



Funding for Success

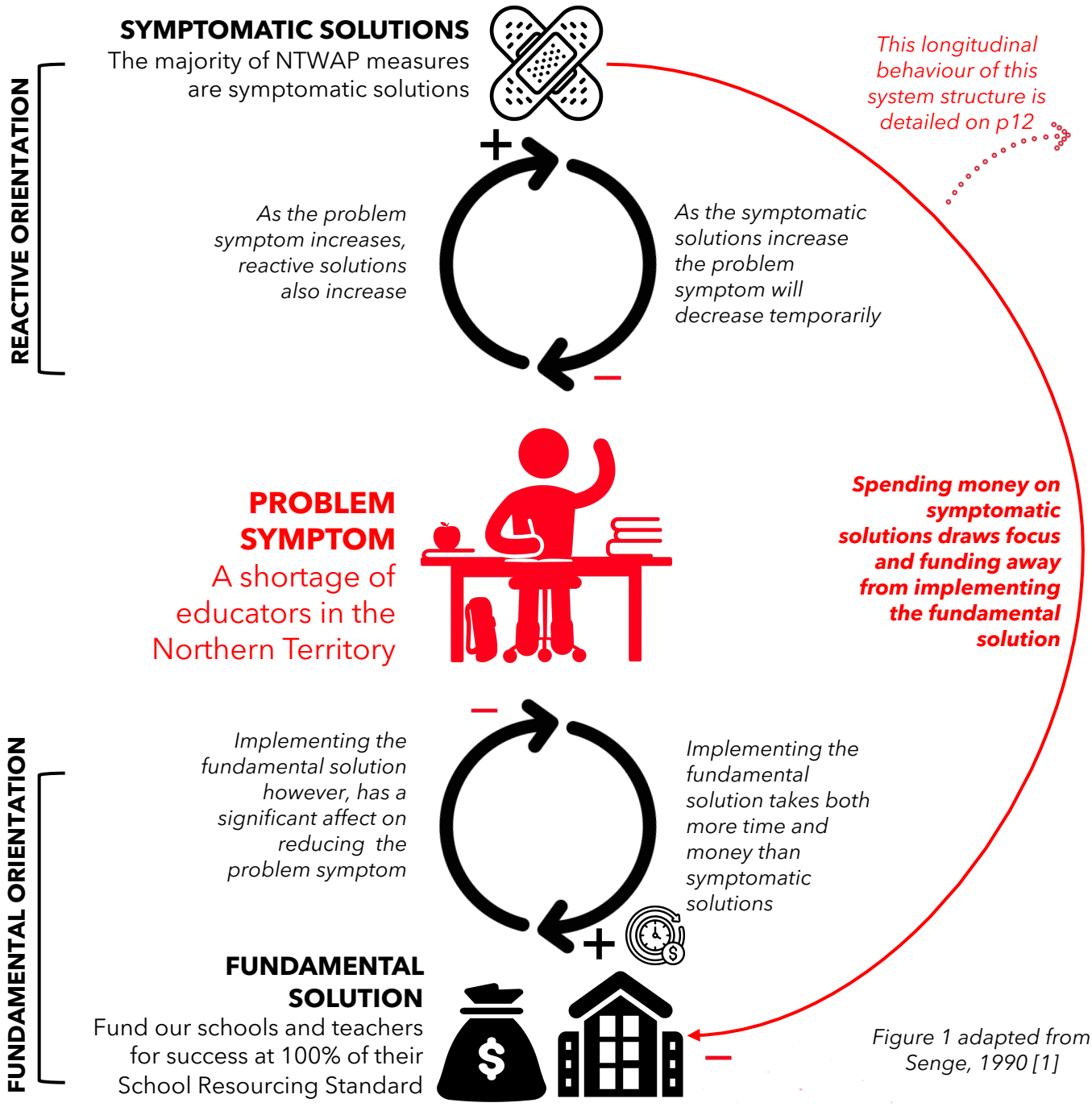
Addressing the root cause of the teacher shortage crisis in the NT

Submission to the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan Public Consultation



