SVA Social Ventures Australia

SVA Perspectives: Education

Children and young people disengaged from education

October 2019

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Foreword

Social Ventures Australia (SVA) is working towards an Australia where all people and communities thrive.

While there have been positive efforts and investment from governments and the social sector over recent decades, one in four people in Australian experience disadvantage.

SVA is committed to understanding the structural causes behind persistent disadvantage, then finding and supporting the innovative approaches that can create systemic change. Since 2002, we have taken an evidence-informed approach to supporting community service organisations, philanthropists, governments and businesses to make decisions that lead to improved outcomes for people experiencing vulnerability and exclusion. Through our work, we have developed a practical understanding of what it takes to tackle disadvantage.

In 2016 SVA released a series of Perspective Papers in the areas of education, employment, housing and the drivers of better outcomes for First Australian peoples.

In 2018, we undertook research and analysis and collaborated with key stakeholders in the sector to refresh our education paper and explore the specific needs of selected cohorts of children and young people experiencing vulnerability. We are proud to present this series of perspectives on the drivers of better outcomes for children in out-of-home care, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children and young people disengaged from formal schooling.

We hope that these papers spark debate, innovation and collaboration among practitioners, community members, funders and policy makers – towards an Australia where every child, no matter their start or journey in life, is supported to thrive.

Suzie Riddell
CEO
Social Ventures Australia

1. Introduction

SVA's vision in education

SVA shares the vision, articulated in the Melbourne Declaration, of an Australian education system that develops the intellectual, social and moral wellbeing of young people as well as contributing to the economic prosperity and social cohesion of the nation.[1]

Presently Australian children don't have an equal opportunity to access a high-quality education, with children from disadvantaged backgrounds likely to start behind and be at high risk of falling further behind. SVA has developed an evidence-informed perspective on the actions and drivers required to promote equity and a high-quality education system for all.

This vision includes ensuring that home, community and formal education environments all support learning. It means harnessing the drivers for improving education outcomes, particularly by supporting effective teaching, from ages 0–5, through formal schooling and in the school-to-work transition (including further education). It also means that the overall system – together with the home and community, and formal education environments – supports the learning needs of different cohorts of students.

The education issue

The correlation between success in education and participation and productivity in society is robust.[2] High-quality education and support creates a path to a sustainable, independent and meaningful livelihood for individuals, and has overall economic and non-economic benefits to society.[3] Children who do not receive a good education are at greater risk of later unemployment or lower income, and are more likely to be involved in crime or to become parents who experience disadvantage.[4]

Australian education struggles to provide equal opportunity and quality outcomes for all students. There are significant gaps in the educational outcomes for some children.[5] In global comparisons of 41 of the world's wealthiest countries, Australia is ranked in the bottom third of all three indicators of equality across early childhood, primary and secondary school levels.[6] Educational outcomes in Australia are more strongly influenced by a person's socioeconomic status than in many other countries.[7] Nearly 60 percent of the students experiencing disadvantage in Australia are in schools classed as disadvantaged, well above the OECD average and substantially higher than in any comparable OECD country.[8]

SVA's work in education focuses on children and young people experiencing vulnerability. Vulnerability can be defined in many ways, but at its core it refers to the likelihood of harm from exposure to risk.[9] Vulnerability is a broader term than disadvantage. It includes wider risk factors than just socioeconomic status, such as trauma, mental health, family violence, and disability. The Review of Funding for Schooling Report, colloquially titled the Gonski Review, identified some determinants of likely vulnerability and applied a financial loading to each of these including school size and location, socioeconomic background, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background, low English language proficiency and students with disability.[10]

A child's experience is made up of a combination of factors that contributes to their level of vulnerability. Children experiencing vulnerability may face multiple risk factors (circumstances or events that increase the likelihood of poor outcomes), a number of protective factors (attributes or conditions that moderate risk and promote healthy development and wellbeing) or the absence of protective factors to mitigate these risks.[11]

1. MCEETYA. (2008). Melbourne declaration on educational goals for young Australians. Canberra: Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (Australia).
2. Gonski, D., Boston, K., Greiner, K., Lawrence, C., Scales, B., & Tannock, P. (2011). Review of funding for schooling: Final report. Canberra: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.
3. Lamb, S., & Huo, S. (2017). Counting the costs of lost opportunity in Australian education. Melbourne: Mitchell Institute.
4. McLachlan, R., Gilfillan, G., & Gordon, J. (2013). Deep and persistent disadvantage in Australia. Canberra: Productivity Commission; Prichard, J., & Payne, J. (2005). Alcohol, drugs and crime: a study of juveniles in detention (Vol. 67). Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.
5. Gonski, D., Arcus, T., Boston, K., Gould, V., Johnson, W., O'Brien, L., Perry, L.P & Roberts, M. (2018). Through growth to achievement: Report of the review to achieve educational excellence in Australian schools. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
6. Chzhen, Y., Rees, G., Gromada, A., Cuesta, J., & Bruckauf, Z. (2018). An Unfair Start: Inequality in Children's Education in Rich Countries. Innocenti Report Card 15. UNICEF.
7. OECD. (2018). Education at a Glance 2018: OECD Indicators. Paris: OECD Publishing.
8. OECD. (2018). Education at a Glance 2018: OECD Indicators. Paris: OECD Publishing.
9. Commissioner for Children and Young People. (2018). It's like a big circle trap: Discussion paper on children and young people's vulnerability. Perth: Western Australia Commissioner for Children and Young People.
10. Gonski, D., Boston, K., Greiner, K., Lawrence, C., Scales, B., & Tannock, P. (2011). Review of funding for schooling: Final report. Canberra: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.
11. Commissioner for Children and Young People. (2018). It's like a big circle trap: Discussion paper on children and young people's vulnerability. Perth: Western Australia Commissioner for Children and Young People

At the start of school, 22 percent of Australian children, approximately 63,000 children, are identified as developmentally vulnerable according to the Australian Early Development Census.[12] This initial gap is rarely caught up, and there is a wide disparity in learning outcomes between the most and the least advantaged students within same school year (typically five to six years).[13] This group of students is more likely to require additional support to make the best possible learning progress.

