsible parenting agreements and request responsible parenting orders, where appropriate.</p> <p>The process of prosecuting parents who fail to support their children's attendance at school will be simplified. It will include fast-tracking prosecutions where there is a history of parent non-responsiveness.</p> <p>This strategy also includes the expansion of the Positive Parenting program to 120 metropolitan and 60 regional centres over the next 4 years. The program supports parents in developing the skills to manage their children in a positive way and establish routines that are conducive to regular school attendance.</p>
	Establishing partnerships with local businesses and agencies to improve attendance	<p>Community agreements will be established to formalise integrated action at the local level, including partnerships between schools and industry, business, agencies and local government.</p> <p>Local partnerships between schools and the Western Australian Police will be facilitated by the Department of Education to conduct anti-truancy operations such as Street Sweeps and expand programs such as Keeping Kids in Schools. Processes will be established.</p> <p>The Department of Education will also improve the standardised leave pass system to strengthen links with Western Australian Police and parents.</p>
	Providing professional learning for school staff and community	<p>Professional learning in culturally appropriate, practical responses to attendance will be developed and offered to schools. Training will be mandatory for staff in those schools identified as most at risk.</p> <p>The Improving Attendance resource currently used by schools will be revised to include practical attendance strategies and information on how to re-engage students with poor attendance, encourage parental engagement and ways to develop community partnerships. The resource will be distributed to all public schools and made available online to private schools. It will contain specific strategies linked to the various causes of poor attendance.</p>

(continued)

Appendix Table A1 (continued): State and Territory student attendance strategies

State/Territory	Strategy	Action(s)
Western Australia (continued)	Making regular attendance a priority across the department	<p>All schools will set attendance improvement targets which will be monitored through accountability processes.</p> <p>Principals of schools with serious attendance problems will have improved student attendance included in their performance agreements.</p> <p>Data systems will be created for schools that link attendance with other indicators of education risk such as literacy and behaviour.</p> <p>Research will be conducted to establish the current causes of non-attendance and the most effective evidence-based responses.</p> <p>Current programs and services that support schools to improve attendance will provide better links to support schools to improve attendance. Such programs and services include school psychology services, the chaplaincy program, and participation coordinators.</p>
Tasmania	Implementation of attendance policies	<p>Responsibilities of school principals and polytechnic regional managers include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring that parents and student understand the legislative requirements for enrolment, attendance and completion of education • ensuring that students and parents have completed the necessary formalities associated with enrolment, including the required enrolment form and associated documentation • implementing attendance policy and associated procedures and guidelines • maintaining an official record of attendance for each enrolled student. This must include any off-site provision • ensuring that all part-time attendance arrangements for students are formally documented, stored and reviewed • ensuring that any intervention processes due to non-attendance are documented and that the appropriate documents are used.
Northern Territory	Every Child, Every Day	<p>The Every Child, Every Day strategy sets out how enrolment, attendance and participation of students in the Northern Territory are to be improved. It includes 5 priority action areas to help parents, schools and communities to overcome some of the barriers to success.</p> <p>Key target groups include Indigenous students; middle school students; those aged 15-17 who are not engaged in education, training or a job; and students with attendance rates between 50% and 90%.</p>
	Getting everyone on the same page—shared beliefs and understandings	<p>Children and young people are much more likely to be enrolled in school, attend regularly and take part in training or work when parents and communities understand how important it is. The Value of Schooling campaign was launched in 2009 as part of the <i>A Smart Territory Strategic Plan 2009–2012</i>. It:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promotes education as a critical factor in gaining equity • sends targeted key messages to the community • reinforces that schools are trusted, positive places for children and community • includes localised advertising, using local people • informs parents about their responsibilities and school enrolment, attendance and participation laws • provides resources for schools to use when working with families.

(continued)