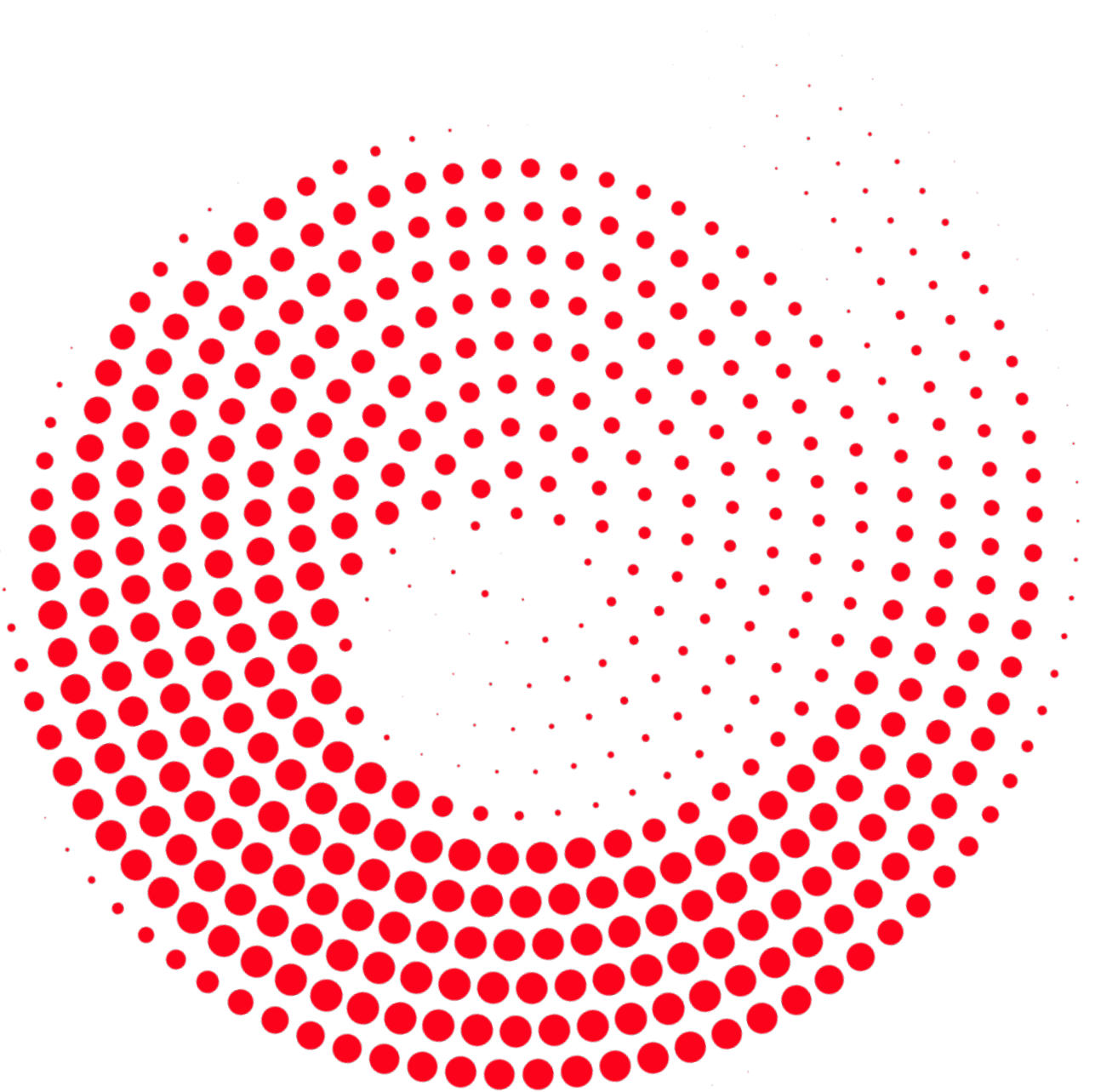
The Problem Mechanics

The teacher shortage is *just one symptom* of a deeper root problem in NT public sector education: **that our schools, our teachers and our students are currently funded for failure.** Student outcomes are dropping and school attendance is crashing. It is no wonder then our teachers and principals are overworked, burnt out and leaving the profession. The National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (NTWAP) addresses this problem only symptomatically and in doing so **draws focus and resources away** from the fundamental solution: *funding public schools for success.*



*"A problem
well-defined is a
problem half solved."*

John Dewey



The Problem Symptoms

MULTIPLE SIGNALS OF A FAILING SYSTEM

The NT Public School system is in crisis. While the teacher workforce shortage is the focus of this current submission, it is vital that it is understood as **just one of a number of symptoms of a failing public education** system in the NT. There are many other ‘problem symptoms’ that need to be assessed collectively or else we risk not seeing the forest for the trees. These include:

- A crash in attendance, particularly for our most vulnerable students which signifies that our schools have lost the capability to meet the learning and wellbeing needs of young Territorians who are disengaging in record numbers (Figure 2);
- A drop in student achievement over the last two decades (Figures 3 & 4);
- A burn out in school leadership with 69 principals leaving their positions across the 2020-22 period in a jurisdiction of just 153 schools [2];
- Approximately 10% of the registered teaching workforce leaving the NT each year in the period 2020-21 [2];
- A teacher shortage crisis that has seen the system forced to employ education department corporate staff as frontline teachers in 2022 [3].
- 42.5% of public sector teachers facing the insecurity of being on non-permanent contracts in 2022 [2].

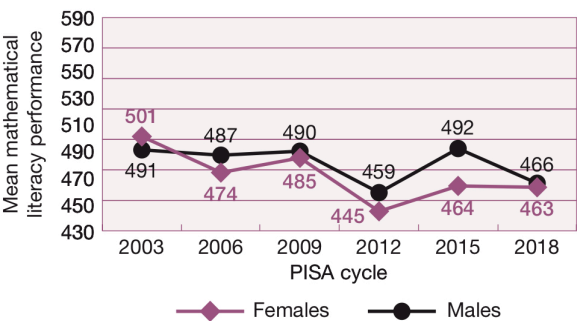
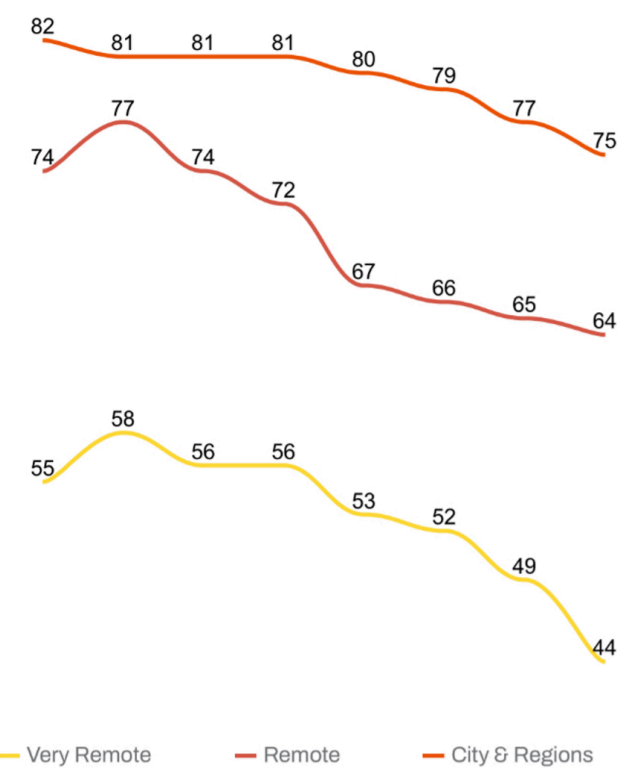