Education alone cannot address all the risk and protective factors associated with vulnerability. However, we contend that high-quality education and support maximises the chance for young children experiencing vulnerability to develop the skills to participate fully in society. It can also empower them to enjoy better health, wellbeing, earning potential and an increased life-expectancy.

Project approach

In 2016, SVA released an Education Perspectives Paper which described the actions required to enable equal opportunity and high-quality education for all children. With a focus on determining the key drivers of better educational outcomes, it is used by philanthropists, system leaders, educators and education organisations seeking to positively impact the lives of children. In 2018, SVA embarked on a project to refresh the Education Perspectives Paper, responding to the need to better explore the specific educational needs of selected cohorts of students experiencing vulnerability.

This paper is one in a three-part series that supplements the original SVA Education Perspectives Paper. The series focuses on the educational needs of three cohorts of children: children in out-of-home care, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children and young people disengaged from formal education. By looking at the challenges and opportunities through a cohort lens, we can better understand the key issues impacting the education journey for that cohort of children and identify targeted actions to improve their educational outcomes.

This paper

This paper considers what is required to improve education outcomes for children and young people who are disengaged from school. These children and young people may face a number of challenges that cause them to disengage from school and may require additional support to reengage with education, training or employment.

In order to provide a useful perspective on the educational journey and outcomes for children disengaged from education, SVA undertook desktop research and analysis, commissioned an evidence scan from the *Mitchell Institute*, reviewed SVA and partner projects related to education and youth employment, examined sources that summarised the experience of those with lived experience, and engaged with the sector through workshops and interviews.

This paper provides SVA's definition of the cohort, considers the scale of the challenge, outlines the current ecosystem of support and summarises stories from those with lived experience. It documents SVA's exploration of the SVA Education Driver Tree through the experience of children and young people disengaged from education. It then identifies the key drivers of better educational outcomes for these children and young people across home/community, the system and formal education environments. The paper provides examples of these drivers in action to highlight activities in the sector that are creating promising outcomes for children and young people disengaged from education.

The paper does not aim to present a complete view of all activity related to children and young people disengaged from education in Australia. It focuses on illustrative examples predominantly from one Australian state (Victoria) to give a perspective of activity across one state education system.

12. Department of Education and Training (2016). Australian Early Development Census National Report 2015: A snapshot of early childhood development in Australia. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
13. Gonski, D., Arcus, T., Boston, K., Gould, V., Johnson, W., O'Brien, L., Perry, L.P & Roberts, M. (2018). Through growth to achievement: Report of the review to achieve educational excellence in Australian schools. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

