

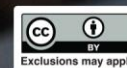


Department of
Education

Agency Commissioning Plan for Community Services

2023

Shaping the future



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The Department of Education acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which our students live and are educated. We acknowledge parents, families, and communities as the first educators of their children. Aboriginal peoples have a long tradition of teaching and learning through sharing their connections with the land and sea, and through their stories and lived experiences that are passed from generation to generation. We recognise and value the learning that Aboriginal children bring with them from their homes and communities into the classroom.

A note about language

In this document, the term Aboriginal people is used in preference to “Indigenous” or “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander” people, in recognition that Aboriginal peoples are the original inhabitants of Western Australia. Together, Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders make up the First Nations of Australia; however, Torres Strait Islander people in Western Australia have unique cultures, identities and histories, distinct from those of Aboriginal people. On average, Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders have different socioeconomic profiles and face different challenges, despite sharing a number of common experiences, including a history of racial discrimination. Some families have both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage, and this rich diversity is acknowledged and celebrated. This document is primarily about Aboriginal people in Western Australia (including Aboriginal people who also identify as Torres Strait Islanders). We respectfully recognise the valuable contributions of Torres Strait Islanders to Western Australia’s society, economy, and communities. We acknowledge that some of the principles and strategic directions outlined in this document may also apply to Torres Strait Islanders.

Agency Commissioning Plan for Community Services 2023

Executive Summary

In August 2022, the state government released the first State Commissioning Strategy (the Strategy) for Community Services for Western Australia (WA). It is intended that the Strategy will deliver greater cohesion between state government agencies, service providers, peak bodies, consumer advocates and end users to ensure that Western Australians have the essential services they need to be well supported and live healthy and fulfilled lives.

Commissioning is the cyclical process of planning, purchasing, managing, monitoring, and evaluating services with the aim of ensuring that every available dollar is allocated in the optimal manner. Commissioning is a strategic approach that will enable a fundamental shift in the system of managing the delivery of services, to provide better services to Western Australians that:

- meets the needs of users, at the right time and in the right place
- are sustainable and delivered by organisations with the right staff and systems in place
- are evidence based with robust quality standards
- are culturally safe and tailored to local community needs.

The future of community service delivery will be grounded in key principles applicable to both government and the community services sector:

- a community and person centred approach focused on outcomes
- a sustainable system
- inclusive services – focus on Aboriginal outcomes and partnerships
- well-led, supported, and transparent system.

As part of the development of the Strategy, state government agencies responsible for delivery of community services developed initial Agency Commissioning Plans (ACPs) which outlined how agencies intend to commission going forward, with an initial focus on expiring contracts. Key considerations for the development of ACPs included:

- strategic planning for community services
- schedule for proposed commissioning processes
- commissioning enablers and barriers
- prioritising Aboriginal people and organisations
- budget and demand considerations.

The Western Australian public school system is a major contributor to the State's prosperity and growth as a fair society promoting the wellbeing and participation of all its citizens. The Department of Education (the Department) provides high quality education for children and young people throughout WA, helping each to achieve academic and personal success.

Our response during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the power and value of partnership in education. We work with parents, families, agencies, and service providers to prepare students with the skills, understandings, and values to achieve their best and make a positive contribution to society.

Every Student, Every Classroom, Every Day, our strategic directions for public schools 2020-2024 sets clear aspirations for every student and focuses on improvement drivers across 6 pillars to strengthen support for teaching and learning to:

- provide every student with a pathway to a successful future
- strengthen support for teaching and learning excellence in every classroom
- build the capability of our principals, our teachers and our allied health professionals
- support increased school autonomy within a connected and unified public school system
- partner with families, communities and agencies to support the educational engagement of every student
- use evidence to drive decision-making at all levels of the system.

As students come to school with a range of learning, social adjustment, and mental health and wellbeing needs, we continue to build partnerships between our schools – across sectors and systems – and other agencies and organisations to procure specialist support services that supplement the services schools provide.

The Department commissions community services consistent with the Delivering Community Services in Partnership (DCSP) Policy and the *School Education Act 1999 (WA)*. In the context of the Department, community services are primarily non-education services that are provided to students (K-12) and their families. This includes services that support student wellbeing and engagement, students at educational risk, provide alternative educational services and provide supports for individuals with literacy, disability, and other support needs.

The Department currently has approximately 48 service agreements in place throughout WA, with an estimated total contract value of \$341 million over the entirety of the contract terms.

Through our partnership with the Commonwealth, we are able to better meet the pastoral care needs of students. In 2022, 689 schools accessed chaplaincy services through in-school chaplaincy programs, school chaplaincy support and pastoral critical incident response services.

In 2022-23, the Child and Parent Centres located in 22 communities across the state, provided 504 programs and services with approximately 73,957 child attendances and 66,456 adult attendances. The centres continue to provide a range of programs and services for families, many in partnership with the Department of Health, to ensure that children transition successfully into school.