Figure 3: NT student achievement in PISA numeracy [5]

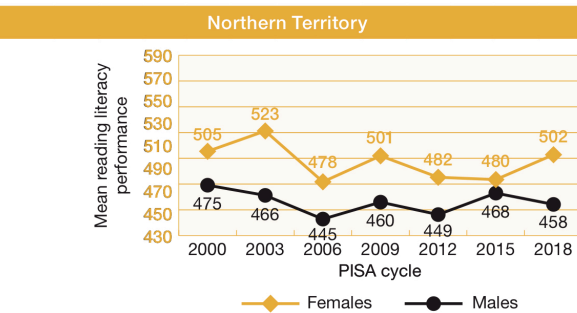


Figure 4: NT student achievement in PISA reading [5]

Figure 2: First Nations attendance rates 2013-20 by geolocation [4]

A Problem Symptom

THE TEACHER SHORTAGE: A SYMPTOM OF A FAILING SYSTEM

Understanding the teacher shortage crisis collectively with the other symptoms of system failure such as engagement, student achievement and leadership burnout allows us to build up a more comprehensive causal model of the current situation.

We hypothesise that much of this has to do with our educators leaving the profession in overwhelming numbers. We know that on the supply side that the growth in the teacher workforce as measured by ITE completion has more or less kept pace with the growth in student enrolments [6]. What is less clear is the size of the attrition out of the profession, which we know to be around 10% a year in the NT, however the exact size of which is largely unquantified across the country [ibid].

What we do know from the research evidence in the NT is that [7]:

- Less than 20% of teachers are sure that they will be in the classroom beyond the next five years (Figure 5);
- The main reasons for this includes high workloads, lack of work/life balance and the stress impacting wellbeing from this (Figure 7);
- This is quantitatively evidenced through teachers reporting that they work on average 151% of their contract hours (Figure 6).

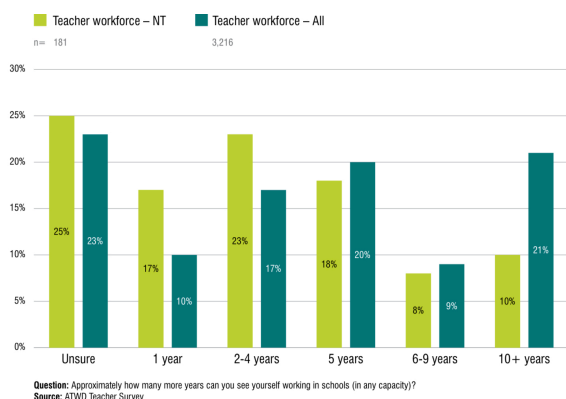


Figure 5: Estimated time left in classroom NT vs. Nat

Paid hours	36-40 hours	31-35 hours
Average total hours worked	59.5	57.4
Total hours in excess of max paid working hours	19.5	22.4
Hours worked as a percentage of contract hours	149%	164%

Figure 6: Average working hours in NT

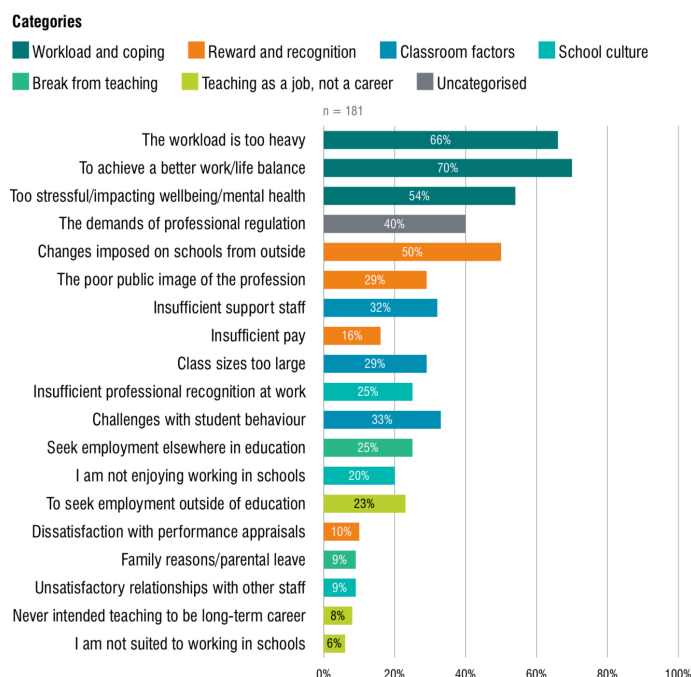


Figure 7: Reasons for considering leaving the profession (NT)

A FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM

FUNDED FOR FAILURE

These crises are symptoms of a more fundamental problem that is driving system collapse in the NT: **our public schools are funded for failure**. The Northern Territory provides a tragic test tube for testing the well-evidenced relationship between school resourcing and student achievement as it is the only jurisdiction in the country that funds students on attendance rather than enrolment [7]. This coupled with the fact that NT public schools in 2022 were only funded at 80% of their School Resourcing Standard (SRS), **means the the Northern Territory is the most underfunded jurisdiction by need in the country** [8].

