



**Aboriginal Peak  
Organisations**

NORTHERN TERRITORY

**APO NT Submission**

**July 2023**

**Review of Secondary Education in the Northern Territory**

**Discussion Paper**

*We want freedom to be whatever a human mind can dream.*

*When you think of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander kid, or in fact, any kid, imagine what's possible. Don't define us through the lens of disadvantage or label us as limited.*

*Test us.*

*Expect the best of us.*

*Expect the unexpected.*

*Expect us to continue carrying the custodianship of imagination, entrepreneurial spirit and genius.*

*Expect us to be complex.*

*And then let us spread our wings, and soar higher than ever before.*

*\*Excerpt from 'The Imagination Declaration' read out at GARMA event by Sienna Stubbs, 5<sup>th</sup> August 2019<sup>i</sup>.*



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APO NT would like to thank the Department of Education (DoE) for providing the opportunity for feedback on the 2023 NT Secondary Review 2023 - Discussion Paper.

We acknowledge the recent commitment by DoE to resource an independent Aboriginal<sup>ii</sup> voice on education through the establishment of the NT Independent Aboriginal Education Peak Body work with APO NT. This is a significant step towards actualising Aboriginal people's human rights. We also take this opportunity to recognise the significant contribution by the Commonwealth Education Department for \$40.1 million investment into Central Australia to support young people to re-engage with the education system.

We look forward to working in partnership with NTG DoE and Commonwealth Government Education Department on key priorities and reform to support Aboriginal children, families, and communities.

Acknowledgement is also given to the following for their expertise in education, their commitment to progressive and innovative practice, and input into this submission:

- NT Aboriginal Education Steering Committee coordinated by APO NT
- Northern Land Council
- Central Land Council
- Discussions at the recent 'Reflecting on NT Aboriginal Education 30 years ago' forum '*Looking Forward and Looking Back*'.

This submission builds on our previous submission to the NT Preschool Review. The key themes are similar throughout, which reflects a need to ensure consistency across all areas of education.

## Introduction to APO NT

APO NT is an alliance of Aboriginal organisations working to promote and protect the rights of Aboriginal people living in the Northern Territory (NT). The APO NT alliance comprises the Central Land Council (CLC), Northern Land Council (NLC), Tiwi Land Council (TLC), Anindilyakwa Land Council (ALC), North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA), Northern Territory Indigenous Business Network (NTIBN), Aboriginal Housing Northern Territory (AHNT) and the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the NT (AMSANT). The member organisations of APO NT are united in their commitment to improving conditions for Aboriginal people across broad political, economic, social, and cultural areas. Since APO NT's establishment in 2010, our members have been working to develop proactive and constructive policies on critical issues facing Aboriginal people in the NT and strive to influence the work of the Australian and NT Governments.

Underlining our collective work is the right to self-determination, which is detailed and expressed in the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People. The significance of this cannot be overstated. As representatives from peak Aboriginal organisations in the NT, we share the aim of protecting and advancing the wellbeing and rights of Aboriginal people and communities in several key areas. Local involvement, ownership and control underpins APO NT's work in advocating for practical and sustainable solutions for Aboriginal people. These are then predicated on policy conditions that support Aboriginal self-determination, including commitments to needs-based funding, building the community-controlled sector and centring Aboriginal decisions in how national strategies are implemented on the ground.



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## Response to the discussion paper 'Review of Secondary Education in the NT'

### Call to Action

Northern Territory Government, Department of Education work in partnership with Aboriginal families and community-controlled organisations to lead the way to develop and implement first class, culturally responsive secondary education programs that support Aboriginal young people to thrive.