The Department is committed to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, particularly the 4 priority reform areas that commit governments to change the way they work with Aboriginal people. The intents of the national agreement are reflected in the state's government's Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy which marks a significant development in the way agencies are expected to work in partnership with Aboriginal peoples in WA. It emphasises the need to build Aboriginal empowerment into how we work to ensure we are guided by Aboriginal-led solutions on matters that impact Aboriginal people. This means shifting away from structures that falsely position Aboriginal people as passive, individual consumers of services, to those that ensure Aboriginal people have a defined and systematic role in decision making. Strengthening engagement with Aboriginal families and community-controlled organisations at the local, regional and system levels is critical to strengthening Aboriginal students' cultural safety, wellbeing, and engagement at school.

The education-related commitments outlined in the state's Closing the Gap Implementation Plan are aligned with the Department's Strategic Directions for Public Schools 2020-2024, the Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework, and the State's Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy. These emphasise a focus on creating culturally responsive classrooms that build on the strengths of Aboriginal students, engage them in learning and enable them to thrive at school and socially. The Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy provides a high-level framework for state government policies, plans, initiatives, and programs that contribute to strengthen outcomes for Aboriginal people, built around genuine partnerships and engagement with Aboriginal stakeholders, strong accountability, and culturally responsive ways of working. The Department has several system-level initiatives underway that embed the key strategic elements of the Strategy (partnerships and shared decision making; building Aboriginal empowerment into how we work; truth-telling and eliminating racism; strengthening Government accountability; and reshaping services and systems to work with culture) into its core business.

The Department recognises that for Aboriginal children and young people, connection to Country, family, culture and community, and strength in cultural identity are critical protective factors that predetermine mental health, resilience, and wellbeing. Several current contracted programs seek to support Aboriginal students' engagement in education and their transitions through school and into a positive post-school pathway. These programs have historically focused predominately on activities to help Aboriginal boys and young men, often with a strong focus on sport, rather than all Aboriginal students.

In 2021, the Department established place-based services to deliver engagement programs for Aboriginal Girls and Young Women in Years 7-12. This service commenced in 2022 and provides strategies and activities for Aboriginal girls and young women in Years 7 to 12 to engage in academic and school life, to create positive post-school pathways, achieve their goals and flourish as strong and proud Aboriginal women. This service also supports our implementation of the Closing the Gap targets to increase representation of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs). The commitment to this service reinforces and enhances a range of Government initiatives including: Closing the Gap more broadly, the Kimberley Juvenile Justice Strategy and the Commitment to Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing.

In 2021, Western Australian schools benefited from a wide-ranging \$104 million student wellbeing package to provide more staff and resources in schools and strengthen supports for students' mental health and wellbeing. The package provided an additional \$21.8 million for schools to engage chaplaincy and/or student wellbeing officer services – ensuring every public school has access to resources to provide additional emotional and social support for students.

The Western Australian public school system is in a strong position to address the challenges and opportunities before us. Our commitment in the years ahead outlined in this ACP will be driven by the Department in partnership with other government agencies, families, communities, peak bodies, and service providers to maximise the learning potential in supporting the educational engagement of every student.

The Department recognises that its ACP outlines its first steps towards an ongoing commissioning approach to the delivery of community services. The Department is on a journey as it moves towards embedding an outcomes-based commissioning model and considers co-commissioning opportunities with other government agencies.

This ACP is a living document that will be reviewed and updated to reflect the Department's commissioning approach, through a formal governance framework established in 2023.

Section 1: Strategic Plan for Commissioning Community Services

Background

The Department engages with community service providers at several levels and through various channels. The public school system has a large economic and social footprint across WA through its infrastructure and operations, with more than 800 public schools, over 320,000 students and being the State's largest employer with approximately 60,000 staff.

In 2020, the Department undertook a comprehensive process to establish its first 5-year forward procurement plan for community services. This process included:

- mapping all existing service and grant agreements
- reviewing the existing contractual arrangements to determine the most appropriate future arrangements
- offering extensions to existing service providers where required
- adopting a phased approach to maintain service provision and avoid future workload issues for the Department and the community services sector
- identifying opportunities for establishing new community services to support schools
- establishing clear and consistent procurement timelines and processes, including strategic planning for services procured under the DCSP Policy.

The Department's first ACP was developed in April 2021 and informed by the following design principles:

- complying with the DCSP Policy in the planning, purchase, and delivery of sustainable community services
- ensuring services are designed in an evidenced, person-centred manner rather than around programs
- allowing time for evaluation practices to occur to ensure there is evidence about the change and impact for individuals
- a commitment to genuine stakeholder engagement and service design work
- enabling local autonomy in schools to ensure responsiveness to place-based need
- staging the sequencing of services that reflect market conditions and sector readiness
- aligning strategies, policies and frameworks that will drive the purchasing rationale and case for change along with service delivery
- timing considerations that will allow for the integration of activities within and beyond the Department
- considering the workforce capacity within the Department
- creating conditions that will support the growth of ACCOs
- considering internal reforms that may result in functional changes.