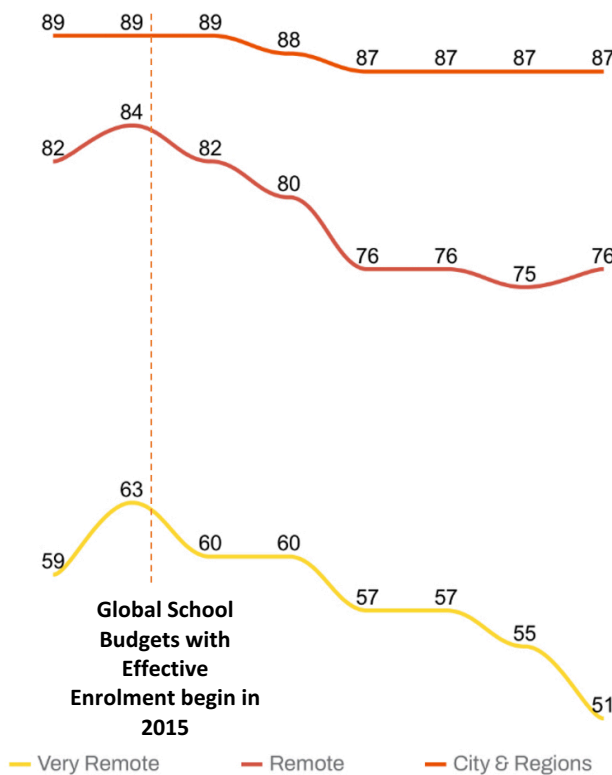


Figure 8: NT attendance rates since the introduction of effective enrolment [2].

Analysis of attendance rates since the introduction of effective enrolment has shown a sharp decline in student attendance and engagement, which is most profound in remote and very remote settings. This drop is commensurate with a **reduction in the school budgets of some of the Territory's most vulnerable schools across this time period (Figure 9) and despite an overall increase in the NT Education Budget of a quarter of a billion dollars** between 2015 and 2022 [9].

Figure 9: Analysis of the school resourcing model for major remote schools shows a 12% drop from 2015-2022 (non-adjusted for CPI)

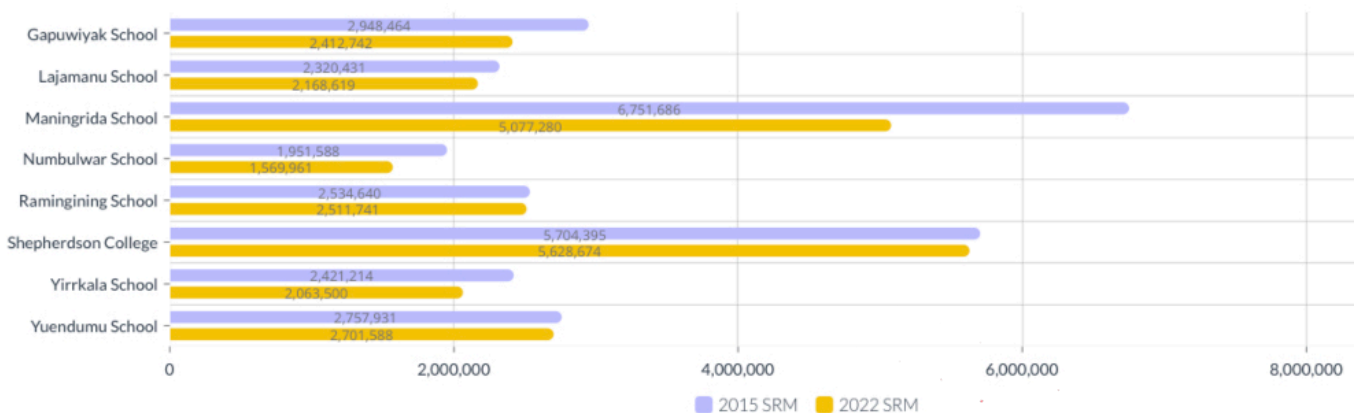
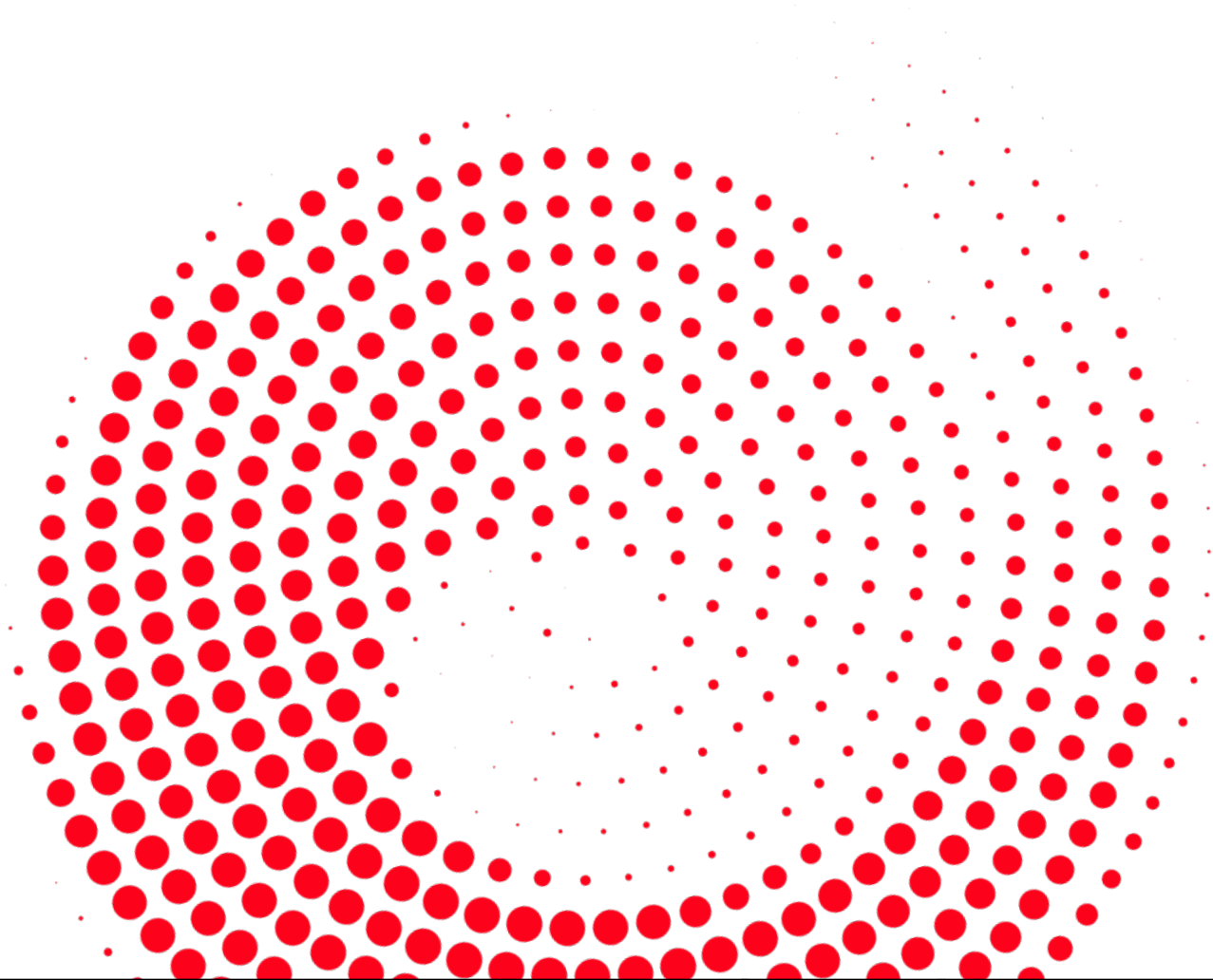