Appendix Table A1 (continued): State and Territory student attendance strategies

State/Territory	Strategy	Action(s)
Northern Territory (continued)	Making leadership in improving attendance and participation front and centre	<p>Strategies include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improved school planning and data collection to help schools focus on what needs to be done to improve attendance and participation • creating a new Participation and Pathways Team —overseeing enrolment, attendance and youth participation • growing a stable, local education workforce • new processes for dealing with absenteeism, including working closely with individual children and their families, engaging in Family Responsibility Agreements and a tougher system of fines.
	Making schools safe and welcoming places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families as First Teachers—Indigenous parenting support services • partnerships with non-government organisations to help middle and senior school students to re-engage with school, including initiatives like Sporting Chance academies and the Clontarf Foundation • Positive Learning Centres—urban-based programs for students with severe and persistently disruptive behaviour, including support services and programs to help get them back into school • School-wide Positive Behaviour program —to be piloted in selected middle schools in Darwin and at the Centralian Middle School • NT ConnectEd—connecting young people with special needs to educational opportunities • Schools as Safe, Supportive Places—aligning and coordinating mental health and child protection resources; the 'Keeping Safe' Child Protection Curriculum; and expansion of the Remote School Counsellor program • Early intervention for students with special needs—a stronger local focus.
	Real home, school, business and community partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work with parents, businesses and communities to create real, sharp and strong agreements that outline what schools, parents, businesses and the community will do to improve enrolment, attendance and participation. • Integrated Child and Family Services— making sure parents and communities have the support and help they need to give every child the best start in life. • No School No Service—a partnership with police, the Chamber of Commerce and businesses. • Tri-Border Strategy—sharing enrolment information with South Australia and Western Australia to help track and support families who move between communities.
	Relevant and interesting learning pathway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal Access to Early Childhood Education—making sure young children get a head-start in life and develop strong habits for attendance. • Bright Future scholarships—for high-attending Indigenous students in years 10, 11 and 12. • Beyond School Guarantee— guaranteeing a pathway to work, university or training for students who attend school regularly, participate and behave well. • Get VET, Get a Future—quality senior secondary Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs that lead to a job. • VET in the Middle—introducing VET and work experience for students in the middle years. • Centres of Excellence—providing opportunities for students to gain access to innovative programs, industry experience and fast-tracked university entry. • Expansion of the WorkReady program.

(continued)

Appendix Table A1 (continued): State and Territory student attendance strategies

State/Territory	Strategy	Action(s)
Australian Capital Territory	Community involvement	Schools should develop their own school-based attendance procedures, which, where possible, should be negotiated with the school's community.
	Communication with students, parents and staff	The school attendance procedures should be communicated to students, parents and staff regularly, and written information given to each child's parents on enrolment at the school. Schools should provide all staff (teaching, non-teaching, temporary and permanent) with information about attendance procedures when they start at the school.
	Targeted strategies for individuals	<p>A school's procedures should include provision of support and strategies to work closely with appropriate individuals, parents and community organisations having regard for social, cultural and religious factors associated with Indigenous children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, students with disabilities and socially disadvantaged children.</p> <p>The relevant school network leader will support the principal to develop appropriate strategies where attendance of a student is an issue.</p>
	Principal responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual school procedures should clearly outline the procedure for principals to follow in notifying the non-attendance of a child. The unexplained non-attendance of a child should be reported by the school to the parent as soon as reasonably possible to ensure the safety of the child. • Principals are required to follow up unexplained absences. When unexplained absences reach a maximum of 7 days in a school year, principals will start official procedures to ensure that students meet the school attendance requirement, in consultation with their school network leader. Partial day unexplained absences will be counted as 1 day.

Appendix Table A2: Programs with anecdotal evaluation data

Program name	Source	Summary of program
Girri Girri Sports Academy (Indigenous students)	< http://www.girrigirrisportsacademy.com/index.html >	The program is high school based and membership to the academy is decided upon by the individual schools. Aim of academies is to improve education outcomes including attendance, retention and completion rates to Year 12 (or its vocational equivalent). Participation in sports is a subsidiary outcome but helps attract students to the program. Operating since 2007.
Bikes in Schools, Bikes Palya — APY Lands (Mainstream, but in an area with large proportion of Indigenous students)	< http://www.bikesa.asn.au/Schools > < http://www.bikesa.asn.au/Bikes-Palya-BMX > < http://www.npywc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/NGU-2013.pdf >	Bicycle SA's 'Bikes Palya' (translates as 'Bikes are great') program is using cycling to engage with school students in the remote Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankuntjatjara (APY) Lands, in 3 schools (Amata, Ernabella and Fregon). Approximately 220 students from reception to senior secondary participate. It offers a new and engaging way of teaching numeracy and literacy skills by using cycling related problems, and has helped improve school attendance.
Growing Our Own	< http://www.apjce.org/files/APJCE_11_3_57_65.pdf >	As part of the Australian Government funded project, Growing Our Own, Charles Darwin University, in partnership with the Darwin Catholic Education Office, is delivering a pre-service education degree program to remote Indigenous communities. The overarching goals of the program are to empower: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indigenous educators to join culturally relevant ways of being, knowing and doing with contemporary curriculum and pedagogical knowledge non-Indigenous teacher mentors to understand culturally relevant Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing and infuse these with contemporary curriculum and pedagogical knowledge to strengthen opportunities for children's learning. <p><i>I believe the Growing Our Own project has been invaluable in empowering the local staff in our school. My assistant Teacher...has developed good skills and has taken responsibility for the students' learning (Mentor Teacher).</i></p>