### Recommendations

1. The Department of Education adopt a human rights approach to education, recognising and enacting the above identified articles into the delivery of all aspects of education.
2. A commitment to work in partnership with the Aboriginal Education Sector to address racism and discrimination in schools.
3. The Department of Education to ensure schools are culturally safe and responsive by reinstating two-way learning in education across the NT.
4. APO NT Aboriginal Education Steering Committee call on the DoE to honour the participation and attendance of students in cultural ceremonies and activities as part of their learning and attendance.
5. All schools in the NT have a mandate to support the local workforce at all levels within education, with multiple approaches to training, mentoring and development of staff that are relevant and suitable to their needs and learning.
6. Request that Stage 2 and Stage 3 evaluation of the Indigenous Education Review be released to ensure transparency of findings, particularly regarding the move away from secondary schools in remote and very remote settings, to residential and transition support options.
7. Reinstating the secondary provisions of education in all remote, very remote and homelands communities.
8. Where schools are isolated, flexible learning models be reviewed and discussed with the community to meet students' needs and aspirations.
9. Transition plan that supports students from secondary to employment and/or higher learning for each school.
10. Commonwealth and Territory governments work together to fund employment pathways programs that are developed and implemented by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.
11. Review previous education initiatives such as AITAP to determine an appropriate model fit for purpose.
12. Expand the City/Country partnerships initiative to include opportunities for remote and regional partnerships.
13. Commonwealth government look to expand LoC type programs across the NT, that are designed to led by Aboriginal people.
14. A timely response to abolishing the 'effective enrolment' attendance-based funding model, to a population & needs based funding model within the next 2 years.
15. Develop a model for students with disabilities, and their families to have better access to boarding school options.
16. Prioritise the commitment to CTG Priority Reform 4 – Department of education work with APO NT Aboriginal Education Steering Committee to prioritise develop an agreement for shared data use.



It is with a heavy heart that we note the recent findings from the Productivity Commissions Annual Data Compilation Report July 2023<sup>iii</sup>. We must act immediately to change this situation, but this cannot be done alone, or in isolation. Partnerships across governments, the Aboriginal Community Controlled Sector and non-government sector, must be pursued as a priority to address this crisis.

APO NT acknowledge the importance of equity and equality as goals within the Mparntwe Declaration<sup>iv</sup> as key principles that underpin the NT Review of Secondary Education<sup>v</sup>. APO NT also take this opportunity to reaffirm our position that articles within United Nations International Conventions and Declarations, are clear mandates, setting minimum expectations for governments (State, Territory and Commonwealth) to embed human rights into education institutions.

At the heart of what is being asked, is to have the human right of self-determination fulfilled within education institutions. The Coolangatta Statement of 1999 quoted *“The educational struggles of Indigenous peoples are fundamentally and unequivocally concerned with the right of Indigenous peoples to be indigenous”*<sup>vi</sup>. This remains relevant and on point today.

Table 1 & 2 below<sup>vii</sup> set out specific articles that must be used as the foundation for which secondary schooling should be reviewed. Among these rights are:

- The right to learn and use your own language.
- The right to access education in your own language.
- Your cultures and traditions be reflected in education.
- The right for Indigenous peoples to establish and control their own education systems.

These rights are consistent with the calls to action that Aboriginal families, communities, and the Aboriginal Community Controlled sector (as well as non-Aboriginal allies) have requested for decades. Recognition of learning begins with acknowledging these human rights, and embedding them into education systems, policies, and processes.

Human Rights Conventions / Treaties	Relevant articles
Convention against Discrimination in Education (CADE) 1960	1 (2.2) - right to education – access to, standard and quality of education 4 – states to implement national policy re: equality of opportunity and treatment in education 5 (c) - right of national minorities to carry own education activities, school maintenance, develop education policies, use teaching of their own language
International Convention on the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) 1966	1 – self-determination, freely determine political status, social and cultural development 13 (1) - education directed at the full development of the person
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) 1989	28 – right to education 30 – right to learn and use own languages
International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) 1965	18 – freedom of thought, conscience, and religion 25 – right to political participation 26 – freedom from discrimination
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) 1966	1 (1) - right to self-determination 27 – right to use own language

\*Table 1 – Summary of Human Rights Conventions & relevant articles



Human Rights Declarations	Relevant Articles
United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) 2007	8 (1) – not be subjected to forced assimilation, destruction of culture 14 (1) - right to establish and control own education systems, provided in own language 14 (3) – right to access education in own language and culture 15 (1) – dignity, diversity of cultures and tradition reflected in education 38 – consultation with Indigenous people to achieve goals in the declaration
Declaration on the Rights of People belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic minorities, 1992	4 – responsibility of the state to support minorities for adequate opportunities to learn in their mother tongue / or have instruction in their mother tongue

*\*Table 2 – Summary of Human Rights Declarations & relevant articles*

### **Domain 1 - Recognition of Learning**

*What are the opportunities for the NT government school system to better recognise students’ skills, capabilities, and knowledge (including Aboriginal cultural knowledge, competencies, and languages)*

As set out above, the right for communities and parents to determine their own education policies, carry out their own education activities, and to control their own education systems are clear. Our governments have clear mandates to ensure this is made possible within our education systems. By working towards achieving these, we demonstrate a valuing of Aboriginal people’s education systems.