Figure 10: The drastic reduction in staff at Shepherson College in Galiwin'ku casts a stark picture. In 2011 there were over 80 staff teaching at the school. In 2021 that number was just 40 [10]. This is despite the number of young people aged under 24 in the community having increased by 17% from the 2011 to 2021 Census [11].

*"The SRS is the minimum funding required so that schools can have at least 80% of their students achieving learning outcomes above the national minimum standard in NAPLAN for reading and numeracy. **It does not provide for 20% of the hardest to reach students in literacy and numeracy.** It makes no provision for attaining learning benchmarks in other subjects. It does not for example, make provision for quality teaching and resources in vocational education and training that might reasonably be expected to be important in reaching students at risk of completing school without meeting expected benchmarks in participation and learning. **In other words, the SRS is an essential minimum level of funding for school systems. The SRS is not an aspirational funding standard.**" [8]*

THE SCHOOL RESOURCING STANDARD



A FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM

FUNDED FOR FAILURE

The AEUNT recently undertook a dynamic systems analysis of the effective enrolment policy that developed a causal model for how these different problem symptoms inter-relate and are ultimately driven by chronic underfunding (Figure 12). The model demonstrates a number of key system behaviours [2]:

- A school's funding directly impacts its staffing levels and other resources for learning (time, spaces, materials);
- Staffing and resources for learning affect a school's capacity to meet student learning and wellbeing needs;
- The capacity to meet student learning and wellbeing needs is related to staff wellbeing, with a feedback loop existing between the two;
- School leadership, whilst exogenous to this model, has a significant affect on staff wellbeing and a school's ability to meet students' learning and wellbeing needs;
- A school's capacity to meet students' learning and wellbeing needs affects student engagement (and its proxy, attendance);
- As school attendance affects the school budget in the Northern Territory, a reinforcing feedback loop (R1) drives schools into **downward, vicious cycles of residualisation** where they lose the very funding they need to engage student's who are not having their learning and wellbeing needs met.

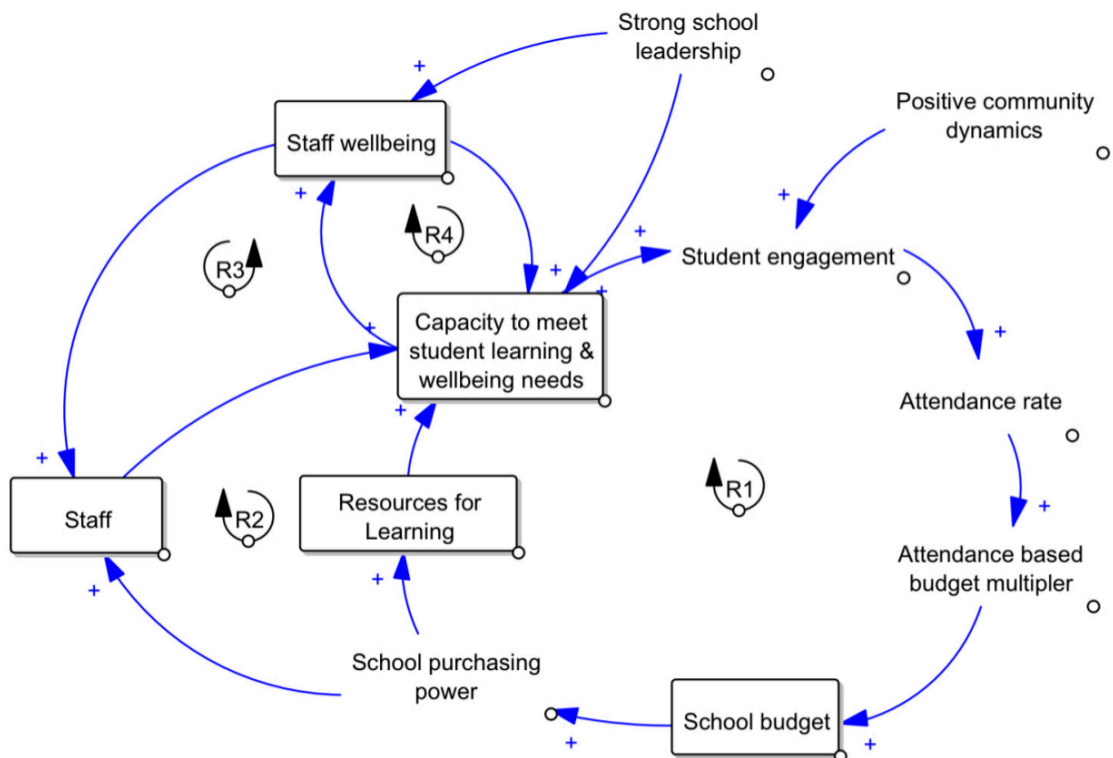
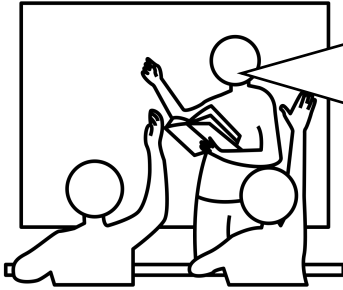


