Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students and educational intentions – Insights from the literature

Rationale

Supporting student aspirations to complete the HSC draws on a number of important factors. This resource uses a scoping review approach of the literature to distil the information from 30 years of research to lay out these factors and highlight key points that matter. Schools can use this resource as of the part of annual HSC results analysis, supporting student aspirations, through key transition stages such as subject selection and to support Personalised Learning Pathways development. Schools can also use this resource as a professional learning tool to seek guidance around implementing and developing evidence practice within the school, teaching and learning programs and pedagogy.

While there are general factors that matter, in terms of aspirations to complete the HSC, there is also particular guidance in the literature to support Aboriginal students. In the scoping review approach inclusion criteria are set to hone the literature search to answer guiding questions.

This resource answers these two guiding questions:

1. **The general** - What are the main factors known to influence HSC completion?

2. **The specific** - Are there points from the literature to inform support for Aboriginal students in completing the HSC?

The resource has two aims:

1.   To answer the guiding questions and,

2.   Model a process of using QDAI in a scoping review approach to the literature.

QDAI (Questions, Data, Analysis and Implications) is the scientific method, simplified to suit a range of needs, and its use to conduct a literature review is detailed in this resource.

Scoping the literature – supporting Aboriginal students to complete the HSC

This document has two purposes: to introduce key ideas from the literature addressing the questions identified below and to illustrate a literature review method using QDAI:

Questions – good questions guide our literature search to collating the best resources

Data – the collated resources or articles are the data that we will analyse for the review

Analysis – use a set method for analysis so others can see our thinking, make judgements about the suitability of the output and be able to replicate the analysis, if needed (to validate this work)

Implications – the findings are presented/discussed to answer the questions

Readers looking to connect with the findings and skip the method section are invited to go straight the implications.

Questions

1. What are the main factors known to influence HSC completion?

2. Are there points from the literature to inform support for Aboriginal students in completing the HSC?

Data

Using keywords and ideas from the questions above a set of literature was obtained from two sources:

1. CESE library services literature collations (email the team to access any articles that are from a subscription)

2. A follow-up scan of known seminal articles

[1] and [2] are used in Table 2 and the reference list to identify the source of the article.

Inclusion criteria:

- Aboriginal students were included in the sample

- Data was used (quantitative and/or qualitative) or reviews of other studies using data

- Models or factors predictive of HSC completion were reported.

- Peer reviewed journal articles and academic reports.

- Published post-1990, relating to the Australian context.

- Senior years of schooling was a focus.

- More than 5 articles referenced* related directly to the questions (a proxy for relevance)

Analysis

Table 1 sets out the charting process for analysis of the articles.

Table 1 – Findings – Analysis frame

Author	Additional literature	Method	Sample	Framing/findings	Implications
First listed (additional is et al.) and Year	A scan of the reference list to identify the number of additional articles for further reading. This can be considered a proxy for relevance	Details of methods used – Quantitative, Qualitative, mixed-method etc.	Participants and any other classifications of participants	As stated in the articles and usually covered in the abstract from the article.	As stated in the article and reflections from the researcher considering the current AOPD and wider Department aims

There were 11 articles identified that met the inclusion criteria*, they are provided in Table 2 and detailed in the reference list. There were five quantitative studies, zero qualitative only studies, three literature reviews, and three mixed-method studies. Some highlights of salient points are provided in the implications column in Table 2.

*Button et al. (2016) contains only two additional relevant articles but is included due to the nature of the article.

In the NSW Department of Education, the use of Aboriginal is preferred over Indigenous, Aboriginal, and Torres Strait Islander people or the abbreviated form ATSI. However, a mix of terms is used here depending on the source.