(continued)

Appendix Table A2 (continued): Programs with anecdotal evaluation data

Program name	Source	Summary of program
Deadly Start 2 High School (targeted towards Aboriginal students)	< http://www.whatworks.edu.au/dbAction.do?cmd=displaySitePage1&subcmd=select&id=542 > < http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/southernadelaide/files/links/13_May_2009.pdf > — brief program detail	Transition program focused on student engagement as a form of retention method. The Deadly Start 2 High School transition program is taking place in the Southern Adelaide region of the Department of Education and Community Services. This is a large region, stretching from Glenelg to Sellicks Beach. Last year, a total of 60 students from 13 primary schools and 8 high schools were involved. Benefits for primary school students are in terms of better transition to high school, while high school students have an opportunity to act as mentors. The program is not designed to replace the transition days run by individual high schools, but rather to provide extra opportunities for students to step out of their comfort zones and get ready for change.
Accelerated Literacy/Deadly Writin', Readin' and Talkin' (Mainstream, but in an area with large proportion of Indigenous students)	< http://www.appa.asn.au/~appa/images/articles/scaffoldedliteracy.pdf >	Accelerated Literacy is a pedagogy that helps learners to read and write complex texts with the support of their teachers and peers. It has been developed over the past 8 years by Dr Brian Gray and Wendy Cowey of Charles Darwin University. The aims of Accelerated Literacy are more rigorous than just teaching students to read, spell and write, talk and think critically, although it does address all those aspects of literacy: it aims to assist students in developing a literate orientation to text, to view texts in a literate way. Gray argues that students must be apprenticed into the ways of talking, viewing and thinking that are part of a literate discourse in Western culture. <i>The security and predictability it provides makes it our most successful attendance strategy – students know what happens in Literacy Focus Time and how to engage successfully in lessons, feel successful and love being able to answer all the questions!</i>
Carnarvon Primary School— Positive Incentive Program (Mainstream, but in an area with large proportion of Indigenous students)	< http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/schools/publications/2000/Attend_Synth.pdf > p. 43	The Positive Incentive Program aims to create a positive school environment. It links all the school's incentive strategies in a comprehensive manner so as to encourage academic excellence and appropriate behaviour. This program is based on a system whereby students gain points for good behaviour, academic achievement and community or citizenship involvement. Points can be gained for picking up litter, attendance at school, and even being happy. Parents and staff see the program as being successful, with an 80% drop in school behaviour problems, and a large jump in parent attendance at school functions. Lunchtime clubs with a large range of activities are an integral part of the program which has seen an increase in student self-esteem and attendance at school. The clubs have positive consequences in that they allow students and teachers to see one another in a different light.

(continued)

Appendix Table A2 (continued): Programs with anecdotal evaluation data

Program name	Source	Summary of program
Badu Island case study	< http://www.whatworks.edu.au/upload/1251417159008_file_SuccessPrac.pdf >	<p>Badu Island State School is on Badu Island, in the Torres Strait. In 2000, there were 176 students enrolled at the school. Approximately 80% are Torres Strait Islanders while 20% are Papuan students.</p> <p>The year 8 transition program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Until 2000, all students had to leave the community after Year 7 if they were going to continue to secondary school. A community survey identified about 20 potential students for a program to assist the transition of students from Year 7 to Year 8 on the mainland. As a group, they were having difficulty with literacy, numeracy and general readiness for secondary school; as well, their parents preferred that they stay on Badu Island. <p>The results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the end of 2000, a review of the program was facilitated by the District Director and included interviews with students, parents and school staff. Some of the findings include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The average daily attendance was 98%. This was deemed extremely successful, considering that the students had previously not been attending school at all and many were 'at-risk'. Parents were very happy with the education their children had received. Students who had been identified as having low self-esteem had improved markedly in this respect. Students had shown leadership in various aspects of the school. Students were saying they felt ready to go on to Year 9 at high school. Parents were impressed with the progress made in technology, and through the use of the Internet. Students felt more confident with literacy and numeracy. From a generally low base, their levels of literacy and numeracy were improving steadily if not dramatically.
Working Together for Indigenous Youth and the Indigenous New Media program (Le Fevre High School, Indigenous students)	< http://www.saaetcb.org.au/media/docs/draft_september_2.pdf >	<p>Le Fevre High School</p> <p>The Working Together project was a pilot project which focused on making small movie pieces in which Indigenous students tell their own stories. This was made with an industry film maker and gave students exposure to the real world media. It provided opportunities for the Aboriginal Education Team to interact with students positively and to support and encourage students.</p> <p>The success of the pilot stage then prompted staff to seek funding for the Indigenous New Media program. This has been running for 3 years and is funded through the Australian Government. Film maker David Kaurna is working with parents and grandparents to tell stories about how they support students in school. The students have interviewed local Kaurna elders including Uncle Lewis O'Brien and Auntie Josie Agius. The principal reports that the opportunity for people to tell their stories has encouraged greater understanding of cultural history. A high-quality final film product has been invaluable in boosting student self-confidence and pride.</p>