By cataloguing our services, the Department has been able to understand better and highlight its contribution to the following strategic priorities:

- Building on Strength: Future Directions 2020-2024 – Department of Education
- Every Student Every Classroom Every Day – Department of Education
- Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework – Department of Education
- Every day matters: 10 point plan to improve attendance – Department of Education
- Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration – All education jurisdictions
- National Agreement on Closing the Gap – All governments
- Western Australian Closing the Gap Implementation Plan – WA whole-of-government

- Disability Standards for Education 2005 – All education jurisdictions
- Commitment to Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing – WA whole-of-government
- Young People's Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drug Use: Priorities for Action 2020 - 2025 - WA whole-of-government
- All Paths Lead to a Home: WA 10 Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020 - 2030 - WA whole-of-government
- The Early Years Partnership – Lead by the Department of Communities
- Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy 2021-2029 – WA whole-of-government
- Minister's Statement on School Violence: Standing together against violence.

As a result of the state government's declaration of a State of Emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department focused on supporting schools to implement measures in accordance with health advice to ensure they were safe and clean for students and staff. The Department's strategic intents during the Response phase were to:

- reduce COVID-19 transmission risk at school sites
- support the continuity of teaching and learning
- assist in maintaining approved Department of Education critical functions
- ensure the provision of consistent, timely and appropriate advice relating to COVID-19.

To ensure continuity of community services during the pandemic that focused on student wellbeing, attendance and engagement in education, the Department offered extensions to organisations with existing service agreements.

The Department's Commissioning Schedule 2022 – 2025 (the Commissioning Schedule) for community services is outlined in Appendix 1. This outlines a phased approach to the strategic commissioning of community services. Information has been provided both at a strategic whole of government and service group level.

The Department intends to work collaboratively and, where possible, use joined-up approaches that focus on collective effort and clearly defined outcomes to respond to community need. As we commission for outcomes and work in an integrated manner (both internally and externally), this will enable the Department to meet its strategic direction and the State Commissioning Strategy's intended benefits.

Commissioning Schedule 2022 - 2025

The Commissioning Schedule includes a phased approach to forward commissioning, consistent with the design principles outlined in this section. The key service groups are outlined below.

In the shift to commissioning, it is the Department's intention to review all service groups, consistent with the key principles of the State Commissioning Strategy and the Department's strategic priorities and reform agenda.

A. Peak Associations

Services under these arrangements provide support/advocacy to local public schools and/or parents/guardians to support students' educational needs.

B. Literacy, Learning and Mentoring Support Programs

Services provide students, including those from low socio-economic communities and/or with learning difficulties with learning and mentoring support to improve academic outcomes and independence at school and in curriculum related activities.

C. Disability Support

Services provide support for students with learning disorders, such as dyslexia and other literacy-related difficulties, and their families. Supports include subsidised assessments, tuition, and provision of essential resources to families to ensure improved outcomes and increased independence for students.

Services provide specialist assessment and instruction service for public school students in WA with vision impairment, to improve their participation and independence at school and in school curriculum related activities.

Services provided through the contract with Western Australian Foundation for Deaf Children deliver programs for deaf and hard of hearing children and their families through the Centre for Families Program.

D. Chaplaincy and Student Wellbeing Program

Services under the Chaplaincy and Student Wellbeing Program aim to positively shift the social, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing of students and the broader school community to enhance students' capacity to achieve their potential as learners and become resilient and successful members of the community. The program operates statewide. Schools engage Chaplains and or Student Wellbeing officers on an as required basis, based on the local context, schools' needs, and the available budget.

E. Alternative Education Programs for Students at Risk

Services under these agreements provide alternative high quality educational programs and targeted support for students of compulsory school age who are disengaged and may not be effectively catered for within mainstream schooling. The programs operate off school sites and seek to improve student's literacy, numeracy, life and employability skills.

In satisfying the legislative and policy requirements of the Department, it is vital that all students of compulsory school age can access a range of approved options that acknowledge their wide and diverse needs and support re-engagement and transitions into further education, training, or employment pathways

There is currently a suite of Service Agreements to provide these services across 6 of the 8 educational regions. Two of the regions use internal resources to deliver these services.

F. Child and Parent Centres

The CPCs are an early intervention strategy targeting children from pre-birth to 8 years of age and their families, with a focus on pre-birth to 4 years of age. The intention is to reduce the level of vulnerability of children within CPC communities, and for children to experience a smooth transition into school, with the mental, social, emotional, physical, and behavioural skills, abilities, and competencies for sustained engagement and success in schooling.

The Service Providers are to provide and coordinate programs and services at and through the CPCs, bringing together a range of government and non-government programs and services in a coordinated way to provide universal and targeted support for some of WA's most vulnerable children and their families. The CPCs are located on or near 22 public schools across the state and provide services to the local families associated with the host school and surrounding public and private schools.

G. Engagement Programs for Aboriginal Students

Schools and program Service Providers have an important role to play in providing opportunities for Aboriginal students to embrace their cultural and linguistic identities and support their social and emotional wellbeing. The support provided must be informed by Aboriginal concepts of wellbeing.

- Engagement Program for Aboriginal Boys and Young Men
The Clontarf Program provides complementary support to Aboriginal boys and young men to overcome barriers affecting their engagement and success in school, and to assist their transitions through school and into post-school destinations.
- Engagement Program for Aboriginal Girls and Young Women in Years 7 – 12
Services under these agreements provide engagement programs to Aboriginal girls and young women in Years 7 – 12 in Western Australian public schools to strengthen their engagement in academic and school life, to create positive post-school pathways, achieve their goals and flourish as strong and proud Aboriginal women.