To better recognise these rights, and Aboriginal students’ skills, capabilities, and knowledge, it is essential that two-way learning is incorporated into NT education systems. The Yirrkala submission into Education in Remote and Complex Environments<sup>viii</sup> states that education institutions should “Adopt a mindset that fundamentally demonstrates a valuing of our First nations knowledge systems and languages”. Until Aboriginal ways of knowing and learning are valued and imbedded into the curriculum e.g., bi-lingual education, the recognition of students’ skills, capabilities and knowledges is limited to a mainstream pedagogy, breaching our commitment to IECSCR Article 13 (1) - Education being directed at the full development of the person.

In this process, we must note that formal learning cannot be recognised when students are not engaging with the system. It is unacceptable that on average between 43.6% and 41.9% of Aboriginal students in the NT are not engaged in education, and the more remote you are, the worse this statistic gets. Whilst attendance rates alone do not determine the quality of schooling, it is a stark indicator of the amount of schooling that students are missing out on. APO NT community engagements to date, inform us that there are several factors that may contribute to the lack of attendance including (1) Racism and discrimination experienced by students, families, and educators (2) low expectations of the same and (3) lack of adequate investment in the local workforce.

#### *Racism, discrimination, and low expectations*

Whilst difficult to hear, it is important that Aboriginal educators, families, and students who disclose significant experiences of discrimination and lowered expectations within education are acknowledged, heard, and appropriately responded to. The conscious and unconscious biases towards students lead to poorer education outcomes, diminished social and emotional well-being, as well as affecting long term quality of life outcomes (APO NT Preschool Review Submission). Outlined on the cover of this submission is an excerpt from ‘The Imagination Declaration’ read out at GARMA event by Sienna Stubbs, 5th August 2019. Reiterated here:



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We must expect more. We must listen to these young people who speak from their hearts and minds about what they want us to do for them. Young people will rise to the challenge if we set it.

### *Lack of Investment in the workforce*

APONT reiterate points raised in the NT Preschool Review Submission that “*staff do not feel valued, they lack training and other professional development, with no clear career pathway considered within education*”<sup>ix</sup>. This is common feedback received during APO NT engagements. We know that the presence of Aboriginal teachers and educator’s matter. Outlined in the ‘Review of the National School Reform Agreement’, the Productivity Commission (PC) acknowledged that effective teaching is the single most influential ‘in-school’ factor for student outcomes. Effectiveness is determined by both teacher quality (the attributes of an individual teacher) and quality teaching (effective practices)”. Research from the John Hopkins University<sup>x</sup> evidences the need for investment in local teaching workforce if we are to close the educational attainment gap. This longitudinal research supports the value and need for Aboriginal teachers, as it maps better secondary graduation rates and higher enrolments in university for each year a ‘black student has a black teacher’.

Investment in the workforce requires flexible learning modes, clear and established pathways for career development, mentoring, and ongoing professional development, as well as input of Aboriginal educators at all levels within the schooling system.

### *Culturally safe and responsive schools*

Whilst these issues are significant and unacceptable, they are not inevitable. The antithesis of this situation is that of culturally responsive and safe schools which have an “*approach to schooling that privileges the cultural identity and social background of students as essential starting points when designing curriculum and approaches to learning*”<sup>xi</sup>. There are numerous examples of culturally responsive schools across the NT including but not limited to; Nawarddeken Academy, Yirrkala School, Yipirinya School, Walpiri Education and Training Trust - Walpiri triangle schools, Dhupuma Barker School, Groote Eylandt Bickerton Island Primary College Aboriginal Corporation, Tangentyere Land and Learning, Tiwi Island Education Committee, Yirrkala Bilingual Schools, Mapuru Yirrkala College and many more. These schools demonstrate models of community governance and leadership, two-way learning and robust accountability and transparency processes. The school’s privilege Aboriginal knowledges and ways of learning, in turn providing hope and vision for student’s futures.



