

Student re-engagement Programs

Interim recommendations report

NSW Department of Education & Commissioning NSW
May 2021

Introduction

Student Engagement: The extent to which students are connected to their learning

To coincide with the end of the Links to Learning funding cycle in December 2019, the NSW Department of Education undertook a review of current processes and approaches to student re-engagement services. These are aimed at helping students at risk of disengagement reconnect with school and their education. Central to this was the understanding of what student engagement is and what it looks like.

The review provided four key recommendations necessary for successful student re-engagement services, covering:

1. Program design
2. Model of engagement
3. Outcome measurement
4. School and provider experience

These recommendations are based on :

Adopting a procurement process that reinforces accountability and tracking of student and program outcomes
Building on what we learnt from Links to Learning and previous student re-engagement services

Increasing the use of schools and students data to allocate resourcing to where it is most needed.

Key recommendations will shape the design and delivery of future student re-engagement services.

Background

Links to Learning

The Links to Learning Community Grants Program is a Department of Education managed Program that funds NSW-based not for profit, non-government organisations and local government authorities to deliver projects to students in public schools.

Since 2000 the program has undergone changes to its structure and focus. In the 2017-2019 funding cycle, the program tightened its focus on student engagement and no longer included the delivery of vocational qualifications or work experience.

Funding agreements were due to expire in December 2019 however, were extended for an additional 12 months and then subsequently to June 30, 2021.

In 2020, the NSW Department of Education in partnership with NSW Treasury used the end of the funding cycle as an opportunity to employ a commissioning approach to inform future student re-engagement services.

Funding for a new student re-engagement service will continue into the 2022/2023 fiscal year while the Department works to ensure value for money and direct services where they are most needed. Stakeholders will have the opportunity to provide feedback and will be consulted throughout this process.

Four key recommendations of successful student re-engagement services

Links to Learning

1. Program design

Incorporate into the program requirements a defined Theory of Change (outline of how the program activities will directly link to the desired student outcomes).



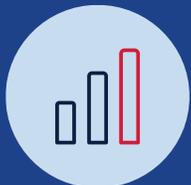
2. Model of engagement

Employ a commissioning system that enables ongoing monitoring of outcomes and adjustments to service delivery to best meet the needs of students and schools.



3. Outcome measurement

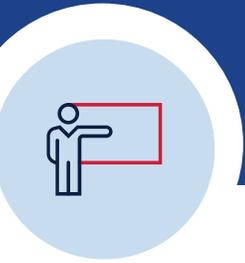
Embed a consistent outcomes framework and measurement approach to evaluate services and ensure students are re-engaging with school and their learning.



4. School and provider experience of the process

Set up logistics of program management that meet the needs of schools and providers, with a focus on reducing the administrative burden for school based staff.





Key recommendation 1: Program Design

Incorporate into the program requirements a defined Theory of Change (outline of how the program activities will directly link to the desired student outcomes)

Implement a **Theory of Change** that highlights what needs to be achieved so students reach their goals.

Creating **student cohort criteria** so providers and schools know which students are eligible for support.

Co-design programs, in partnership with schools, to make them context specific.

Build on evidence of previous services so providers and schools have access to a **community of best practice.**

“It would have been helpful to have a lot more structure. On occasions, the boys would go down the back and play footy.”

High School Deputy Principal



Key recommendation 2: Model of Engagement

Employ a commissioning system that enables ongoing monitoring of outcomes and adjustments to service delivery to best meet the needs of students and schools.

Implement **service agreements** that enable systematic measurement of student outcomes across all providers.

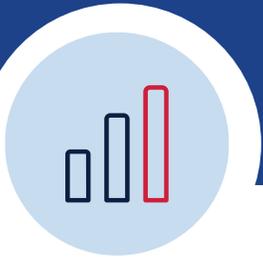
Use **Department wide tools** to consistently measure impact and ensure students outcomes are met.

Identify **areas of need** and prioritise resourcing so students with the highest need are supported.

Allow **accountability and flexibility**, where a student is not meeting the desired outcome, to alter service delivery so the student can achieve their goals.

“It (grants allocation process) was quite onerous actually, like we're asking for funding to build a \$100m dollar tunnel.”