Charting the data

Table 2 – Findings – Analysis frame applied

Author	Additional literature	Method	Sample	Framing/findings	Implications
[2]**Ainley et al. 1991**	5+	Quantitative, Survey with reading and numeracy scores	3,045 Year 9 students, 23 government schools, NSW DET	This article describes part of a study to understand the ways in which school factors influence high school students to stay in school for the senior secondary non-compulsory years. A causal model was proposed in which student background characteristics and school factors had a direct influence on students' intentions and had less direct influence through two intervening variables, namely, student achievement level and student perceptions of the quality of school life. An important step in the study was establishing which schools were significantly different from each other (substantially and statistically) after controlling for student background characteristics.	**Student background**, and two intervening variables, **academic achievement, and perceptions of 'quality of school life'** matter. 'Quality of school life' has similar measures as used in TTFM. **Schools vary in their ability to retain students.** Their method identified school characteristics that programs to support all students, including aboriginal students, should understand. They present a structural equation model (p73) that is similar to Gemici et al.'s. These two

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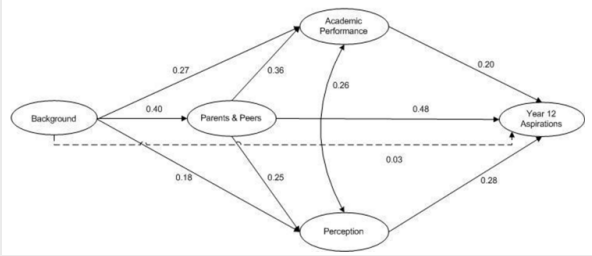| Author	Additional literature	Method	Sample	Framing/findings	Implications
				Quantitative and qualitative information about significantly different schools then indicated the parameters that should be more closely observed to understand the school factors producing the school differences.	models clearly show what matters for initiatives to support students to complete their schooling.
[2]Briggs 2016	5+	Mixed method, heavily qual via case study	58 in two schools	This paper aims to provide some insight into the links between attendance, retention, and engagement of Indigenous senior students in an urban environment. A study of 58 students from two urban high schools during the period 2009–14 was undertaken. The study used data from a variety of school records, as well as informal interviews with students. It is argued that while the broader comprehensive statistical studies are useful there is a need to have some more, in-depth, localised studies in urban schools. Results of the study support the link between absences	This paper points to the **dearth of research that relates to senior Indigenous students in an urban school setting.** Author cautions on generalisability. **Attendance AND disengagement** matter, **re-engagement interventions can work for some students.** **High attendance in Y 11 and high motivation** mattered. **Some students benefit from**

Author	Additional literature	Method	Sample	Framing/findings	Implications
				and student disengagement. There was a clear positive link between retention to Year 12 and superior attendance. In many individual instances, the links between attendance, retention, and engagement were complex. There was also a need to place emphasis on alternative paths for some of the disengaged groups rather than just trying to improve attendance. These paths included employment opportunities, Technical and Further Education (TAFE), and post-school traineeships or apprenticeships. This paper points to the need for further longitudinal studies in urban high schools to study the long-term life outcomes for Indigenous students.	**transition support (to post-school destination).** Their intervention was able to retain 100% of students to senior school. Strategies include: **Supporting students to have early academic success in their senior years and activities that promote mutual respect.** **Student areas of concern were essay writing, research skills, completion of assignments, explanation of curriculum content, and exam technique.** These concerns were irrespective of academic ability or socioeconomic status.
[2]**Burgess et al. 2019**	5+	Systematic review	54 articles covering five quantitative studies, 34 qualitative	This review analyses studies that identify pedagogies to support, engage and improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student outcomes. Some studies focus on pedagogies to support and engage, while others describe	There is **more evidence linking engagement and support for Aboriginal students to pedagogic practices** than there is linking pedagogy to educational outcomes.

Author	Additional literature	Method	Sample	Framing/findings	Implications
			studies, and 14 mixed-method studies	pedagogies that are designed to improve engagement, attendance, and academic skills. The role of context emerges as a key theme, particularly in remote areas. In larger studies, Aboriginal students are often a subset of a larger student group, included because of socioeconomic status and achievement levels. Key findings indicate a disconnect between practice and outcomes where links to improved outcomes are by implication rather than evidence. Further, definitions and detail about pedagogies are mostly absent, relying on 'common understandings' of what pedagogy means. This review highlights that most of the research identifies effective pedagogies to engage and support Aboriginal students rather than to improve their educational outcomes.	The complexity of designing effective programs to support Aboriginal students is acknowledged. **Standardised approaches are unlikely to be successful across the board.** **Programs focusing on literacy and numeracy are more likely to receive system support.** The importance of ethical and **authentic consultation** and collaboration with Aboriginal families, communities, and organisation. The **NSW Quality Teaching model and the 8 Aboriginal Ways Pedagogy are identified as helpful pedagogical** tools in this space.