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### Domain 2 – Transitions between and beyond

*What are the opportunities to improve transitions between and beyond schooling for secondary aged students across the NT?*

#### *Primary into secondary school transition*

As a key transition point, we draw attention to the issue of there being a shift away from relevant and appropriate secondary options, specifically for students living remotely, very remote and on homelands. Since the Bruce Wilson Education Review in 2011, resulting in the implementation of the Indigenous Education Strategy 2015-2024, there have been significant decline in the availability of secondary schooling in these areas. Anecdotally we know that even though there is a decent uptake of boarding school across the NT, there are still significant numbers of young people that remain in their communities, not accessing any education. Families want choices. They want to be able to choose the right path for their children. For there to be any chance of achieving equity and equality, there must be choice.

#### *Secondary into higher learning, employment transition – Targeted programs such as AITAP / Iwara*

One of the most important transition points for young people in their education, is that from secondary schooling to post schooling, hopefully into higher learning and/or employment. However, for many, we know this is not the situation. With only 34.8% of Aboriginal young people aged 15-24 engaged in education or employment<sup>xii</sup>, it is fair to state that this area of secondary and post-secondary schooling is failing students. There are however programs that have worked. At a recent forum on Aboriginal Education “*Reflecting on NT Aboriginal Education 30 years ago*” forum ‘*Looking Forward and Looking Back*’ held in Darwin, the Aboriginal and Islander Tertiary Aspiration Program (AITAP) was identified as one of the most successful programs for support young people to academically achieve during and beyond school. Graduates recalled these experiences as life changing.

#### *Aboriginal Community Controlled initiatives*

There are many Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO’s) that are effectively working with their communities to support transitions from secondary schooling to employment. NPY Women’s Council (NPYWC) is one such organisation that take on the responsibility of supporting young people to not fall through the gap and be lost in the system. This is an excellent example of a targeted program delivered by ACCO’s.

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### **Iwara Ara Nintiringanyi Program Case Study** **NPYWC Youth Service**

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The Iwara Ara Nintiringanyi project has been designed by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff working together to create a nuanced program that recognises Aboriginal people’s learning styles, with an individual focus on strengths and goals. Building upon the success of previous rounds focused on young women, the NPYWC Youth Service recognised the need to tailor the program to address the unique challenges and requirements faced by young men in the NPY region. Through an action research approach, valuable feedback from Aboriginal Youth workers prompted a restructure within the project to emphasise language, literacy, and numeracy skills at a key transition point in time from secondary schooling age to post schooling age. The Youth Service partnered with TAFE SA and other NPYWC programs introducing the *Sound Way* program, a 35-hour language, literacy, and numeracy course. Young people were supported to participate in a Cert II - Access to Work and Training, enabling them to obtain valuable certifications like white cards, RSA, and Road Traffic Management certificates.



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The twelve-week program encompasses various activities, including Rec Shed games with AFL NT, a work experience week with Deadly Hair Dudes, exposure to Voyagers, a cultural camp at King's Canyon, and work placements within local community youth programs. Additionally, evenings in Alice Springs feature Arrernte Boxing sessions and a nutrition program, ensuring holistic development and continued engagement.

A pre- and post-survey conducted during the trial week provided valuable insights into the young men's motivations and expectations. The pre-survey identified several barriers to employment, including difficult family relationships, drug and alcohol issues, caregiving responsibilities, and language barriers. However, all the participants shared a common desire to be seen as positive role models in their community and expressed their belief that gaining employment would improve their lives and boost their confidence. The Iwara Ara Nintiringanyi project has embarked on an impactful journey, empowering young men, and young women in the NPY region through tailored support, education, and opportunities. By addressing their unique needs, the program has fostered confidence, growth, and resilience among the participants. The Iwara program stands as a testament to the transformative power of targeted intervention, nurturing the potential of young individuals and empowering them to overcome obstacles, achieve their goals, and create a brighter future for themselves and their communities.

## Secondary education & transition support

It is important that education is relevant and meaningful. Young people need to feel confident embracing the next phase of their life. There has been significant feedback about the need for better support to be work ready and transition successfully, such as: having relevant identification, tax file numbers, information about voting, MyGov accounts. The list goes on. Whilst it is debatable as to whether schools are responsible for this preparedness or not, it is a key transition point where DoE could make a significant difference in young people's opportunities to continue learning, gain employment and participate generally in society.