Figure 12: Causal Loop Diagram demonstrating the inter-relationship between school funding, staff wellbeing, student learning and engagement.

A FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM

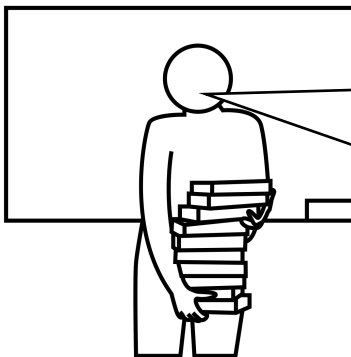
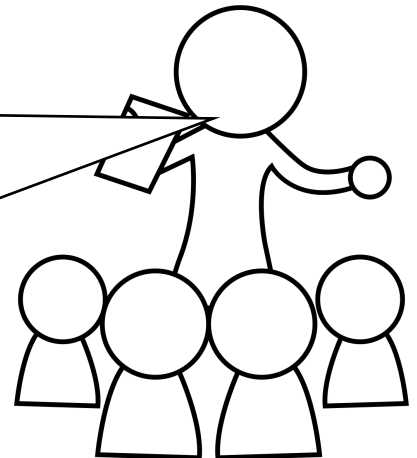
FEEDBACK FROM OUR TEACHERS

Our NT teachers have given voice to this vicious cycle of residualisation in our NT Public Schools. They describe an environment where a lack of staffing and resourcing leads to a feeling of being unsupported, being constantly overwhelmed, guilt, poor relationships with colleagues and ultimately letting students down.



- A lack of quality teaching resources and time to develop new ones
- No relief teachers means having to take countless extras and feel guilty about sick days
- Lack of quality senior staff to give direction
- Experienced teachers taking on overwhelming responsibilities because lack of experienced colleagues

- Senior staff with excessive teaching loads or constantly doing relief
- A distinct lack of time and resourcing for mentoring and collaboration
- Lack of school support staff
- Lack of health and special needs specialists
- General lack of specialist teachers leading to many working outside their expertise area
- Lack of job security because principal's can't confirm budgets until close to end of Term 4

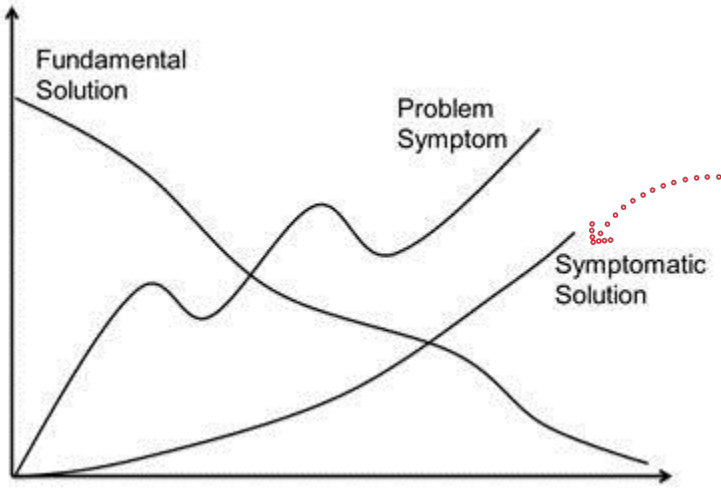


- Lack of time for proper mentoring from local Aboriginal educators and leaders
- Inadequate induction including cultural.
- Lack of support and mentoring for Aboriginal Assistant Teachers
- PD gets squeezed out when there are other time pressures

A FUNDAMENTAL SOLUTION

REFRAMING THE POLICY RESPONSE

The teacher shortage is one of a number of symptoms of a system in failure due to lack of funding. Successfully addressing this failure requires addressing the fundamental problem: the chronic underfunding of NT public schools. As Figure 1 (p2) indicates this will require an investment that take both more time and more money. **The greatest risk however is if we opt for the cheap, quick, and reactive route by employing symptomatic solutions to a narrowly defined problem.** While this often results in a temporary reduction in the problem symptom, it diverts focus and funding away from the fundamental solution and across the long term, the situation continues to get worse (Figure 13).



It is the opinion of this AEUNT submission that vast majority of the measures within the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan are symptomatic solutions to a narrowly defined problem. While some have merit when considered in isolation from the system as a whole, they will not fix the teacher shortage while our schools are chronically underfunded and the fundamental problem remains.

Figure 13: Symptomatic vs. Fundamental Solution System Behaviour [1]

The Northern Territory is historically littered with these policy approaches such as the Commonwealth’s \$78m Remote Schools Attendance Scheme which has been in place across this period of historic disengagement by Territory students and showing no evidence of impact [12]. Our study used the causal model in Figure 12 to quantitatively model student engagement across a 20 year period. The base run indeed demonstrated a worsening of the problem and eventually system collapse. Many of the warning signs of this collapse have become starkly apparent over the last decade, as detailed in this submission. However, when school funding was brought back up to 95% of SRS the system was able to bounce back over time.