(continued)

Appendix Table A2 (continued): Programs with anecdotal evaluation data

Program name	Source	Summary of program
Happy Kids	http://www.det.wa.edu.au/docs/carnarvonhappykids.pdf http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/key-resources/programs-projects?pid=184 http://www.dia.wa.gov.au/Documents/ReportsPublications/OvercomingIndigenousDisadvantage/OIDSSummaryBooklet.pdf	<p>The Happy Kids project, established by the Department of Education and Training, has been extended by the Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate to include Indigenous school-aged children. The project focuses on establishing and promoting resilience and emotional wellbeing in Indigenous children and teenagers during the school period from years 6 to 10. The aim of the project is to monitor the cognitive, social and emotional wellbeing development of the Indigenous children as they experience and cope with complex issues during this developmental stage. The project involves 3 components: kids at-risk, school-based activities and school expos for the wider school community. Kurongkurl Katitjin, Centre for Indigenous Education and Research at Edith Cowan University, is conducting a project to measure the success of this project.</p> <p>Case study:</p> <p>Carnarvon and East Carnarvon primary schools recently held school expos as part of the Happy Kids program, designed to boost students' attendance, participation and achievements. According to a source,</p> <p><i>'Happy Kids was not developed specifically for Indigenous students, but we found the generic program was having outstanding results for Aboriginal children.'</i></p> <p><i>'The program was expanded following its success in Perth, and due to its great results we extended it to schools that have a high proportion of Aboriginal students.'</i></p> <p><i>'It's one of the few programs we have that specifically looks at the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal students and has proved to be very successful.'</i></p> <p>The school expos combined health messages such as smoking awareness, drug awareness and the benefits of an active lifestyle with activities designed to encourage students to attend school.</p>

(continued)

Appendix Table A2 (continued): Programs with anecdotal evaluation data

Program name	Source	Summary of program
Families as First Teachers—Indigenous Parents Support Services program	http://www.det.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0013/21532/FaFT_Newsletter2011Sem2.pdf http://www.det.nt.gov.au/parents-community/early-childhood-services/families-as-first-teachers-program	<p>Families as First Teachers was created in June 2005 to support Indigenous parents in assisting their young children's early literacy and numeracy development and to cater for those students whose attendance at school was marginal to nil.</p> <p>This program focuses on providing Indigenous parenting support services in the areas of early learning, child development knowledge, and health, hygiene and nutrition.</p> <p>Parenting and family support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Families as First Teachers program works to strengthen positive relationships in families, promote positive behaviour in children and build confidence in parenting. This is done through modeling behaviour management at the early learning sessions, encouraging families in their interactions, group discussions, parenting workshops, home visiting and individual consultations. The program takes a strength-based approach to parenting, working from the belief that all families want the best start in life for their children. <p>Early learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The early years of a child's life are the most important for learning and development. The Families as First Teachers program builds family knowledge of early learning through active engagement in quality early childhood education programs. Play-based programs support families through modelling, side-by-side engagement and discussion. Resources have been developed to give families information about how young children learn and how parents can make the most of everyday opportunities. These resources can be used in group or individual family settings. <p>School readiness is addressed through the Families as First Teachers program in early learning groups with a focus on literacy and numeracy foundations, orientation to school programs and parent engagement initiatives. A dual generational approach provides adult activities during early learning sessions.</p>
Mobile preschool	http://ccde.menzies.edu.au/sites/default/files/FINAL%20Mobile%20Preschool%20Evaluation_gn.pdf	<p>During the 2010 school year, 7 new onsite, outreach and mobile preschool programs were piloted in small remote homelands and town camp communities where children had not previously had access to preschool or had not been accessing existing preschool programs. An additional 45 students, 38 of whom are Indigenous, received a preschool program through these pilots.</p>

(continued)