H. Grant Agreements

The Commissioning Schedule captures some existing grant agreements that will be converted to service agreements in the 2022 - 2025 period. This includes:

- funding support to peak organisations representing the interests of different groups within the education system in WA
- literacy, learning and mentoring support
- disability support services.

Transitioning grant agreements to longer-term service agreements through a commissioning approach will ensure that service models are re-designed with a focus on the needs of service users and desired outcomes. This also provides greater funding certainty and sustainability for the community services organisations providing these services. Grants that have been identified for conversion to service agreements are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Grants identified for conversion to service agreements

Purpose	Annual estimated value
Peak Associations	\$329 351
Literacy, Learning, and Mentoring Support	\$366 000
Disability Support Services	\$221 000

In 2021, Western Australian schools benefited from a wide-ranging \$104 million student wellbeing package to provide more staff and resources in schools and strengthen supports for students' mental health and wellbeing. The initiatives are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Package of new initiatives for Western Australian schools

New initiative	Commitment
More than 100 additional psychologists in WA schools over the next 4 years	\$42.2 million
Expansion of successful Alternative Learning Settings (ALS) pilot program across WA	\$38.5 million
Enabling every WA government school to purchase chaplaincy and or student wellbeing officer services	\$21.8 million
^Expansion of Respectful Relationships program to prevent family and domestic violence	^\$1.4 million

For these commitments, funding was allocated to the Department as a part of the 2021-22 State Budget process.

The Department of Communities is the lead agency and manages the election commitment funding for Respectful Relationships and works in partnership with the Department to deliver the program in schools.

Section 2: Commissioning Enablers

Schools have an important role to play in promoting wellbeing through connected, inclusive, culturally safe and equitable school communities. Some of the challenges associated with out-of-school factors, cannot be solved by educators alone and indeed, schools are limited to what they are able and expected to do. Evidence suggests that there is an increased prevalence of students coming to school with a range of learning, social adjustment, and mental health issues. Part of the solution is to bring a range of other services to assist the children and their families that need specialist support services that schools cannot provide. This includes working with other government agencies to explore opportunities for joined-up approaches.

School staff are faced with growing complexity challenges, particularly in, balancing expectations and responsibilities in the management of student behaviour and mental health. While schools can most certainly make a strong positive contribution, it is recognised that principals and teachers are not mental health professionals. Arguably, the most powerful impact school staff can and should make in supporting students' emotional wellbeing is to ensure every student feels a strong sense of connection and belonging where they are valued and acknowledged for their contribution to the school community. Schools can be a protective factor for student mental health and wellbeing.

The Department is progressing work on strategic priorities relating to Aboriginal students, student wellbeing, and disability. Within the objective of the State Commissioning Plan, this may reveal opportunities for joined-up approaches at a strategic policy and commissioning level. This approach is aligned with the key strategic directions for public schools 2020-2024 and focus areas for:

- providing services that support the engagement and wellbeing of Aboriginal students
- promoting and supporting positive student mental health and wellbeing
- supporting the educational attainment of students with special educational needs or living with disability
- early childhood education
- child safety.

Implementation of the commitments contained within this section may require consultation, collaboration, and/or co-design with key stakeholders, including principals and teachers; Aboriginal and other local communities; peak bodies; Unions and Associations and other government agencies. An appropriate engagement strategy will be developed and progressed as required. Likewise, these commitments will likely serve as commissioning enablers, which may inform decisions within and beyond the ACP.

Student Wellbeing and Mental Health

The Department will develop a Student Wellbeing and Care Strategy. The Strategy is a statewide plan of action to advance the wellbeing of all students in Western Australian public schools and responds to the recommendations of various reports, engages with, and aligns to whole-of-government activities. Through the Strategy, the Department is setting clear expectations for schools to embed effective approaches to student wellbeing. This will incorporate mapping existing initiatives and supports, developing guidance to align effort and resources across the public school system.

This work will be informed by the:

- Ombudsman WA report, Preventing suicide by children and young people, 2020
- State Government Commitment to Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing
- Young People's Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drug Use: Priorities for Action 2020 - 2025

- WA Recovery Plan
- Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health
- Commissioner for Children and Young People's Speaking Out Survey and Student Wellbeing in Schools Project.

The demand for school psychologists has significantly increased to assist with the growing prevalence of child and adolescent mental health issues. The mental health and wellbeing of young Western Australians is an issue of broad community concern. Schools play an important role in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of their students, including through learning outcomes from the curriculum as well as the provision of specialist support through school psychologists.

Despite the significant role of schools in promoting and supporting students' wellbeing, there is still a need for a stronger cross-sector approach at a State, system, and school level. The Department will continue to identify opportunities to work across government, with the community services sector, peak bodies and other partners to strengthen responses to student wellbeing and ensure that students receive the support they need.

Students with Disability

Under the *Disability Discrimination Act (1992)* and the *Disability Standards for Education (2005)*, the Department provides appropriate adjustments to ensure students with disabilities can fully participate in learning alongside their peers.

The Department provides a range of resources, programs, and services for students with disabilities, including:

- support available to schools through the Schools of Special Educational Needs (Disability; Sensory; Behaviour and Engagement; Medical and Mental Health), school psychologists and agency partnerships
- financial assistance for schools, to support students with disability, through the SCFM for the procurement of services at the local level.