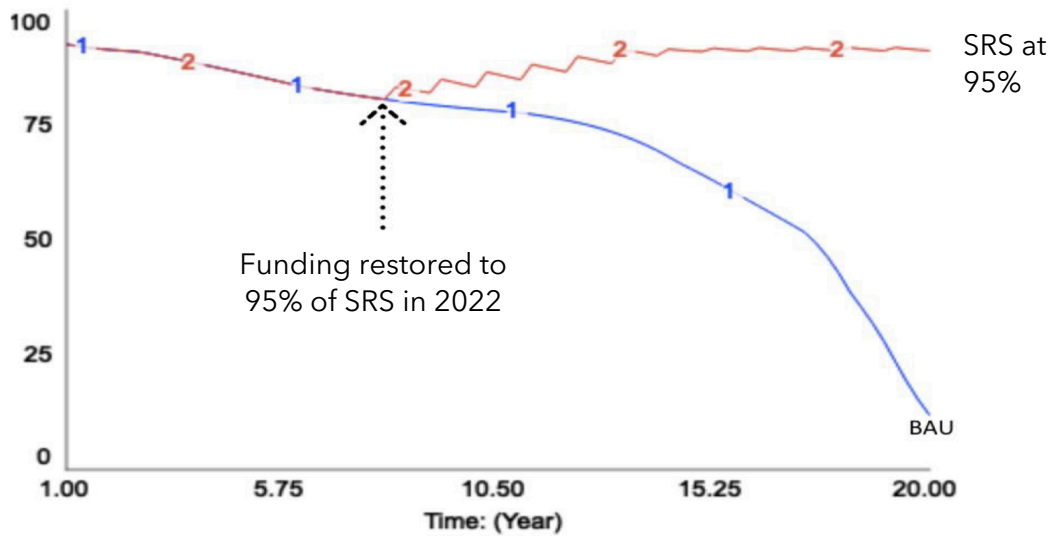


Figure 13: Dynamic system modelling of remote school system collapse vs rebound with restoration of SRS Funding at 95%

APPLYING A FUNDAMENTAL SOLUTION

FUNDING THE TERRITORY FOR SUCCESS

The analysis put forth by this AEUNT submission is that addressing the teacher shortage must be done in a holistic way that appreciates its inter-relation with other problem symptoms such as student disengagement and underperformance, and that ultimately tackles the driving force of chronic underfunding.

With mounting public discontent about effective enrolment in the Territory and its impact on teacher wellbeing and student outcomes [13] and a recent House of Representative inquiry calling for the abolition of attendance-based funding in all new National School Resourcing Agreements (NSRA) [14], **an important policy window is opening ahead of the NSRA negotiations in 2023.**

Some remote NT schools receiving funding for less than half of enrolled students under 'effective enrolment' model, data reveals

By Sarah Spina-Matthews and Oliver Chaseling
Posted Wed 16 Nov 2022 at 7:33am



A former teacher says the funding model is sending remote schools into a 'downward spiral'. (Facebook: NT Department of Education)

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In order to implement the fundamental solution to the teacher shortage crises and the inter-related student engagement and achievement problems, the AEUNT is calling for a number of principle measure to be incorporated into the new Northern Territory-Commonwealth NRSA bilateral agreement due to begin in 2024:

1. That public school students in the NT are funded to 100% of their SRS by 2026;
2. That students in the bottom 50% of ICSEA schools and all students in remote and very remote schools receive 100% of their school resourcing package;
3. That the effective enrolment policy be abolished and for schools to be funded on enrolment;
4. That the NT and Commonwealth share this investment by both increasing their contributions to the SRS (an alternative to the 80:20 split) and a publicly transparent funding trail exists showing where this money has been deployed.

THE FUNDAMENTAL SOLUTION WILL AUGMENT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MANY OF THE MEASURES WITHIN THE NTWAP

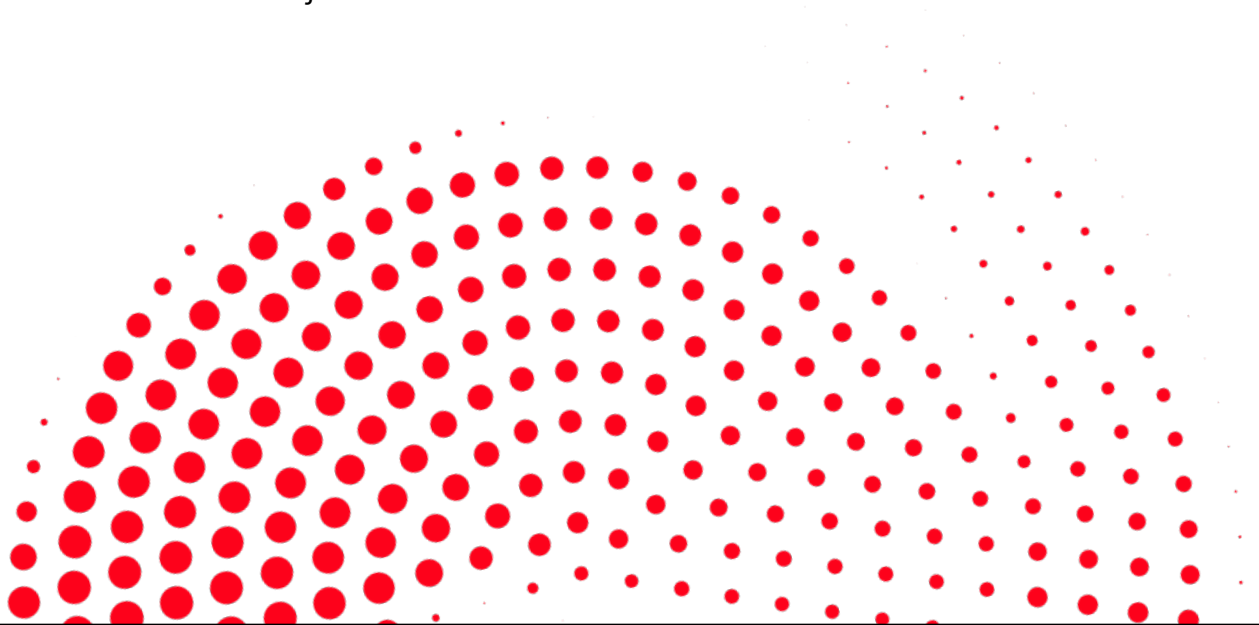
While implementing the fundamental solution is a costly investment that will take time to come to fruition, it serves as a vital prerequisite to many of the actions put forth within the NTWAP, whilst serving as a powerful augments of many others (see Table 1, p13). The Productivity Commission's interim report clearly outlined addressing attrition out of the teaching profession as key priority vis-a-vie supply-side issues [5]. Many of the NTWAP actions related to stemming this attrition require the development of school environments where teachers have the time and resourcing to do what intrinsically drew them to the profession in first place: the joy of teaching young people [ibid]. Further, the research evidence now shows that having the space to build collective efficacy through collaboration with colleagues has the highest effect size on student outcomes [18]. However, all of this ultimately is predicated on schools having the necessary funding to provide the staffing profiles pre-requisite to developing nurturing and enabling environments.

