

Better and Fairer Schools Agreement

On 31 July 2024, Minister for Education Hon Jason Clare MP, Northern Territory Chief Minister Hon Eva Lawler, and Northern Territory Minister for Education Hon Mark Monaghan announced the NT's signature to the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (BFSA). Other states and territories expected to follow suit, with Western Australia expected to be next to sign.

The BFSA is a ten-year agreement, developed in collaboration between the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments. It was also informed by recent work by the Productivity Commission. In addition, for the first time ever, the Agreement was also developed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives, including the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation (NATSIEC) and the Coalition of Peaks.

This collaboration embeds commitments made by all governments in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, one such commitment is the ambitious target to increase the size of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educator workforce. The BFSA's targets, termed Improvement Measures, collectively incorporate the targets of the Closing the Gap Agreement, either by using existing metrics, or committing to the development of new metrics to capture targets that aren't sufficiently covered by current data.

The BFSA, a cornerstone of the Albanese government's policy for primary and secondary education, has four main provisions. It commits the federal government to an increased level of funding for schools, sets a number of Improvement Measures, provides a series of programs to meet the Measures called National Reform Directions, and details National Enabling Initiatives aimed at enabling future reform across jurisdictions and amplifying its impact.

Funding

As part of the Albanese government's objective to achieve school funding at 100% of the School Resource Standard (SRS), the Commonwealth has agreed to increase government school funding by 2.5 percentage points, to 22.5% of the SRS by 2029, or as otherwise agreed in bilateral agreements. These agreements will detail the contribution of the relevant State government, as well as the roadmap for that State's implementation of the National Reform Directions

In the Northern Territory's case, the Commonwealth has agreed to increase its contribution to 40% of the SRS, with the Territory government contributing the remaining 60%.

On top of this, the BFSa commits to a review of the SRS base and loading calculations.

The Commonwealth committed to continue funding non-government schools at 80% SRS.

Improvement Measures

The BFSa broadly seeks to aid the achievement of three overarching objectives, consistent with the goals of the Mparntwe Education Declaration.

1. **Equity and Excellence:** Provision of high quality, effective, evidence-based education services that are accessible to all students
2. **Wellbeing for learning and engagement:** Provision of appropriate support and resources to allow students to positively and confidently engage with learning, creating a sense of belonging and safety
3. **A strong and sustainable workforce:** Education staff are valued and respected in the community, and are supported to innovate. More Australians will consider a career in teaching

The metrics that underpin the achievements of these goals are as follows.

Equity and Excellence

- By 2030, year 12 certification to improve by 7.5 percentage points in 2022 levels nationally, and trend upwards for regional and remote students and low socioeconomic students.
- By 2031, the proportion of people aged between 20 and 24 to have a year 12 or equivalent qualification to be 96% or higher
- By 2031, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged between 20 and 24 to have a year 12 or equivalent qualification to be 96% or higher
- By 2030, the proportion of students in each year group achieving the Needs Additional Support proficiency level in NAPLAN to fall by 10%
- By 2030, the proportion of students in each year group achieving the Strong and Exceeding proficiency level to increase by 10%

Wellbeing for Learning and Engagement

- By 2030, increasing the Student Attendance Rate to 91.4%, and returning the rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, regional and remote students, and low socio-economic advantage schools to 2019 levels
- Achieve parity between the broader student population and priority equity cohorts by 2035

A Strong and Sustainable Workforce

- By 2035, increasing the engagement rate for domestic students as a whole, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, by 10 percentage points each
- The development of a metric for early career retention by 2028, including targets

National Reform Directives

The BFA contains policies or policy directions, grouped by the main objective they aim to achieve, called National Policy Directives.

Equity and Excellence

- Whole-of-system approaches to identify student needs and provide targeted support to students with extra needs
- The creation of a Year 1 phonics check and numeracy check program
- Program to encourage and enable students to undertake STEM education.

Wellbeing for Learning and Engagement

- Promote interconnectedness between schools and non-school services for students, that help to increase attendance and engagement, including full-service schools
- Structured initiatives that support student wellbeing, such as school psychologists and youth health nurses
- Promote student engagement, such as by driving inclusion or engaging with a students family or community

A Strong and Sustainable Workforce

- Initiatives to develop, recognise and reward achievement by teachers, and deploy expert teachers to schools where additional support is most needed
- support access to high-quality, evidence-based training and professional development
- Promote the wellbeing of teachers and student leaders, including programs to improve safety and reduce workload
- Increase teacher retention, and encourage students to explore a career in teaching, especially among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

National Enabling Initiatives

In addition to the Directives, the BFA also includes a number of programs which require implementation across jurisdictions in order to enable and magnify the effect of future reform. Notably, these include the following.

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Government Relations Strategy

- A review of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) base and loadings calculation methodology. The review should include a cost neutral option. This review should be received by mid-2029
- Implementation of the Unique Student Identifier for school students, with students receiving a USI by the end of 2027
- Undertaking collective work to better understand socioeconomic diversity and school attendance, especially their impact and ways to address these impacts. These findings should be reported by the end of 2027
- A review of the Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia to ensure its relevance. This review will include a cost benefit analysis of a series of new metrics, such as for student engagement, equity in learning, access for students with disability, and teacher registration and retention
- The development of an early years numeracy check to identify students who need tailored support earlier

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