Provider



Key recommendation 3: Outcome Measurement

Embed a consistent outcomes framework and measurement approach to evaluate services and ensure students are re-engaging with school and their learning.

Define **student engagement**, what it means and what it looks like.

Implement an **Outcomes Measurement Framework** that details what success looks like.

“Reporting mechanisms and feedback (data) on student achievement needs to be provided to schools.”

School based staff member

Implement an outcomes focused approach to systematically **measure impact**.

Provide **regular updates** to ensure students are tracking well to meet program outcomes, including proactive action when a student is not meeting the desired outcomes.

It would be great if we could measure how they [students] are engaging with the curriculum, their confidence, their attitude to teachers... have improved over the course of the program.

Provider



Key recommendation 4: School and Provider Experience of the process

Set up logistics of program management that meet the needs of schools and providers, with a focus on reducing the administrative burden for school based staff.

Prioritise **reducing the administrative burden** for school based staff.

Provide **tools** that are designed to support successful programs and ease reporting.

Set up **communications** that support a shared understanding of student outcomes and how they will be measured

Establish ongoing **feedback** loop so programs can be adapted to meet the needs of students and good news stories can be shared.

Need to do lots of research [about programs available]. If we don't know it's there, how do we know to access it? We would almost like a directory of programs we could access.

Learning and Wellbeing Advisor

A good provider and facilitator can make all the difference. There are a few around, but this is also a weakness.

Director, Educational Leadership

No one in schools understands what the program is about... you got to have multi-pronged communication approach.

Secondary School Principal

Appendix: Student Engagement Insights

The extent to which students are connected to their learning



The drivers of student engagement are complex and inter-related

Drivers of student engagement

Through our research and interviews, we encountered three drivers of student engagement:

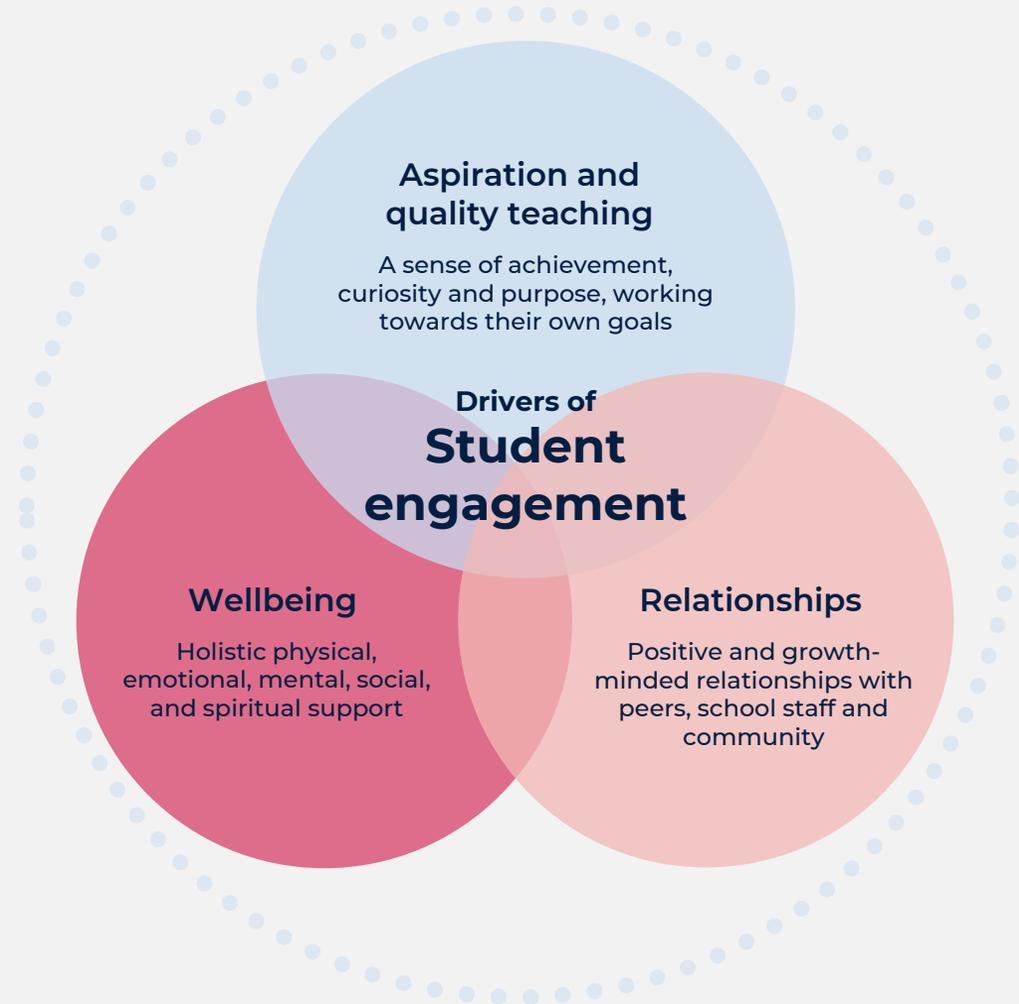
(1) aspiration and quality teaching, (2) relationships, (3) wellbeing.