Author	Additional literature	Method	Sample	Framing/findings	Implications
[1]**Button et al. 2016**	2	Quantitative, system-level data	257 state school, 29,219 students, of whom 1,854 were Indigenous	This paper focuses on concerted strategies in the Queensland state schooling system to boost the attainment of the Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) by students in Year 12, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It examines the purposeful reform program pursued by the Queensland Department of Education and Training (DET) during 2014–15 – in schools, regions, and central office – to boost certification for students exiting Year 12 in Queensland state schools. A key element has been increasing QCE attainment for Indigenous students to Close the Gap with their non-Indigenous peers.	System wide focus on: 1. **Purposeful, consistent, and deliberate nature of the initiative** 2. **Overt moral imperative as a foundation** 3. **Focus on student-level data to inform system response** 4. **Case management and flexible resourcing** 5. **New ways of using student-level data** Over the period of this work, there was a substantial increase in Aboriginal students completing Year 12.

Author	Additional literature	Method	Sample	Framing/findings	Implications
[2]**Crawford et al. 2018**	5+	Quantitative using census data	2016 census data at the national level (1.2 million records)	This paper uses data from the Census of Population and Housing to examine trends between 2006 and 2016 in two aspects of Indigenous education: school participation and Year 12 attainment. We find that there has been considerable growth in the Indigenous school student population, both at the primary and secondary levels. Much of the growth in Indigenous student numbers at the primary level has been in nonremote areas, particularly in urban areas of Queensland and New South Wales. Growth in the number of secondary school students was also seen in some remote areas of Western Australia, Queensland, and the Northern Territory. Over time, more Indigenous students are attending non-government schools. However, the government system remains the most important provider of education for Indigenous students, in both remote and nonremote areas. There has been strong growth in Year 12	Under the National Indigenous Reform Agreement, 'Year 12 or equivalent attainment' is measured as the proportion of 20–24-year- olds who have completed Year 12 or a qualification at certificate level II or above. Despite the impressive increase in school completions rates, Indigenous students remain much more likely to leave school without completing Year 12 than non-Indigenous students. Location matters - the report of an independent review into Regional, **Rural and Remote Education noted 'a persistent relationship between location and educational outcomes.'** Culture as a focus **– there is a call for emphasis on cultural responsiveness and building strong relationships between students, families, communities, and schools.**

Author	Additional literature	Method	Sample	Framing/findings	Implications
				attainment among the Indigenous population, in both remote and nonremote areas. A large part of the remaining gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in the likelihood of leaving school without completing Year 12 is attributable to personal, household, school, and neighbourhood characteristics.	
[2]Gemici et al. 2014 a &b	5+	Quantitative survey linked with PISA	14,251+ 2009 LSAY cohort Year 9 students	An initial analysis of the factors that impact on aspirations confirms the importance of what might be referred to as the 'list of usual suspects' in youth transitions research. These factors include gender, English-speaking background, socioeconomic status (SES), and academic achievement at age 15 years, as well as parental and peer influences. In terms of importance, the results show that academic achievement at age 15 years is the most important predictor of Year 12 completion, followed by parental influence. A key insight from this study is just how critical	They present a structural equation model (in the support document, p17) that is similar to Ainley et al.'s. These two models clearly show what matters for intentions to stay at school. **Parent and peer expectations, academic achievement, and student's perceptions of school.**