In July 2020, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) was fully rolled out in WA. The Department worked with the National Disability Insurance Agency and other agencies to take a strategic whole-of-government approach and ensure a successful transition to the NDIS. This reform involved significant changes in the provision of support and services to people living with disability which impacted the Department's approach to providing support and services.

The Department has developed a roadmap of actions to guide future work supporting students with disability in the system.

Violence

School leaders establish the conditions for a safe and secure learning environment, supported by the Department's stance on zero tolerance to violence. Schools play an important role in addressing violence by supporting students to develop and maintain positive behaviours. This includes connecting with families through positive parenting programs and community engagement around violence in schools.

The Minister's Statement on School Violence, Standing together against violence, puts in place actions to assist school staff to respond to aggressive and violent behaviour including:

- clear expectations of roles and responsibilities of all members of the school community
- additional training, including post incident follow-up, to help schools manage students with complex and challenging behaviours
- strengthened support and escalation guidelines for principals to manage individuals who are harassing, abusive, threatening, or violent
- supporting principals to remove aggressive people from school sites, including issuing prohibition orders with the support of the Department's legal team

- suspensions for students who intentionally attack or instigate a fight with another student or share or promote violence online
- automatic move to exclude students who intentionally harm school staff
- the readiness of schools to respond to extreme violence and external risks.

The 'Connect and Respect' resources make clear for parents and schools the shared expectations and values to support the school community to work together in the best interests of students. The resources provide practical ways in which parents, carers and visitors to schools can contribute to creating improved communication, greater collaboration, and a nurturing culture.

The response to violent behaviour is a shared responsibility, and the statement includes actions that call for the broader community to be involved in solutions to this complex community issue. The behaviour of students is strongly influenced by the way adults conduct themselves, and the school community is expected to lead by example and demonstrate the type of positive engagement that is required.

Attendance

Regular school attendance is fundamental to student learning and contributes significantly to educational outcomes. Factors affecting school attendance are multi-dimensional, complex, and numerous. Our current strategies to strengthen attendance include multiple approaches with shared responsibility between students, parents, schools, and a range of government agencies. The Department is leading the implementation of a cross-agency response in remote and low socio-economic/vulnerable communities, Every day matters: 10-point plan to improve student attendance.

Commissioning Approach

The Department is on a journey as it moves towards embedding an outcomes-based commissioning model and acknowledges that many of its current service agreements and contracts have not been comprehensively reviewed and re-developed for many years. There are significant opportunities across all service areas, for the Department to engage more broadly with all stakeholders including service users, service providers, peak bodies, and other government agencies in the design of community services. The intention is to commission services that are evidence-based, sustainable, culturally responsive and meet the needs of service users.

As with other agencies commissioning community services, the Department regularly faces issues with thin markets and turnover in the provider market in regional and remote settings. Coordinated planning and commissioning activity at a whole-of-Government level, together with commissioning and contracting approaches that facilitate and promote capacity building in the community services sector, would be significant commissioning enablers.

In 2023, the Department established its Agency Commissioning Committee and intends to further embed its internal governance structures to support the agency-wide shift to commissioning.

In 2024, this will include a focus on:

- implementing newly established commissioning timelines
- internal resourcing, responsibilities, and agency capability gaps
- partnerships – across government and the community services sector
- stakeholder engagement and service design.

The Department intends to establish an Agency Implementation and Advisory Group in 2024 and will establish individual internal Commissioning Project Working Groups as required.

Section 3: Prioritising Aboriginal People and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations

Aboriginal students accounted for 28,755 (8.9%) of the total 322,294 students in public schools in Semester 1, 2023.

We acknowledge and understand that Elders, parents, families, and communities are the first educators of their children, and we recognise and value the cultures and strengths that Aboriginal children bring to the classroom.

The Department is working to strengthen its cultural responsiveness in alignment with the state government's Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy and Closing the Gap Implementation Plan, supporting government reforms to better meet the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal people.

The Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy requires government agencies to increase the proportion of service delivery by ACCOs and to support Aboriginal organisations and the Aboriginal services sector to build their capacity. The refreshed National Agreement on Closing the Gap also commits agencies to build the capability of the ACCO sector to deliver services.

The Western Australian Closing the Gap Implementation Plan for 2023-25 (Implementation Plan) recognises that structural change is needed in the way governments work with Aboriginal people. The Implementation Plan commits government agencies to support the ACCO sector to deliver high quality services to Aboriginal people. It also includes a commitment to increasing the proportion of services being delivered by ACCOs and policies to support ACCOs as preferred providers to Aboriginal people.

The forthcoming Whole-of-Government ACCO Strategy for community services to Aboriginal people is a priority of both the State Commissioning Strategy Implementation Plan and WA's Closing the Gap Implementation Plan and reflects the strategic directions of the Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy. The new ACCO Strategy expects agencies to work with ACCOs in planning and designing services; increase the number of ACCOs delivering services to Aboriginal people; and build strong and sustainable ACCOs. Agencies will also need capability building, and building their own cultural responsiveness, to work effectively with ACCOs.