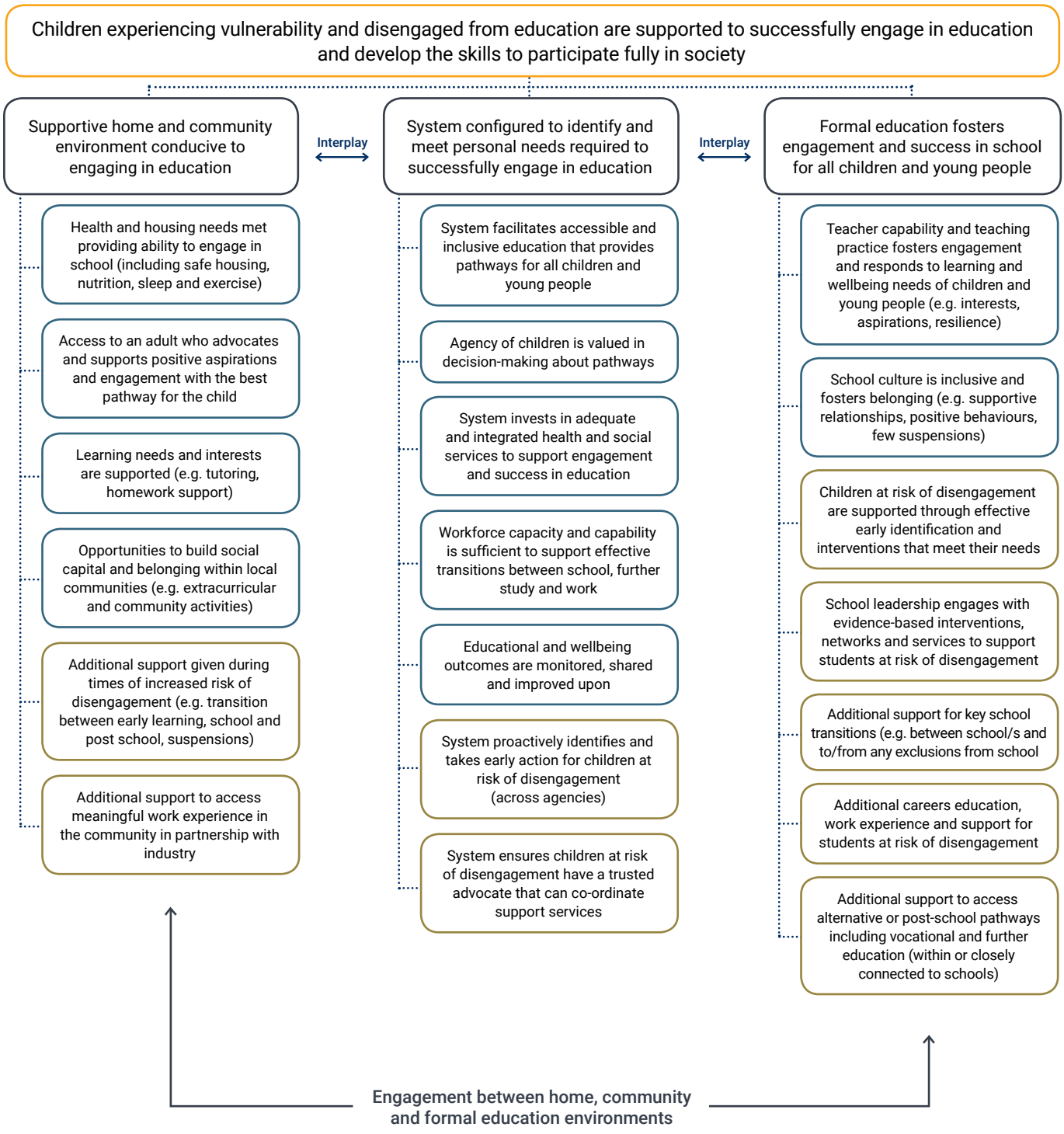
2. SVA Education Driver Tree

In 2016, SVA released the original SVA Education Driver Tree to identify the key drivers of better educational outcomes. Many stakeholders have found the SVA Education Driver Tree to be a useful universal statement of educational drivers and use it as a tool to analyse and prioritise their activity in the sector (see Appendix on page 42).

Over the last two years, we discovered that the SVA Education Driver Tree needed more nuance to address the educational needs of specific cohorts of children. The cohort-specific driver tree provided here dives deeper into the needs of children disengaged from education, building on the original SVA Education Driver Tree. It provides more detailed insights to assist those making decisions on investments and the design of programs to improve the educational outcomes for children and young people disengaged from education.

In future, SVA plans to refresh the original SVA Education Driver Tree to incorporate further system elements and integrate feedback from the design and use of the cohort-specific driver trees described in this series of papers.

Figure 1: SVA Education Driver Tree for Children and Young People Disengaged from Education



Unique features of children disengaged from education:

- May have negative experience of school (e.g. limited learning success, poor relationships, suspensions)
- May have personal or family vulnerability that makes it difficult to engage in school (e.g. poverty, lack of family support, disability, geography)

Drivers apply across all stages of education, with particular emphasis on the following during each stage:

Early learning and development supports effective early identification and intervention that ensures children are ready for school	**K – 12 schooling** is responsive to interests, aspirations and needs to engage students and help them make the best possible progress	Children disengaged from school have a learning pathway and are supported to follow that pathway to **re-engage in school, work or further study**

Supported Transition — Supported Transition

Note: Blue boxes indicate a universal driver, Olive boxes indicate a driver related to students identified as at risk who require additional support. Refer to page 24 for more information