Author	Additional literature	Method	Sample	Framing/findings	Implications
				parental influences are in driving young people's educational and occupational aspirations. From a policy perspective, the results from this study reinforce the importance of parent- focused interventions.	**Understanding this model** and the discussion regarding Aboriginal students in the supporting document is essential reading for program owners.
[1]Guenther et al. 2019	5+	Systematic review	45 articles 15 quantitative studies, 25 qualitative studies, and 5 mixed methods studies	Education for Australian First Nations students living in remote communities have long been seen as an intractable problem. Ten years of concerted effort under Closing the Gap and related policy initiatives has done little to change outcomes beyond small, incremental improvements. Programmes and strategies promising much have come and gone, and most have died a quiet death. This systematic review aims to uncover what research reveals about what does make a difference to outcomes for students. The review found 45 papers that provide considerable evidence to show what is and is not effective. The	Seven clusters of outcomes were identified, including literacy and numeracy, wellbeing, aspirations, equity, participation, identities, and relational. Any work designed to support Aboriginal student outcomes could focus on these. The factors that contribute to improved outcomes—particularly those defined from a community perspective—are focused on: • **Parent and community involvement** • **Attention to health**

Author	Additional literature	Method	Sample	Framing/findings	Implications
				review also found several issues that have little or no evidence and which could be the subject of more research.	• **Safety and wellbeing** • **Local employment** • **Appropriate curriculum and pedagogies and strategies that build engagement in learning**
[1]**Harwood et al. 2015**	5+	Mixed method, survey, and case study	Quantitative, surveys – 91 mentees (interim figures at the time of writing), Quantitative, Interviews 125	A strong feature of the widening participation agenda is improving the aspirations of groups that are underrepresented in higher education. This paper seeks to reposition the utility of this as a focal point of educational interventions by showcasing the success of a mentoring program that takes a different approach. The Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) significantly and positively impacts Australian Indigenous high school students' aspirations to finish school and continue to further study, training or employment. AIME is not read	The AIME (mentoring) program acknowledges **"a continuity of cultural assets and resources"** within young people and on this premise supports young people to engage more with schooling. AIME departs from a rigid cultural capital framework, seen as the manifestation of the dominant "White people" culture. Before Years 11 and 12 the focus is on: • Nu**rturing [cultural] identity**

Author	Additional literature	Method	Sample	Framing/findings	Implications
			mentees, 77 mentors.	as a classic intervention program for raising aspirations. Instead, AIME builds upon the cultural wealth of participants and adopts an approach that seeks to inspire individuals rather than remediate them. The paper draws on survey data and fieldwork to present an example case study for resisting the assumption that young people's aspirations are deficit and in need of 'improving'. The paper describes how AIME works within young people's 'windows of aspiration' to positively impact their engagement in school and further education, training, and employment.	• **Positive relationships** • **Communication** In years 11 and 12 **goal-setting skills** are taught in addition to the three points mentioned above. The intent of the AIME is threefold: 1. **Challenge the neo-liberal emphasis on individual responsibility (and the associated blame placed on** 2. **Promote that "Indigenous = Success"** 3. **Promoting that existing aspirational windows are both validated and honoured.**
[1]**Helme et al. 2011**	5+	Clearing house review	NA	The main factors that influence completion rates for Indigenous students are access, attendance, and achievement. The barriers to their access to	A major study (Lamb & Rice 2009) of effective strategies to improve school completion points to three strategies

Author	Additional literature	Method	Sample	Framing/findings	Implications
				school are: physical (for example, due to geographic isolation) cultural (for example, due to discrimination) economic (for example, due to the costs associated with attending school) informational (for example, due to the lower levels of literacy in Indigenous communities). Absenteeism among Indigenous students is markedly higher than among non-Indigenous students. Poorer access and absenteeism contribute to lower academic achievement, making it more difficult for many Indigenous students to successfully complete school. Closing the school completion gap is a major national challenge and will require effort in a range of related areas, not just in schools. Gains in education may be limited unless other aspects of socioeconomic disadvantage are improved, such as health, nutrition, housing, and employment.	• **School culture and leadership:** Schools with high retention have a supportive school culture with a shared vision across the school community, high expectations of staff and student success, responsiveness to individual needs, and a drive for continuous improvement. • **School-wide strategies:** Strategies that help improve student engagement and reduce early leaving are adopted across the school for all students. • **Student-focused strategies:** Programs are put in place to directly meet the individual or group needs of at-risk students, with strong and active links to welfare providers.