Drivers are what support students to be engaged in their learning. To tackle disengagement, we need to ensure these drivers are in place for each student.

These drivers are in line with key pillars of the Wellbeing Framework for Schools (Connect, Succeed, Thrive)¹ as well as other models of engagement and wellbeing such as PERMA (Positive Emotion; Engagement; Positive Relationships; Meaning; and Accomplishment) by Martin Seligman².

1. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/student-wellbeing/whole-school-approach/wellbeing-framework-for-schools>

2. Seligman, M. (2011). Flourish. Sydney, New South Wales, Australia: William Heinemann Australia.



Future exploration is required to better understand drivers and validate this model

Student engagement is demonstrated through 3 lenses



Behavioural engagement

Students' participation in learning. Includes the extent to which students follow rules and adhere to classroom norms, participate in extracurricular activities, and exhibit behaviours such as skipping school or "getting into trouble".

Measurements: Attendance, absences, suspension

"Students go to school because they want to, not because they have to"

School Based Apprenticeship Officer



Cognitive engagement

Students' investment in learning. Incorporates thoughtfulness and willingness to exert the effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills.

Measurements: Value-added growth, NAPLAN results, HSC attainment and results

"Kids disengage a lot because they don't get the literacy or numeracy component. They can't see any point in what they're learning"

High School Principal



Emotional engagement

Students' positive and negative reactions towards learning, school, peers and school staff (e.g. level of interest, boredom, happiness, sadness and anxiety). Influenced by a student's overall wellbeing and relationships with people at school. Creates ties to a school and influences willingness to do work.

Measurements: Tell Them From Me survey (data not provided), Wellbeing Tool

"It's about the relationships. Students are not going to learn if they don't have good relationships, but instead are stuck in fight or flight mode."

Complex Behaviour Coordinator

Students are engaged on a continuum

LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT *	BEHAVIOURAL	COGNITIVE	EMOTIONAL
 Actively engaged (High attention – high commitment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good attendance • No behavioural issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finds purpose and value in their learning • Demonstrates curiosity and persistence to deepen understanding • Has clear education, life and/or career aspirations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relates well with peers, school staff and community
 Selectively engaged (High attention – low commitment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good attendance • Behavioural issues are rare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performs for outputs, results, extrinsic recognition (e.g. grades, awards) • Able to articulate career goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally good relationships with peers, school staff and community
 Compliant (Low attention – low commitment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average attendance • Avoids negative attention and consequences (don't stand out from the crowd) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning happens at low and superficial levels • Minimum effort; going through the motions to meet what is required of them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May feel some connection to peers or some staff, but not invested in school community
 Disengaged (No attention – no commitment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor attendance • Visible behavioural issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not participate in classroom tasks • Disconnected and disinterested in learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak relationships with peers and staff
 Resistant (Diverted attention – no commitment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very poor attendance • Likely experienced multiple suspensions • Actively disrupts peers and school staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refuses to do the work, sometimes substitutes with other tasks • Negative, sometimes hostile attitude towards classroom learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very poor social behaviour • Does not feel any sense of belonging in their school environment

Attention: The student is attentive and focused on the tasks associated with the work being done.

Commitment: The student voluntarily (and without the promise of extrinsic rewards or negative threats) deploys scarce resources (e.g. time, effort) to support the activity called for by the task.

*Adapted from Schlechty, Phillip C. (2011-02-16). Engaging Students: The Next Level of Working on the Work.