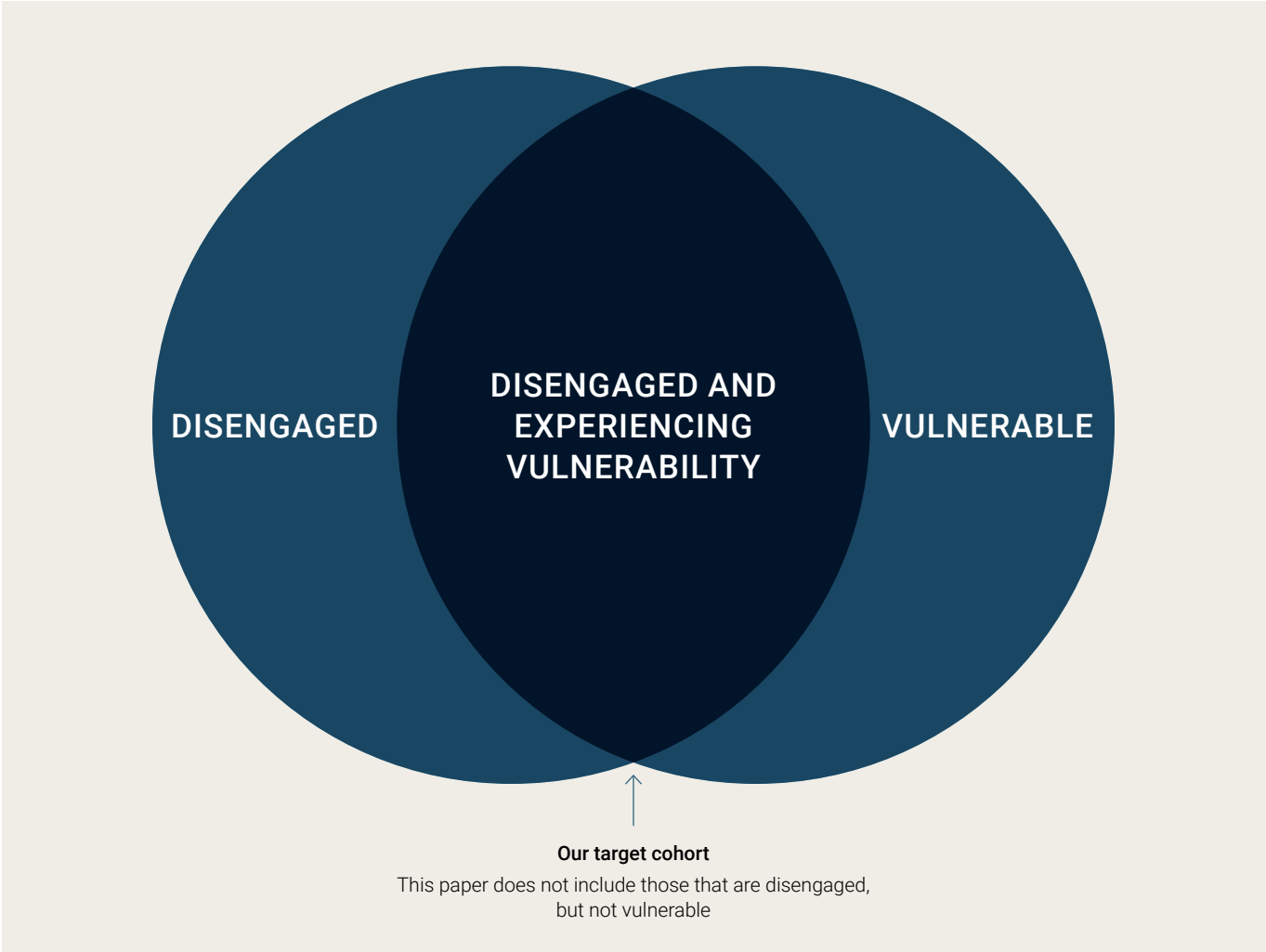
3. Cohort overview

Cohort definition

A child or young person is considered 'engaged' in education when they participate in formal education both socially and academically, feel included in the educational setting with a sense of belonging, and are personally invested in and take ownership of their learning.[14]

We define children and young people disengaged from education as youth of compulsory school age (usually up to 17 years old)[15] who are not participating in formal education, training or employment, or who have very low attendance in these activities. This report focuses on children and young people who are both disengaged from education and experiencing vulnerability as depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Representation of the target cohort



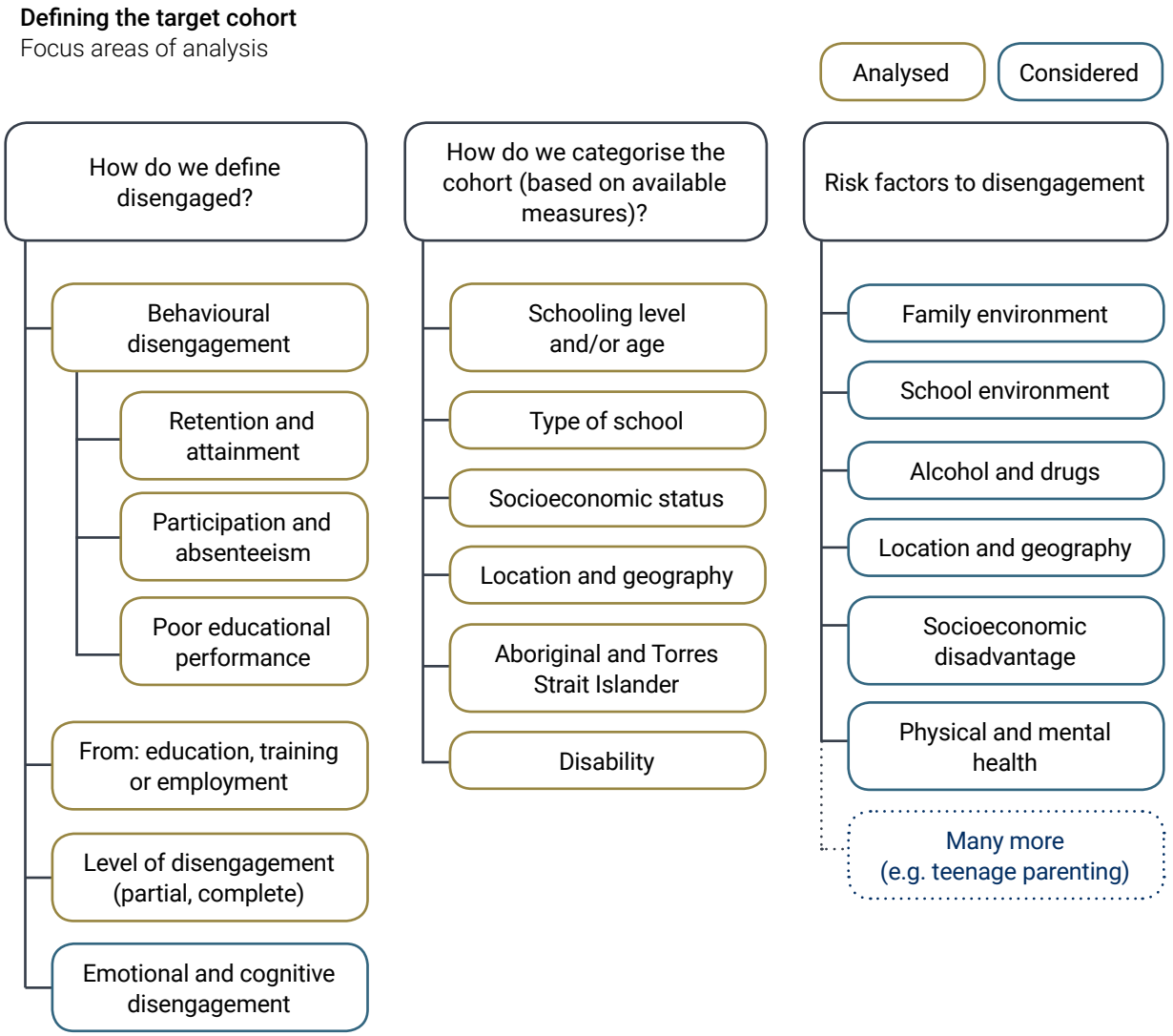
14. Victorian Department of Education and Training. (2019, May 22). Identify students at risk of disengaging. Retrieved from: https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/behaviour/engagement/Pages/identify-students.aspx
15. In most Australian jurisdictions young people under the age of 17 are legally required to be in full-time education, training or employment. In the 2000s many Australian jurisdictions raised the school leaving age from 15 to 17. See Youth Law Australia for a summary by each jurisdiction: https://yla.org.au/qld/topics/school/age-to-leave-school/