We draw your attention to a significant piece of work undertaken by the NPY Empowered Communities secretariat re: transition support from secondary to employment / higher learning. See table 3<sup>xiii</sup> below:

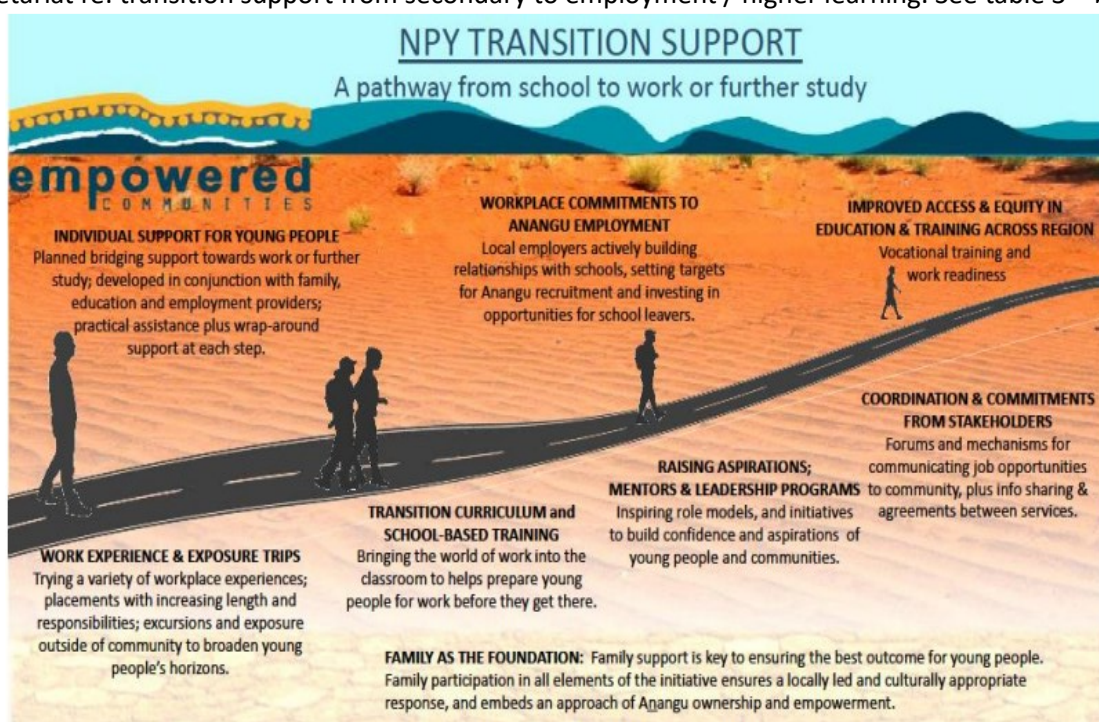


Table 3 – NPY Empowered Communities Transition Support pathways





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This pathway approach, developed with Anangu (local Aboriginal people) in the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands, demonstrates the need to have a considered, transition support program in each school to ensure as many options as possible for students are available when transitioning from secondary schooling into employment and/or higher learning.

*Flexible models – including distance education, mixed modes.*

We strongly encourage there to be an emphasis on flexibility in the delivery of secondary education. DoE should work alongside those who have limited access to secondary school to find alternative ways of accessing learning i.e., accessing distance education and/or accessing specialist educators to advance students learnings and engagement. Community services can partner with schools to support these arrangements.

### Domain 3 – Learning access and design

*What are the opportunities to ensure meaningful learning, and strengthen delivery and accessibility to secondary education throughout the NT?*

As mentioned, education programs need to be meaningful and relevant. There is no better example of this, than the Learning on Country Program delivered by the Northern Land Council (NLC). This is an excellent example<sup>xiv</sup> of a targeted culturally appropriate education program that provides a pathway to existing employment opportunities, funded by the National Indigenous Australians Agency, and administered by the NLC.

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#### Learning on Country Program Case Study Northern Land Council

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The program is delivered through a partnership arrangement between community ranger groups and schools in 15 NT remote communities (Maningrida, Galiwin'ku, Yirrkala, Laynhapuy Homelands, Ramingining, Milingimbi, Gapuwiyak, Umbakumba, Angurugu, Borroloola, Ngukurr, Numbulwar, Gunbalanya, Beswick and Barunga). It is targeted towards middle and senior school students and provides a practically oriented educational, training and employment pathway using a combination of natural and cultural resource management activities and education resources. Communities, schools, and Aboriginal ranger groups across the Top End have embraced LoC as the principal mechanism for delivering 'both ways' (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) teaching, learning and evaluation.

