



Australian Government

**Australian Institute of
Health and Welfare**

SCSEEC successful school attendance strategies evidence-based project

Literature review



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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
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.

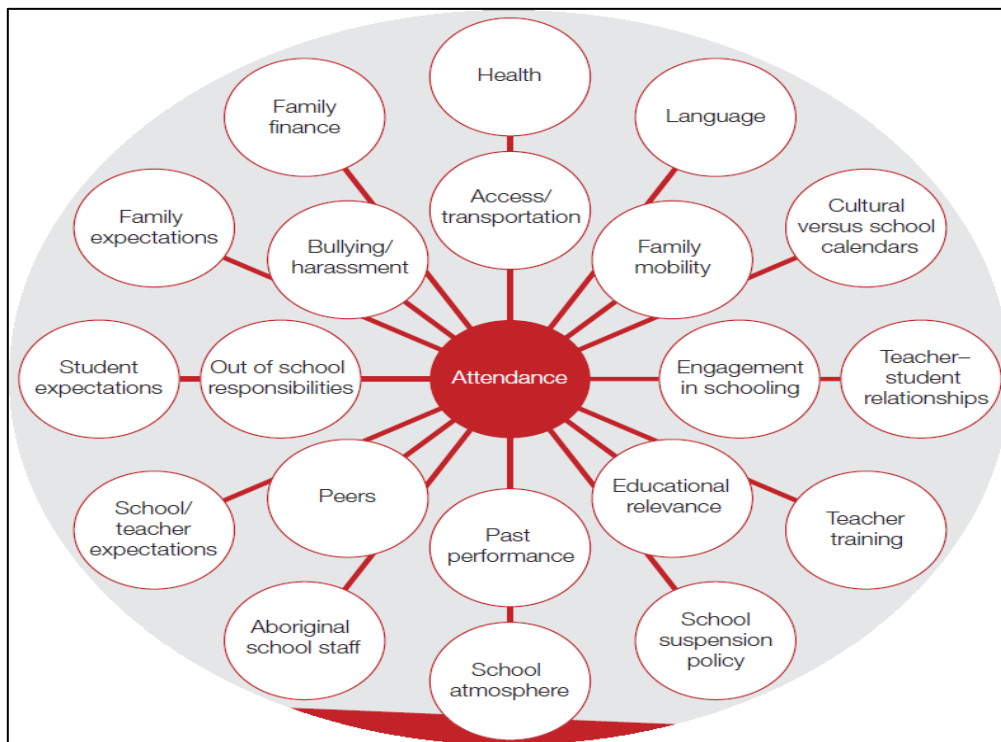


Figure 1.1: Summary of issues relating to attendance

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 ATSI-EAP 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 Assessed Collection	Increasing school attendance	109	15
ProQuest	Indigenous school attendance	1,320	18
ERIC	School Attendance AND programs	5	11
Google Scholar	Evaluations AND Indigenous school attendance	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	Extracurricular activity programs	
	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.
	Music and arts programs	
	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.
	Sporting programs	
	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>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>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>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>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>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>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>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>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 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/co mmunity 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>
Aboriginal education workers	<p>The role of Aboriginal education workers is to enhance the strategies discussed above.</p>	<p>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.</p>

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

Sheperdson 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	<p>Woodburn High School, Hydroville Curriculum project</p> <p>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.</p>	<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	<p>Tuancy Reduction Program: a community approach at Lac du Flambeau Tribe</p> <p>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.</p>	<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	<p>Count Me In! campaign</p> <p>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.</p>	<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	<p>Minnetonka (Minnesota) School District's high school attendance policy</p> <p>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.</p>	<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	<p>Chicago High School Redesign Initiative (CHSRI)</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>First-time freshmen attending schools set up under the CHSRI were absent fewer days than their peers at other Chicago public high schools:</p> <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). <p>Juniors at CHSRI schools were also absent fewer days than students at other similar Chicago schools:</p> <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	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="598 336 2036 411">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. <li data-bbox="598 424 2036 499">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. <li data-bbox="598 512 2036 587">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. <li data-bbox="598 600 2036 675">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. <li data-bbox="598 687 2036 762">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.
South Australia	Educational programs that promote attendance and engagement for all children and students	<p data-bbox="598 786 2036 861">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 data-bbox="598 874 2036 924">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 data-bbox="598 936 768 960">Policy outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="598 971 1845 995">• improvement in children's and students' attendance and participation as shown in the data collected by each preschool and school <li data-bbox="598 1008 1615 1032">• improvement in learning outcomes as measured by preschool, school and system assessment processes <li data-bbox="598 1045 2036 1067">• increased understanding of the importance of regular attendance by the community of educators, learners and families of each preschool and school <li data-bbox="598 1080 1995 1129">• each preschool and school reporting to its community and the Department of Education and Children's Services on attendance through the annual reporting cycle <li data-bbox="598 1142 1744 1166">• ongoing analysis of attendance data which informs the review of each preschool's and school's policies and procedures <li data-bbox="598 1179 2036 1227">• 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	Strategies include: <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	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. The relevant school network leader will support the principal to develop appropriate strategies where attendance of a student is an issue.
	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 Aunty 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	<p><http://www.det.wa.edu.au/docs/carnarvonhappykids.pdf></p> <p><http://www.healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/key-resources/programs-projects?pid=184></p> <p><http://www.dia.wa.gov.au/Documents/ReportsPublications/OvercomingIndigenousDisadvantage/OIDSummaryBooklet.pdf></p>	<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	<p data-bbox="427 316 869 395"><http://www.det.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0013/21532/FaFT_Newsletter2011Sem2.pdf></p> <p data-bbox="427 403 869 480"><http://www.det.nt.gov.au/parents-community/early-childhood-services/families-as-first-teachers-program></p>	<p data-bbox="898 316 2051 368">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 data-bbox="898 376 2051 429">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 data-bbox="898 437 1173 458">Parenting and family support</p> <ul data-bbox="898 466 2051 603" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="898 466 2051 603">• 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 data-bbox="898 611 1032 632">Early learning</p> <ul data-bbox="898 639 2051 777" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="898 639 2051 777">• 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 data-bbox="898 785 2051 869">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	<p data-bbox="427 877 869 962"><http://ccde.menzies.edu.au/sites/default/files/FINAL%20Mobile%20Preschool%20Evaluation_gn.pdf></p>	<p data-bbox="898 877 2051 997">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.