Disengagement is both a process and an outcome. Poor attendance, for example, may reflect disengagement from school, and is also a risk factor for school dropout. Disengagement is shaped by a number of influences on a child and young person wider than the educational setting, including family-related factors.[16]

Disengagement is defined, conceptualised and measured in different ways. Disengagement can occur at different levels of education from content, classroom, and school, and the education system in general, and across a range of domains such as behavioural, emotional and or cognitive.[17] Behavioural disengagement may involve absenteeism, poor educational performance, lack of participation or anti-social behaviour. Emotional and cognitive disengagement may involve feelings of disengagement such as a poor sense of belonging, anxiety or boredom.

The ways in which we look at disengagement in this paper using common definitions, sub-groups reported upon, and risk factors is summarised in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Ways to define and categorise the cohort



16. Hancock, K. J., & Zubrick, S. (2015). Children and young people at risk of disengagement from school. Perth: Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia.
17. Hancock, K. J., & Zubrick, S. (2015). Children and young people at risk of disengagement from school. Perth: Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia.

Scale of the challenge

About one in five young Australians aged 15 to 24 years old are disengaged from full-time education or employment.[18] One-fifth of young people do not complete Year 12 in an uninterrupted, linear fashion from the start of high school.[19] Year 12 completion rates are rising but in 2016 approximately 70,000 Australian students did not attain a Year 12 or equivalent qualification.[20]

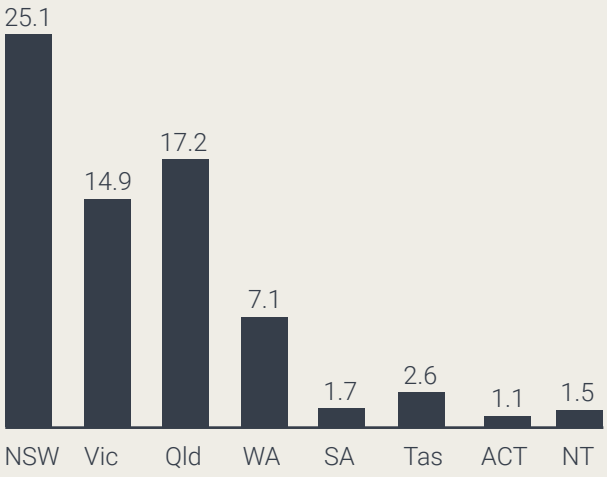
Figure 4: 2016 Year 12 attainment rates by state

~70,000 Australian students did not attain a Year 12 certificate in 2016

Attainment rate across Australia is ~76%

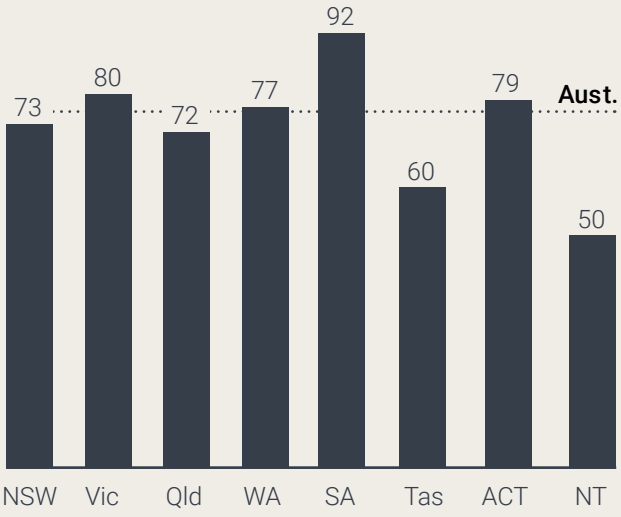
Estimated[1] number of students not attaining a Year 12 or equivalent qualification

000's of students, 2016



Year 12 attainment rates by state

% of potential students, 2016

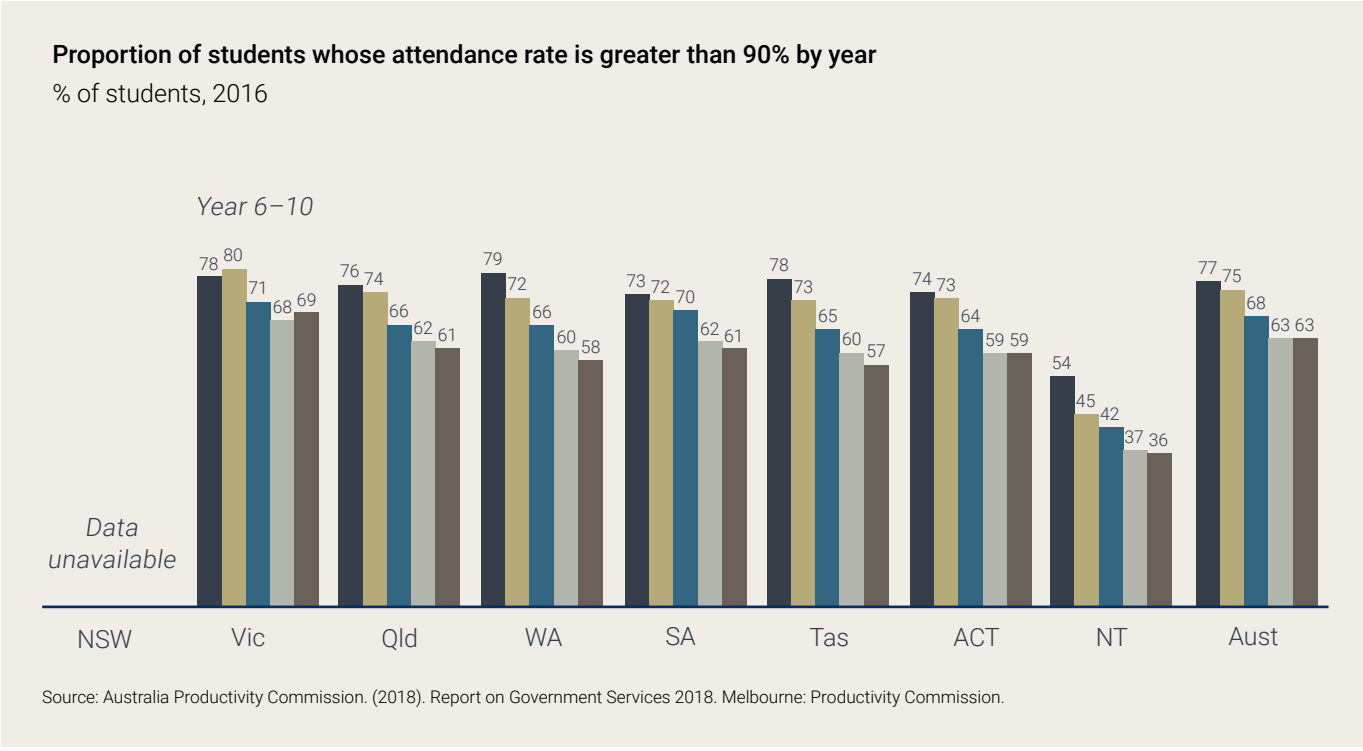


Source: Australia Productivity Commission. (2018). Report on Government Services 2018. Melbourne: Productivity Commission.

Approximately 50,000 Australian students are not retained from the start of high school to Year 12.[21] It is difficult to obtain precise disengagement data as individual students cannot be tracked from Year 7/8 through to Year 12, however school attendance rates show that there is a pattern of increasing disengagement in school from Years 6 to 10.[22]

18. Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2018). 6227.0 - Education and Work, Australia, May 2018. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.
19. Deloitte Access Economics. (2012). Youth Transitions Evidence Base: 2012 Update for the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. Canberra: Deloitte Access Economics.
20. Attainment is a measure of students who meet the requirements of a Year 12 certificate or equivalent. Australia Productivity Commission. (2018). Report on Government Services 2018. Melbourne: Productivity Commission.
21. 'Retention' (apparent retention rate) is defined as the number of full-time school students in Year 7/8 that continue to Year 12. The rate of attainment is generally lower than the rate of retention as retention a measure of attendance rather than graduation. Australia Productivity Commission. (2018). Report on Government Services 2018. Melbourne: Productivity Commission.
22. AIHW. (2017). Australia's welfare 2017. Australia's welfare series no. 13. AUS 214. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