Author	Additional literature	Method	Sample	Framing/findings	Implications
[1]Marks 2014	5+	Quantitative, population level-data analysed using regression	68,223 students in Year 9 in 2008 in Victoria, 790 of whom are Indigenous	This paper examines student and school influences on reaching Year 12. Male, English-speaking background, government school, and especially Indigenous students were less likely to reach Year 12 than comparison groups.	The major contribution of this study is to demonstrate the **strong influence of prior achievement on reaching Year 12** and the rather modest independent effects of a socioeconomic background, school sector, and individual schools once student performance has been considered. The strong effect of prior achievement on reaching Year 12, immediately poses the question: What are the influences on school achievement? Are schools and students' socioeconomic and demographic characteristics strong predictors of student achievement or is student achievement largely a function of early childhood cognitive influences that are largely independent of schools and students' social characteristics?

Author	Additional literature	Method	Sample	Framing/findings	Implications
					The much lower level of school completion by Indigenous students, even when accounting for the socioeconomic background and prior performance, warrants further investigation and policy responses. **There are Indigenous students who perform just as well as non-indigenous students who for some reason or other decide not to continue with their education.**
[1]**OECD 2017**	5+	Mixed methods using quantitative data from National collections and qualitative data from	National level quantitative data, qualitative data from discussions (n>200, 30%-40%	The objectives of the study are threefold: 1) to identify promising strategies, policies, programmes, and practices that support improved learning outcomes for Indigenous students; 2) to build an empirical evidence base on what works to better support Indigenous students to succeed in education; and 3) to assist provinces and territories in Canada to learn from one another as they strive to achieve sustained and accelerated progress in closing education gaps for Indigenous	Evaluation of programs supporting Aboriginal students are scant and those that have been done are limited in their rigour (2010-2012). **As a result, there are constraints around highlighting effective strategies, policies, and practice.** **The practices that benefit Indigenous students also benefit**

Author	Additional literature	Method	Sample	Framing/findings	Implications
		document analysis and discussions with key stakeholders	of whom are Indigenous)	students. Queensland and National Australian data are used to inform this report. The report looks beyond student attainment and achievement to include well- being, participation, and engagement. While we have sought policies and practices underpinned by evidence of success, the lack of evaluation is problematic regarding education for Indigenous populations.	**non-Indigenous students.** All students benefit from high-quality, responsive teaching in combination with localised curriculum and learning activities, within a safe and inclusive school environment. Successful schools mainstream local Indigenous values, history and cultural approaches as part of everyday school life, rather than add-ons targeted only to Indigenous students. Six priorities are identified: • **Student wellbeing** • **Participation rates** • **Student engagement** • **Early learning** • **Supporting teachers and leaders** • **Engaging families**

Author	Additional literature	Method	Sample	Framing/findings	Implications
					Decision-makers and stakeholders must have access to **high quality and timely data on key indicators.**

Implications

This section presents the main ideas obtained from the scoping review of the literature. These are set out in two categories, addressing the guiding questions:

1. What are the main factors known to influence HSC completion? **Factors that matter**

2. Are there points from the literature to inform support for Aboriginal students in completing the HSC? **Advice on implementing initiatives to support Aboriginal students**

"The practices that benefit Indigenous students also benefit non-Indigenous students" (OECD, 2017, p.12)

Factors that matter

In order of significance in the literature these factors matter:

- Parent and peer expectations (Gemici (2014b) identify this as well as others), this is mediated via the following factors also:

    - Academic achievement, literacy, and numeracy (Many articles highlight this, and it is placed second due to some of those studies not being able to 'operationalise' notions of parent and peer expectation)

    - Student perceptions of school (addresses the quality of the learning environment)

    - Student background (not a direct effect, Gemici (2014b))

- Wellbeing (discussed at length in OECD (2017) p. 52)
- Engagement with culture and community as an integral, localised, whole-school approach to building trust

It is less helpful to discuss the factors that schools cannot change or influence, though these do matter: Aboriginality, gender, location, SES, and which school attended (debated in the literature).