Actions	Likely effect without fundamental solution	Likely effect with fundamental solution
Elevating the profession (1-4)	Awards and media campaigns are unlikely to be effective as long as NT schools remain chronically underfunded, sending a powerful contradictory message to teachers and the community about the value placed on their work. Effective teachers are understandably reluctant to apply for HALT accreditation (Action 4) when they feel overworked and burnt-out.	Funding the NT public school system to 100% of the SRS would send a strong signal to teachers that their work is valued. By equipping schools with the staff and resources they need to meet the basic learning needs of their students, this reform would provide an enormous boost to the system's collective capacity to achieve successes worth celebrating (Actions 1-3).
Improving teacher supply (5-9)	We know that in recent years the number of graduates completing initial teacher education has more or less kept pace with the growth in student enrolments [6]. While financial incentives (Actions 6 & 7) may help to attract more people to the profession, if we do not address the fundamental problem of the underfunded school environments that they are going into, we will simply continue to lose them out the other side. This then represents a large outlay of capital for a very short-term solution.	Funding schools for success will create nurturing and collaborative environments that can keep teachers in the profession. Once every student in the NT is fully funded, then creating real pathways for para-professionals to move into teaching (Action 5), such as our many brilliant Special Education Support Officers and Aboriginal Assistant Teachers, will be a crucial next step. The surest long-term solution to staffing our most remote and challenging schools is undoubtedly to train up a new generation of local Aboriginal teachers (Action 8) – but this can only happen with specially designed teacher education programs, conducted largely in community and most crucially, accompanied by extensive in-school support, both during study and after graduation. Under the current funding model, most NT schools cannot afford this.
Improving initial teacher education (10-13)	While these actions may provide some buffer for graduates entering high stress, chronically underfunding school environments, we will still see an untenable attrition of early career teachers out of the profession. Actions such as enhancing professional experiences are predicated on schools have the resourcing to provide this extra mentoring.	Exploring pathways for mid-career entrants and other employment-based processes Action 10 could provide important new entry points for local teachers and particularly First Nations educators if there is adequate in-school resourcing to mentor them. Recognising prior learning of First Nations people Action 11 would only enhance this.

Maximising time to teach (14-18)	Actions 15, 16, 18 all require an adequately funded school system that provides the staffing, time, space and resourcing for teachers and will fail without it.	Forget wasting money on a \$25m pilot and in fully funding schools you build up a rich and enabled environment were a wide portfolio of innovation to maximise teacher's time preparing and delivering quality learning. Actions 15-18 are all predicated on this.
Better understanding of future workforce needs (19-23)	A clearer understanding that the fundamental problem lies in underfunded school environments that causing teachers to leave the profession.	We begin to utilise our significant investment in our students and teachers increasingly more effectively and precisely.
Better career pathways to support and maintain teachers in the profession (24-28)	These actions require time and space for PD and mentoring that is just not present in severely underfunded schools. Chronic underfunding and effective enrolment also forces principals to use contracts as the main form of employment causing significant job insecurity and ultimately attrition.	Funding schools for success creates environments where teachers are resourced to collaborate, mentor and develop their craft. We are particularly supportive of Action 28 (micro-credentialing) as it provides new opportunities for First Nations educators to engage in training.

Recommendations

1. Australian Education Minister's to reframe and expand the problem definition of the teacher shortage crisis so it fully appreciates related issues such as student engagement and school leadership, while deeply engaging with the fundamental driving force of chronic school underfunding;
2. Australian Education Minister's to commit to funding all public schools students to 100% of the School Resourcing Standard as an important prerequisite to not only addressing the teacher shortage crisis, but towards investing in overall system improvement;
3. That as apart of the new National School Resourcing Agreement between the Northern Territory and the Commonwealth government beginning in 2024, that:
 - i. That all public school students in the NT are funded to 100% of their SRS by 2026;
 - ii. That students in the bottom 50% of ICSEA schools and all students in remote and very remote schools receive 100% of their school resourcing package;
 - iii. That the effective enrolment policy be abolished and for schools to be funded on enrolment;
 - iv. That the NT and Commonwealth share this investment by both increasing their contributions to the SRS (an alternative to the 80:20 split) and a publicly transparent funding trail exists showing where this money has been deployed
4. That NTWAP actions (5, 8, 10-11, 15-18, 28) be deployed as priority measures in conjunction with Recommendations 1-3.



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"A world class education system that encourages and supports every student to be the very best they can be, no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenges they may face."

Vision

The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration