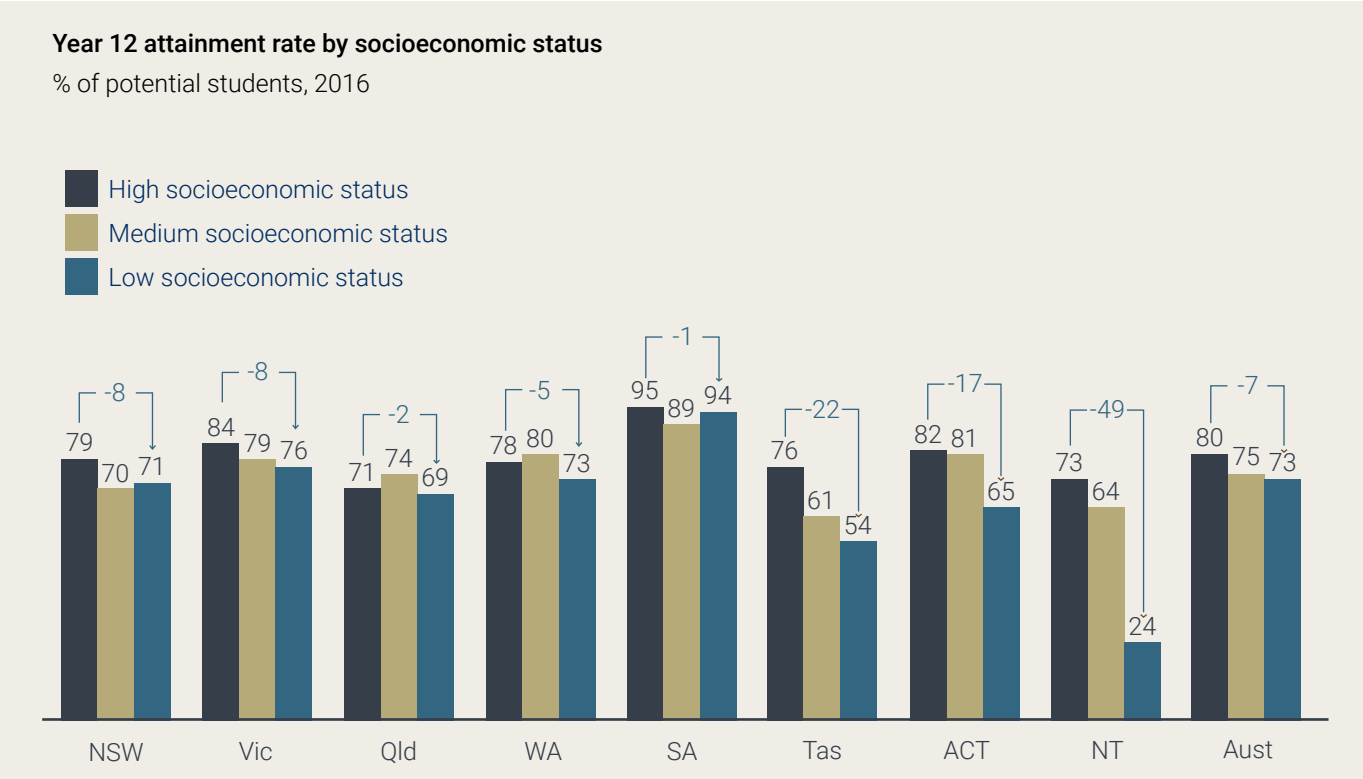
Figure 5: 2016 Year 6–10 attendance rates for students



Source: Australia Productivity Commission. (2018). Report on Government Services 2018. Melbourne: Productivity Commission.

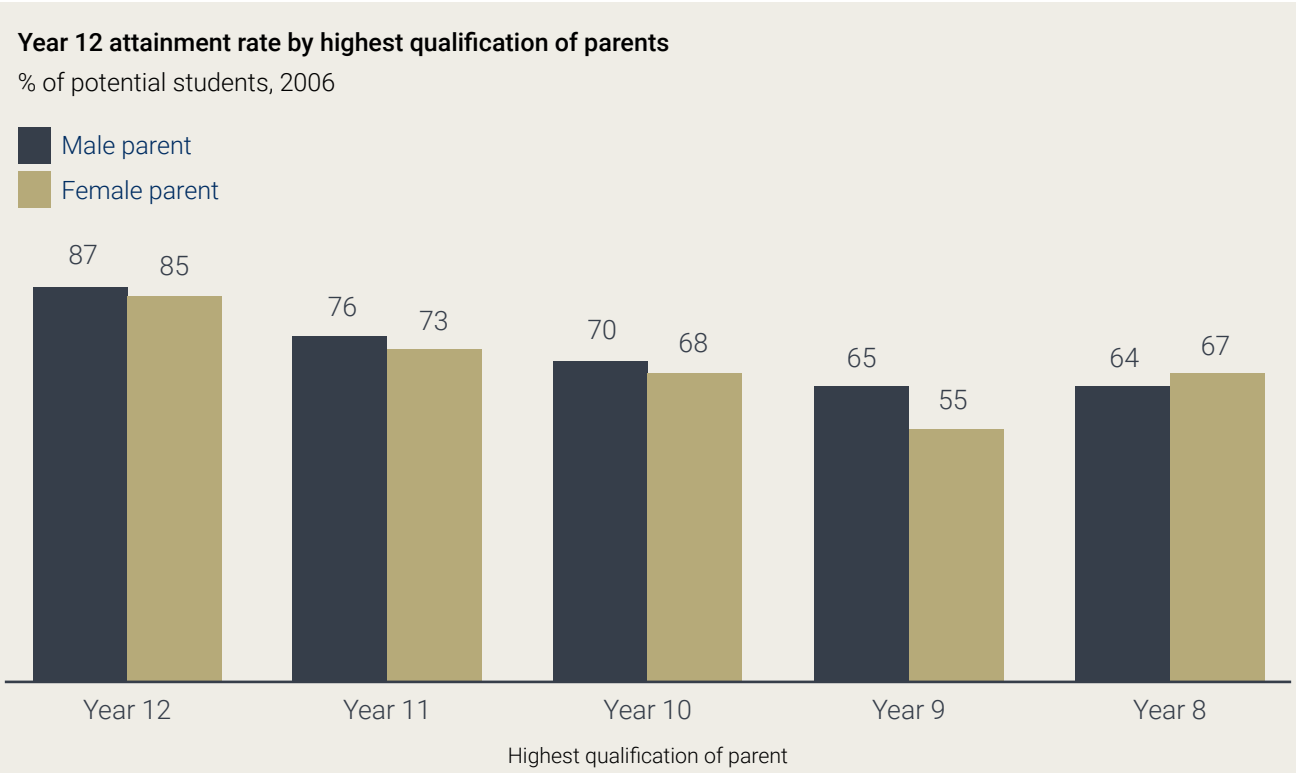
Year 12 attainment rates are lower for students who are from low socioeconomic backgrounds or have parents who have lower educational qualifications.