Advice on implementing initiatives to support Aboriginal students

Connections with families and communities have dimensions beyond simple expectations. Truth, trust, and valuing culture is critical given the historical and current experiences of Aboriginal people (Guenther et al., (2019), Helme et al. (2011), OECD (2017)).

When collaborating to develop initiatives:

- Engage with the literature, plan, and evaluate well. The best model to inform initiatives is found in Gemici et al. (2014 b), p.17. It is essential to connect with the Aboriginal Education Policy and the AECG partnership agreement

- Engage authentically with families and communities to enable them to actively support students' educational goals. Use Personalise Learning Pathways to good effect Promote mutual respect, build and maintain high quality, culturally affirming, learning environments.

- Use validated models (QT and QTR) and culturally appropriate models (8 Aboriginal ways of learning)

Notes

This document has two purposes: to introduce key ideas from the literature addressing the questions identified and to illustrate a literature review method (QDAI). The use of QDAI is a generic tool well known as an evaluative framework in NSW Department schools. Additional routines within the QDAI method can increase the rigour of the enquiry. Here QDAI was applied in a simple routine and there are associated limitations as a result. A more comprehensive approach is described in Arksey and O'Malley (2005). One assumption of the scoping review is that ideas in the broader literature remain salient and the review will pick these up. While this review is introductory and limited, the main ideas are considered to be adequately captured. However, the process of distilling the themes here hides the detail and nuances needed to effectively support Aboriginal students in getting the most from their schooling. Engage with the literature that best suits your needs.

Gemici et al. (2014 a&b) and Briggs (2016) are recommended introductory articles.

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Supporting Aboriginal students to attain the HSC

Scoping the literature to identify key factors and advice for initiative design

Aboriginal Outcomes and Partnerships

NSW GOVERNMENT

QDAI

A structure to support scoping reviews of the

Questions   Good questions guide our literature search to collate the best resources

Data   The collated resources or articles are the data we will analyse for the review

Analysis   Use a set method for analysis so others can see our thinking, make judgements about the suitability of the output and replicate the analysis, if needed (to validate)

Implications   The findings are presented/discussed to answer the questions

The following slides present the **implications** from this process, the full review is available here,

Note: This review is introductory and limited. The process of distilling themes hides detail needed to effectively support Aboriginal students in getting the most from their schooling. Engage with the literature that best suits your need.

Implications – factors that matter

What are the main factors known to influence HSC

In order of significance in the literature these factors matter:

- **Parent and peer expectations** (Gemici (2014b) identify this as well as others), mediated via the following factors:

- **Academic achievement, literacy, and numeracy** (Many articles highlight this, and it is placed second due to some of those studies not being able to 'operationalise' notions of parent and peer expectation)

- **Student perceptions of school** (addresses the quality of the learning environment)

- **Student background** (not a direct effect, Gemici (2014b))

- **Wellbeing** (discussed at length in OECD (2017) p. 52)

- **Engagement with culture and community** as an integral, localised, whole-school approach to building trust

It is less helpful to discuss factors schools cannot change or influence, though these do matter: Aboriginality, gender, location, SES, and which school attended (debated in the literature).

Note: The full reference list including where and how to locate articles can be found in the full resource.

Implications – implementing initiatives for Aboriginal students

Are there points to inform support for Aboriginal students in completing the HSC?

Connections with families and communities have dimensions beyond simple expectations. Truth, trust, and valuing culture is critical given the historical and current experiences of Aboriginal people (Guenther et al., (2019), Helme et al. (2011), OECD (2017)).

When collaborating to develop initiatives:

- Engage with the literature, plan, and evaluate well. The best model to inform initiatives is found in Gemici et al. (2014 b), p.17. It is essential to connect with the Department's Aboriginal Education Policy and the AECG Partnership Agreement.

- Engage authentically with families and communities to enable them to actively support students' educational goals. Use Personalised Learning Pathways to good effect.

- Promote mutual respect, and build and maintain high quality, culturally affirming, learning environments.

- Use validated models (Quality Teaching (QT) and QT Rounds) and culturally appropriate models (8 Aboriginal Ways of Learning).