The LoC program is supported by site specific local LoC committees and in situ LoC coordinators. An all-Aboriginal LoC Steering Committee provides cultural and strategic guidance to the program. This governance arrangement means Aboriginal people decide and deliver the LoC activities (in partnership with rangers and schools) and set the strategic direction for the program.

The LoC employment pathway is beneficial for young Aboriginal people in remote communities because a 'both ways' education supports them to walk proudly and confidently in two worlds. It also benefits employers in various industry sectors involved in the sustainable use of land and sea (such as mining, pastoralism, forestry, tourism, fisheries, aquaculture, horticulture and wildlife utilisation, biosecurity, Border Force and Norforce, and conservation management) because it is an employment incubator and succession planning tool to support these sectors by:



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- Building confidence and capability and encouraging young people to consider taking up sectoral employment opportunities and community leadership roles.
- Increasing the availability of a job ready cohort of young Aboriginal people with transferable skills ready to transition into employment roles as they become available; and
- Reducing workplace recruitment disruption because replacements are drawn from the student cohort supported by the community rangers, better preparing them for the workplace transition.

Programs such as the LoC initiative, provide such valuable insight into what works. It is so important to the future of education for Aboriginal children and young people that LoC and similar initiatives are endorsed and funded by governments. From this case study, we can see the value of Aboriginal governance and workforce, valuing of Aboriginal knowledges and learning styles, as well as the opportunities it provides during and post-secondary schooling.

### Domain 4 – Partnerships and engagement

*What are the opportunities to strengthen engagement between schools and their local communities, and other partnerships?*

#### Service partnerships

Partnerships are vital to achieving success in education. The Yipirinya School have paved the way for a model that provides wrap around support for children<sup>xv</sup> with the establishment of their 'Happy Heart Hub'. Whilst this has an early childhood focus, it is essential that this wrap around support is consistently offered throughout secondary school. Through strong partnerships within the immediate community, this can be achieved.

#### Community partnerships

Partnerships with communities relevant to the education setting are crucial for student engagement and learning. As pointed out in The Office of the Children's Commissioner submission to the Education Strategy Discussion Paper 2021<sup>xvi</sup> "*Families, carers, elders and support networks should be incorporated into the education system alongside students and teachers in a model that is culturally and community driven*" pg. 5-6. Forming partnerships with communities take time, and a long-term commitment beyond election cycles.

The Walpiri Education and Training Trust Advisory Council approach to education an excellent example of strong engagement between schools and their local communities. For more than 40 years, the WETT Advisory Council has integrated a system of Indigenous Knowledges, with non-traditional schooling, to ensure that Walpiri languages and cultural knowledge are integrated into the schooling system. The template of Walpiri culture titled 'Ngurra-kurlu' describes a system that represents 5 key elements (1) Land (2) Law (3) Language (4) Ceremony and (5) Skin. This distinct pedagogy, known as the Walpiri theme cycle "*replicates traditional ways of learning and knowing but is adapted to the rhythm of non-traditional contemporary schooling*"<sup>xvii</sup>.

It requires approaches such as this, to strengthen the partnership between schools and communities. This model provides meaningful and relevant curriculum, offers communities paid and unpaid involvement with the school, as well as creating a learning environment for everyone. Importantly, it elevates the states of Indigenous knowledges. In addition to this, culturally safe spaces within schools for Aboriginal students and their families are essential. These provide important places for families to engage with the school, for students to self-regulate and feel safe when there are challenges at school. They also provide opportunities to seek out additional supports for students and families if needed.

#### Minimum standards



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APO NT call upon DoE to support a set of minimum standards across all NT schools that strengthen the engagement and partnership with local communities to include:

- Involving Aboriginal people in the recruitment and performance reviews of Principals and Teachers.
- Requiring teachers, principals, and other education staff to undergo a process of cultural emersion that is deemed appropriate by the local community.
- Providing culturally safe spaces for students and families in each school.

### *Strategic partnerships*

Partnerships that provide opportunities for academic success, not just sporting success, such as AITAP mentioned above should be resourced. The AITAP was such a program that is spoken of fondly and has produced many great graduates such as MLA Selina Uibo, Miranda Tapsell<sup>xviii</sup>. Strategic partnerships such as those with universities, other schools, youth services and relevant programs are important in supporting such initiatives.