Appendix Table A2 (continued): Programs with anecdotal evaluation data

Program name	Source	Summary of program
Beenleigh Together Against Truancy	< http://www.beenpcyc.org.au/activity-info/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20Beenleigh%20Together%20Against%20Truancy.pdf >	<p>Program run in 2009</p> <p>Objective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The program aims to reduce the number of good order offences and calls for service committed in and around the Beenleigh and Windaroo central business districts by targeting students who are truanting from Beenleigh State High School and Windaroo Valley State High School (Queensland). <p>Target group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At-risk students attending Beenleigh State High School or Windaroo Valley State High School, in years 8–12, who test the system by truanting. <p>Program goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce truancy among those in years 8–12 at Beenleigh State High School and Windaroo Valley State High School Reduce crime (shoplifting, disturbances, fighting, graffiti, antisocial behaviour) Reduce calls for service Increase community satisfaction levels Decrease the number of ‘gangs’ hanging around shops at inappropriate hours Educate the businesses on the ‘ID Attend’ card system Encourage businesses to place a sign up stating they will not serve school students without an ‘ID Attend’ card. <p>Process for achieving outcomes involves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Truancy officer to implement and monitor program prevention strategy (businesses and community) Engagement strategy (youth and parents) Absence identification (Police-Citizens Youth Club - PCYC and Police) Absence management (schools and parents).
Tri-border strategy	< http://www.education.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/15140/EveryChildEveryDayActionPlan.pdf >	<p>The Northern Territory, Western Australia, South Australia and Australian governments are signatories to a joint strategy that allows the sharing of information across borders to address the issue of significant absenteeism in very remote schools resulting from the regular movement of families between communities.</p> <p>A central database of all student enrolment and attendance information in targeted schools is being established. The database will allow principals to share student enrolment and attendance details and educational plans so teachers can plan sustainable, consistent and engaging learning programs. The Tri-Border strategy concentrates on schools in the Alice Springs and Katherine regions in the Northern Territory. It was implemented in Semester 2, 2010.</p>

(continued)

Appendix Table A2 (continued): Programs with anecdotal evaluation data

Program name	Source	Summary of program
Whole-of-school practice— Port Adelaide Primary School case study	< http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/speced2/files/links/link_66901.pdf >	<p>The 2 parts of the strategy were aimed at addressing identity, community issues and cultural influences for Indigenous students, and involved: (i) surveying families—to gather information about which groups they belonged to, and the use of Aboriginal English in the home and (ii) developing a club ('Purliana Inbarendi' [Stars working together]) to increase involvement and ownership of students. The club held activities during school hours each Friday, such as finding the students' family groups and locating them on a map, storytelling about the Dreamings, and art and craft with an hourly paid instructor. Parents were invited to attend sessions, which allowed them to have informal chats with school staff.</p> <p>Attendance and punctuality improved dramatically; parent/caregiver response was positive; the students had increased self-esteem, identity, and a sense of belonging to a group; teachers noticed students were more settled in class and behaviour improved, particularly on club days (that is, when the club meets); students were more willing to share their work on a regular basis, and were more active and involved in decision making in the classroom.</p>

Appendix Table A3. School reference index

School name	Initiative	Australia or international
Ashmont Public School	Engagement	Australia
Willowra School	Literacy and numeracy	Australia
Neerigen Brook Primary School	Incentives	Australia
Neerigen Brook Primary School	Whole-of-school	Australia
Aurukun	Parental consequence	Australia
Eagleby South State School	Transport	Australia
Mount Lockyer Primary School	School/family/community partnership	Australia
Shepherdson College	School/family/community partnership	Australia
Halls Creek District High School	Engagement	Australia
Goulburn Valley	Whole-of-school	Australia
Aurukun, Coen, Mossman Gorge, Hope Vale	Parental consequence	Australia
Elcho Island	Parental consequence	Australia
Eagleby South State School	Parental consequence	Australia
Shepherdson College	Transport	Australia
Woodridge State High	Attendance monitoring	Australia
Goonellabah area	School/family/community partnership	Australia
Daly region	School/family/community partnership	Australia
Wadeye	Grow your own	Australia
Woodburn High School	Engagement	International
Temecula Valley Unified School District	Incentives	International
Chicago Public High School	Whole-of-school	International
Lac du Flambeau	Parental consequences	International
Minnnetonka High School	Attendance monitoring	International
Te Kotahitanga	Whole-of-school	International
Toronto Regent Park	School/family/community partnership	International
Ohio	School/family/community partnership	International
Kamaile	School/family/community partnership	International
Mali	School/family/community partnership	International

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This report reviews the available evidence on effective strategies for improving attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Analysis of this literature yielded nine types of strategies or interventions with demonstrated evidence of effectiveness. The report discusses each of these strategies, presenting examples of successful programs and the mechanisms that appear to underpin their effectiveness.