The Department recognises that partnering with Aboriginal people and organisations is critical to making stronger progress on Closing the Gap outcomes.

It is a priority of the Department to create culturally responsive classrooms that build on the strengths of Aboriginal students, engage them in learning and enable them to thrive at school; and that the educational opportunities we provide match the aspirations of families and communities.

The Department has established an [Aboriginal Advisory Body](#). This external advisory body will have an important role in the oversight of our progress towards reconciliation and creating a culturally responsive education system, to support the wellbeing, engagement and achievement of Aboriginal students in public schools. Nominated members will advise and guide us to work in ways that value the knowledge, expertise and experiences of Aboriginal people, and create opportunities to work collaboratively with Aboriginal communities to determine aspirations and set directions for students.

The [Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework](#) (the Framework) continues to drive the Department's work to strengthen Aboriginal students' wellbeing, engagement, and achievement and build strong partnerships between families and schools. The Department will continue to use the Framework in the research, design, delivery, and evaluation of services, policies, strategies, and programs impacting Aboriginal students, their families, and communities.

The Department delivers a range of internal system-level programs and initiatives that support Aboriginal students in public schools including:

- the Follow the Dream program which provides enriched opportunities for Aboriginal students to pursue their aspirations
- KindiLink, which is jointly planned and delivered by early childhood teachers and Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers and provides 6 hours per week of play-and-learn sessions for Aboriginal children and their parents or carers

- literacy and learning resources designed to improve outcomes of Aboriginal students, including Tracks to Two-Way Learning professional learning and resources, the English as an Additional Language or Dialect (AL/D) Progress Map, the Capability Framework: Teaching Aboriginal EAL/D Learners and the new EAL/D Hub, which is a free online professional development resource.

The Department currently contracts a range of services that will support the Department's implementation of the Closing the Gap targets to increase the representation of ACCOs. The Department will identify opportunities to establish and strengthen formal partnerships with the ACCO sector.

The WA Government's 2023-24 Budget has allocated \$5.7 million to fund the operation of a new ACCO peak body, the Council of Aboriginal Services Western Australia (CASWA). CASWA will represent the interests of ACCOs from all social services sectors in WA as opposed to being aligned with a single sector. CASWA was formally incorporated in March 2023.

CASWA will:

- facilitate capability building for all member ACCOs
- provide policy development and advice to government and other stakeholders
- develop formal partnerships with the WA Government, including through Closing the Gap governance structures
- participate in Coalition of Peaks discussions, sitting alongside the Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia (AHCWA)

CASWA will play an important role in providing advice about the ACCO sector to agencies that commission community services. The Department will consider upcoming commissioning and engagement processes that are likely to involve ACCOs and consider where CASWA may be able to add value and expertise to the process. The Department will engage with CASWA to understand the services that CASWA will start to offer, and how these will facilitate improved relationships between the sector and government.

The Department affirms its commitment to continuing to follow the state government's Aboriginal Procurement Policy to engage Aboriginal-owned businesses and support employment.

Currently, the Department has one service agreement for programs that support male Aboriginal students in public schools, which is the Clontarf Foundation Academies program.

Clontarf Foundation Academies provide a range of in school and extracurricular activities for male Aboriginal students to support their engagement in school and to assist their transitions through school and into post-school destinations. In 2021, the program expanded to include primary school students in specific locations in the Pilbara region.

The State Government's Commitment to Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing to support improved educational engagement includes the establishment of a panel arrangement for place-based engagement programs for Aboriginal girls and young women. The estimated total contract value over 5 years for these programs is \$83 million, which includes central recurrent funding and the estimated potential school-based expenditure funded from schools' one-line budgets.

Programs on the panel promote Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing and support Aboriginal girls and young women to achieve their full learning potential, shape their own futures, and embrace their cultures, languages, and identities as Australia's First Nations people. The service model and outcomes were informed by extensive community consultation in metropolitan and regional locations. The service is being delivered to Aboriginal girls and young women in public schools in Years 7 to 12 across WA. The services are place-based and include strategies and activities that will nurture personal and professional resilience and help

Aboriginal girls and young women reach their chosen future aspirations. The panel arrangement was finalised in 2021 with services commencing throughout the state of WA in 2022.

Both the engagement programs for Aboriginal boys and young men along with Aboriginal Girls and Young Women directly support the Western Australian Government Commitment to Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing with respects to Commitment 9: Better engagement with education – Education is crucial to equipping young people to embrace the challenges of adulthood. We will work towards improving the engagement of Aboriginal children and young people in education, in the Kimberley and across WA.

The existing arrangements for the delivery of engagement programs to Aboriginal students expire at the end of 2026. The Department will be undertaking a commissioning process for these future services which will include alignment with whole of government reforms and the need to co-design services with service users, service providers and schools to address the variety of needs identified by local communities and schools.

The Department's future commissioning approach for engagement programs for Aboriginal students will prioritise an increase in the number and percentage of ACCOs delivering engagement programs to Aboriginal students.

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations Capacity Building Grant Program

The Department currently purchases a range of community services to optimise student wellbeing and engagement. The Department recognises that for Aboriginal children and young people, connection to Country, family, culture and community, and strength in cultural identity are critical protective factors that predetermine mental health, resilience, and wellbeing. Supporting the cultural identity and social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal students is essential for positive life outcomes.