The City / Country Partnerships initiative<sup>xix</sup> funded via NIAA is one approach. This partnership approach should be expanded to include remote / urban school partnerships. This would benefit students and their families who are more transient between urban/regional and remote schools, as well as the schools themselves in times of increased and decreased student attendance.

## **Domain 5 – System of supports**

*What are the opportunities to improve guidance, support, and resources to enable successful delivery of secondary education?*

Given the importance of Aboriginal educators, there has been two significant strategies identified that need to be expanded or strengthened:

- Develop a support network for Aboriginal Assistant Teachers / Support workers.
- Reinvest in the RATE program to be available for all interested Aboriginal educators across the NT.

At its peak, the RATE Program provided a significant amount of people with opportunities for higher education. Many of those people are still teaching today or have become principals. This program at its most effective and most accessible, is seen as a model to strive towards.

### *Funding*

There have been persistent calls from the sector, and Aboriginal communities to abolish the discriminatory school resourcing model known as the “Effective Enrolment” model. It is well documented that this resourcing model has had the biggest impacts on Aboriginal children’s education. We appreciate and note the DoE commitment to ending this resourcing model. We implore DoE to do everything within their power to prioritise this reform.

### *Transparency of funding*

The Indigenous Education Consultative Groups’ submission to the Review of the National School Reform Agreement, June 2022<sup>xx</sup> identified the importance of access to, and transparency of funding information to enable ongoing analysis and reform work. Currently, to determine actual school funding, multiple sources of information need accessing. For example, to determine the amount of funding that a school receives, there are 2 distinct sources that need to be accessed (1) My school data re: funding and (2) Department of Education NT School data. Information as to where specific Aboriginal education funding goes is currently unclear and the discrepancy between these 2 sources is significant. For example:

According to this Department of Education site re: Government School Funding, in 2023, Maningrida College will be receiving a total amount of \$5,854,642 million<sup>xxi</sup>. According to My School Data<sup>xxii</sup> in



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2021, Maningrida College received a total net recurrent income of \$12,659,140 million. Assuming that there has not been a significant decrease in funding over the 2 years, there would seem to be a discrepancy of more than \$7 million in what the school receives, compared to what is allocated.

### *Children & young people with disabilities (diagnosed and suspected disabilities)*

Children with disabilities are often overlooked, especially those in remote settings where their education can often be secondary to other priorities such as care and protection. In their publication titled “Tjitji Aṭunymankupai Walytja Tjuṭangku – Looking After Children With Disabilities from the NPY Lands”<sup>xxiii</sup>, Anangu identify significant barriers to support children and young people to access school including; requiring a formal diagnosis for targeted resources and supports to be available, need for gender appropriate care, placement of children in child protection due to complexity of needs – which means “moving back and forth between foster care and institutional care settings” (pg. 13) consequently, education is disrupted as their disability and protection needs dominate.

Boarding school provides an important option for students with disabilities, however, there needs to be better collaboration between the Department of Education – Transition Support Unit, Abstudy, Schools and the NDIS to ensure that students with disabilities who aspire for boarding school, are well supported. We need to raise our expectations of children with disabilities, in parallel with the right support to achieve it.

### *Indigenous Data Sovereignty*

The sharing of intellectual property is often one way. Aboriginal people are continually expected to provide their cultural knowledge and expertise (often for free, and often for problems that non-Aboriginal people have caused). It is the experience of Aboriginal people, that non-Aboriginal people and systems do not freely give this in return. Aboriginal people expect and deserve information and knowledge that will assist with their participation in the education of their children, as well as advocacy efforts for much needed reform. APONT call on the Department of Education to release easy to access, de-identified, disaggregated data that will enable Aboriginal people to make informed decisions and direct advocacy towards effective solutions.

### Concluding remarks

Education should be emancipatory. Given the existing crisis in education across the NT, we implore the DoE to think seriously about the lived experiences of Aboriginal students and their families. Students want to learn, their families want to participate in their children’s education, so the questions need to be asked, what is going on for there to be such low attendance, and for the socio-economic reforms within CTG, to be going backwards.

The current education environment lends itself to a standard of low expectations of students, their families, and educators and lived experiences of racism. This coupled with a lack of investment in the local teaching workforce, leave people feeling worthless and hopeless for their futures, and most importantly for the children’s futures. We have an amazing opportunity to change this. The NT Education system can and should be world class. We acknowledge the steps taken by DoE to resource the APONT Aboriginal Education Peak Body, to give voice to those who know what needs addressing, and how best to address it. However, until the experience of racial discrimination is acknowledged and addressed at a structural level, the recognition and value of Aboriginal cultural knowledges, competencies, languages cannot be fully realised. Thus, children and young people’s education and well-being will continue to suffer.