The proportion of all services currently being delivered to Aboriginal students by ACCOs needs to increase.

The Department will establish a Project Working Group in 2024, to develop and establish an ongoing ACCO Capacity Building Grant Program. The goal of the program is to engage, build and strengthen relationships with ACCOs, and increase the number and type of services provided by ACCOs to all students in public schools in WA.

It is anticipated that the first grant round will be advertised in early 2025, with the intention to support capacity building activities and include a period of delivery of services that support the wellbeing and engagement of all students.

Priority focus areas will be identified through the Project Working Group and the ACP Governance Committees, co-designed with ACCOs, service users and will be aligned with the commissioning of future community services and panel refreshes.

The Department also intends to work with other government agencies in the development of its ACCO Capacity Building Grant Program.

Section 4: Budget Considerations

The Department's ACP has been developed based on the Department's current approved budget settings.

Western Australian public schools operate with a one-line budget and are funded through the Student-Centred Funding Model (SCFM). The SCFM allocates funds for each student enrolled in a school with different amounts depending on the year level of the student. Targeted funding allocations are also provided to schools with eligible students to meet the specific learning needs of:

- Aboriginal students
- students facing social disadvantage
- students with English as an additional language or dialect
- students with disabilities.

The SCFM also includes school characteristic funding, Enrolment-linked Base, and locality allocations, to ensure that schools are not disadvantaged due to their size or location. Further information on the SCFM is available on <https://www.education.wa.edu.au/funding-public-schools>.

The SCFM supports greater local control and decision making by principals and school communities in determining how funds are utilised and includes more flexibility to develop educational programs and staffing profiles that best suit the needs of the school communities. This also provides flexibility in determining participation in engagement programs and targeted support to students. In addition to the SCFM funding may be provided to specified schools as Targeted Initiatives for strategic programs and services, resulting in greater empowerment at a local level for decision making.

This ensures that schools have greater access to services and can respond to the complex and diverse issues that arise in the school setting and students can achieve their educational goals.

Public schools are able to engage a wide range of community services at the local level, based on local need and each school's decisions on the services required to support quality teaching and learning.

This localised place-based approach is reflected in how some of our service agreements are structured, which is pick and buy panel arrangements. This buying process means that service providers are engaged to deliver services on an as-required basis at individual schools, based on local context, school needs and available budget.

Panel arrangements are regularly refreshed to meet the evolving needs of schools and changes in demand.

Service agreements with fixed recurrent central funding allocations are also in place and currently account for approximately 37.5 per cent of all agreements. The Department partners with a variety of community service organisations to support the educational engagement of every student as outlined in Appendix 2.

The Department does not undertake any commissioning projects or activities without confirmation of budget.

Section 5: Additional Considerations or Concerns

Working in partnership with other government agencies and support services remains an important priority for the Department. As previously mentioned, the Department is developing Departmental strategic positions relating to Aboriginal education, student mental health and wellbeing and students living with disability. Within this, it will likely reveal opportunities for joined-up approaches at a policy and service delivery level. The Department welcomes the insights and outcomes from the State Commissioning Plan that can support and enable this, particularly integration benefits where efforts are coordinated with multiple stakeholders and agencies.

In addition to what has already been highlighted, other considerations and opportunities are outlined below.

DCSP Policy Reform

While the current policy is comprehensive, it may benefit from articulating the various pricing models applicable within a service agreement context. This would address annual funding levels, fee for service, and individualised funding arrangements accompanied by high-level principles for their application.

To ensure a greater uptake of the Preferred Service Provider process by variation, the procurement guidelines could benefit from a clearer articulation of:

- when and how it can be applied
- the applicable approval gateways relevant to financial thresholds for variations
- the degree of acceptable material changes to the original scope that is permissible within procurement frameworks.

Commissioning Capacity and Capability building

High quality, evidence informed capacity and capability building, and ongoing support is a key enabler and must accompany the State Commissioning Strategy for Community Services Implementation Plan 2022- 2024 to ensure it is consistently embedded into agency practice, process, and policy. While it is acknowledged that the transition to commissioning under the Strategy is likely to take some time, significant upfront investment in capacity and capability for line agencies, service providers, and their staff is needed to ensure successful implementation.

The Department has highlighted agency commissioning capability gaps as a focus area, through its newly established Agency Commissioning Committee.

Food Security Programs

The School Breakfast program is delivered by schools to provide healthy breakfasts to students vulnerable to poor nutrition.

The provision of food products to support schools with the delivery of the program is funded by the Department (as the lead agency) and Primary Industries and Regional Development.

In 2023, 457 schools and 22,314 students in WA accessed the School Breakfast Program.

Respectful Relationships

A 2017 election commitment of the state government was to identify evidence based respectful relationship programs suitable for delivery in Western Australian public schools and provide \$1 million in funding for the program to be delivered by organisations with appropriate expertise.

This was achieved through Department in-kind support to the Department of Communities as part of a broader set of commitments, intended to stop family and domestic violence. The Department of Communities has been the lead agency for this commitment and holds the contract with the provider, while the Department supports the engagement of public schools, and advises on training and support materials for suitability and alignment with the curriculum.

The program focuses on two major areas:

- Building a whole school approach to ensure norms, cultures, and attitudes that condone and/or excuse family, domestic and gender-based violence are changed, ensuring that schools continue to be safe places for students and supportive of student disclosures
- Maximising opportunities within the existing curriculum to develop respectful relationships education and equip staff to effectively deliver this content in the context of family and domestic violence prevention

The Western Australian Respectful Relationships Teaching Support Program was expanded through the 2021 election commitment of \$1.4 million.

Full Service School

A 'Full Service School' model as a way of addressing the needs of vulnerable young people and their families living in the Armadale-Kelmscott region was developed to provide a range of core and additional services to improve educational and social outcomes for young people.

Through this model, state government agencies are working together to address the needs of vulnerable young people and their families through facilitating access to existing programs and services. The Department is leading the Full Service School pilot, while working collaboratively with the Departments of Communities, Justice, Health, and the WA Police Force.

The focus of this initiative is building partnerships that are collaborative and sustainable within and between sectors. A collaborative inter-agency approach is intended to holistically address the needs of vulnerable young people and their families through individualised case management. In 2020, twelve public government agencies and 33 non-government agencies provided a range of support services, including counselling support, employment, and housing support, parent education, medical screening, youth outreach, and alternative education pathways.

Appendix 1: Commissioning Schedule 2022 – 2025

The Department's Commissioning Schedule is provided overleaf.

Appendix 2: List of Organisations

- Albany Youth Support Association
- Albany Worklink Inc
- Anglicare WA
- Aurora Education Foundation Limited
- Centrecare Inc
- Centrecare Training and Employment Clontarf Foundation
- Communicare Inc
- Foodbank of Western Australia Inc
- Glass Jar Australia Ltd.Investing In Our Youth Inc
- Jobs South West Inc
- Koya Aboriginal Corporation
- Marninwarntikura Fitzroy Women's Resource Centre (Aboriginal Corporation)
- Mercy Community Services Limited
- Ngala Community Services
- North Regional TAFE
- One Tree Community Services
- OnPsych Chaplaincy Ltd
- Parkerville Children & Youth Care Inc
- Peel Youth Services Inc.
- SHINE Inspire Achieve Belong Inc.
- Shire of Mundaring
- South Metropolitan TAFE
- South Regional TAFE
- Stars Foundation Limited
- Stephen Michael Foundation Ltd.
- TAG Group Australia Pty Ltd
- The Churches' Commission on Education Incorporated (t/a YouthCare)
- The Dyslexia-Speld Foundation WA Inc
- The Federation of Western Australian Police and Community Youth Centres Inc
- The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Perth Centrecare Skills Training Centre
- The Royal Life Saving Society WA Inc

- The School Volunteer Program Ltd
- The Smith Family
- SU Australia Ministries Limited
- VisAbility Limited
- WA Foundation for Deaf Children
- Waalitj Foundation Limited
- Wanslea Limited
- Whitelion Youth Agency Ltd
- Wunan Foundation Inc
- YMCA Perth Youth and Community Service Inc
- Youth Futures Ltd t/a Youth Futures WA Inc

Appendix 3: Case Study

This case study is provided to contextualise the school's service delivery environment and other closely related settings. Services that are delivered through existing contractual arrangements and/or grants are emphasised with *italics*. This case study is an illustration of a general experience of the service delivery environment and a pseudonym has been used.

The Collins family lives in a low-socioeconomic area in outer metropolitan Perth.

They comprise of 3 children, aged 7, 12 and 16. All 3 students have accessed the *school breakfast program* to provide them with access to a nutritious breakfast and support improvement of their educational, social and behavioural outcomes. When living regionally, the children accessed the *in-term swimming lessons*, and all children have participated in literature workshops provided by the *Literature Centre* where they wrote their family story in their own language. The older children have both accessed interstate sporting competitions.

The 12 year old has recently transitioned to high school and has joined the *Clontarf Academy* at his public school to support his engagement and success at school and to assist him into post-school destinations. He is having difficulties transitioning to high school from his regional primary school and is being supported by accessing the *chaplain* who is an important part of the school's overall pastoral care provision for students. He will also be attending an excursion to the *Gravity Discovery Centre*, where he will meet scientists who are undertaking research and learn about the relevant scientific concepts on which their work is based while also undertaking a program of related work in his science class. His teacher thinks he will be inspired to pursue a career in astronomy.

The 16 year old attends the *Education and Training and Participation Plan* service, where she attends South Metropolitan TAFE. She is successfully undertaking the Maritime program with the purpose of building her readiness to enter into employment in the industry, or further training for a job that requires higher-level qualifications.

The family accessed the *Child and Parent Centre* for the youngest child prior to attending school. Challenges were identified and on re-location to outer metro Perth, access to a psychologist and speech pathology was accessed through consultation with *Dyslexia-SPELD*. The teaching staff at the primary school have also accessed the online materials to support teaching and learning for this child.

Supports for the family were strengthened by the school accessing enhanced student health and wellbeing services that support complex needs. For example, *chaplain and student wellbeing officers*, one-on-one culturally responsive mental health counselling services; mentoring; allied health professionals and ACCOs.