Report written by Christine Williamson, Senior Project Officer, Aboriginal Education

Aboriginal Peak Organisations, NT

August 2023



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## References

- <sup>i</sup> Imagination Declaration excerpt <https://aimementoring.com/2019/08/05/the-imagination-declaration-2/>
- <sup>ii</sup> The term Aboriginal is inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples residing in the NT.
- <sup>iii</sup> CTG Productivity Commission Annual Data Report July 2023, Attachment C, Summary of progress across socio-economic outcome areas <https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/annual-data-report/report/snapshot-socioeconomic#seo3>
- <sup>iv</sup> Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration, 2019, The Education Council
- <sup>v</sup> NT Review of Secondary Education, 2023, <https://haveyoursay.nt.gov.au/secondary-education-review>
- <sup>vi</sup> The Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous Rights in Education, 1999 <https://www.worldcat.org/title/coolangatta-statement-on-indigenous-rights-in-education/oclc/223184452>
- <sup>vii</sup> UN Human Rights Instruments listings <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-listings>
- <sup>viii</sup> Yirrkala School Submission 2020 – Senate Inquiry into Education in Remote and Complex Environments, 2021 [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/House/Employment\\_Education\\_and\\_Training/RemoteEducation/Submissions](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Employment_Education_and_Training/RemoteEducation/Submissions)
- <sup>ix</sup> APONT Submission NT Preschool Review
- <sup>x</sup> Black students who have one black teacher are more likely to go to college <https://hub.jhu.edu/2018/11/12/black-students-black-teachers-college-gap/>
- <sup>xi</sup> Perso, T.F. (2012) *Cultural responsiveness and school education: With particular focus on Australia's First Peoples: A review & Synthesis of the Literature*, pg. 28. Menzies School of Health Research, Centre for Child Development and education, Darwin NT.
- <sup>xii</sup> CTG Annual Data Report July 2023, Outcome 7 <https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/annual-data-report>
- <sup>xiii</sup> Empowered Communities NPY Region – Submission to the Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, February 2020 [https://www.npyec.org.au/uploads/1/0/5/7/105789899/npy\\_ec\\_submission\\_ed\\_in\\_remote\\_communities\\_inquiry.pdf](https://www.npyec.org.au/uploads/1/0/5/7/105789899/npy_ec_submission_ed_in_remote_communities_inquiry.pdf)
- <sup>xiv</sup> Northern Land Council Submission to the Northern Australia Workforce Development Inquiry 2022 [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Joint/Northern\\_Australia/WorkforceDevelopment/Submissions](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Northern_Australia/WorkforceDevelopment/Submissions)
- <sup>xv</sup> Yipirinya School Happy Heart Hub <https://www.yipirinya.com.au/happy-heart-hub/>
- <sup>xvi</sup> Office of the Children's Commissioner submission to the Education Engagement Strategy discussion paper, 3<sup>rd</sup> August, 2021 - available through the OCC upon request
- <sup>xvii</sup> Disbray & Martin, 2018, *Curriculum as Knowledge System: The Walpiri Theme Cycle*. Published in Language Practices of Indigenous Children and Youth; The Transition from Home to School edited by Wigglesworth, Simpson and Vaughan.
- <sup>xviii</sup> NT News Article, 18<sup>th</sup> July 2023, Christine Ross and Tanyah Nasir discuss Aboriginal education outcomes.
- <sup>xix</sup> <https://www.niaa.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/closing-gap/implementation-measures/city-country-partnerships>
- <sup>xx</sup> Submission 052 (June 2022) - <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/school-agreement/submissions#initial>
- <sup>xxi</sup> [Government school funding in the Northern Territory | Department of Education](#)
- <sup>xxii</sup> My School Data, Maningrida College, Finances 2021, <https://myschool.edu.au/school/50061/finances>
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Tjitji Atunymankupai Walytja Tjuṯangu – Looking After Children With Disabilities from the NPY Lands, 2019 <https://www.npywc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Children-with-disability-in-the-NPY-Lands-Tjitji-Atunymankupai.pdf>
- 13 APO NT Submission – NT Secondary Review