Figure 6: Year 12 attainment rate by socioeconomic status



Source: Australia Productivity Commission. (2018). Report on Government Services 2018. Melbourne: Productivity Commission.

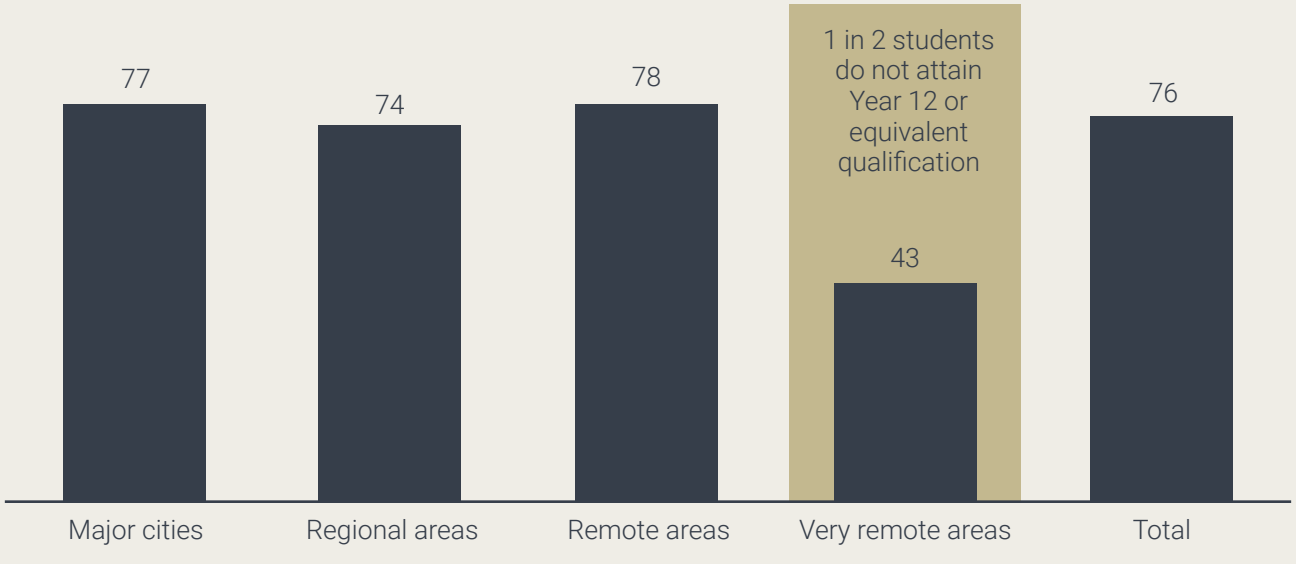
Figure 7: Year 12 attainment rate by highest qualification of parents



Source: Hancock, K. J., & Zubrick, S. (2015). Children and young people at risk of disengagement from school. Perth: Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia

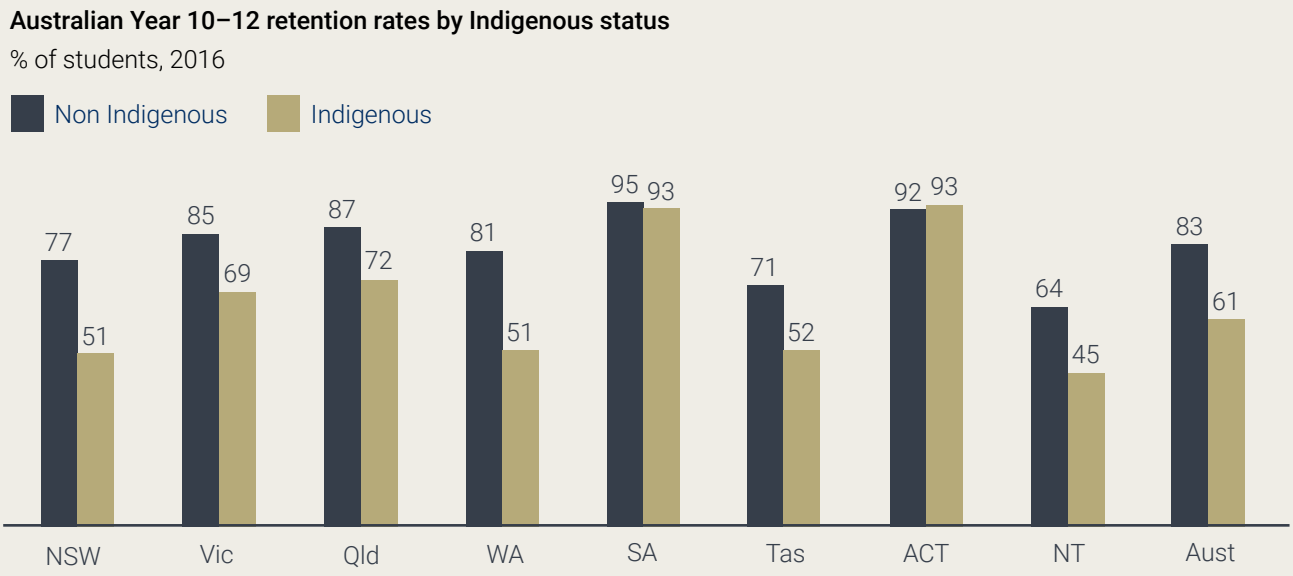
Youth who live in very remote locations, are Indigenous, or have a disability have much lower Year 12 attainment and Year 10 to 12 retention rates than other young people.

Figure 8: Year 12 attainment rate by geographical location



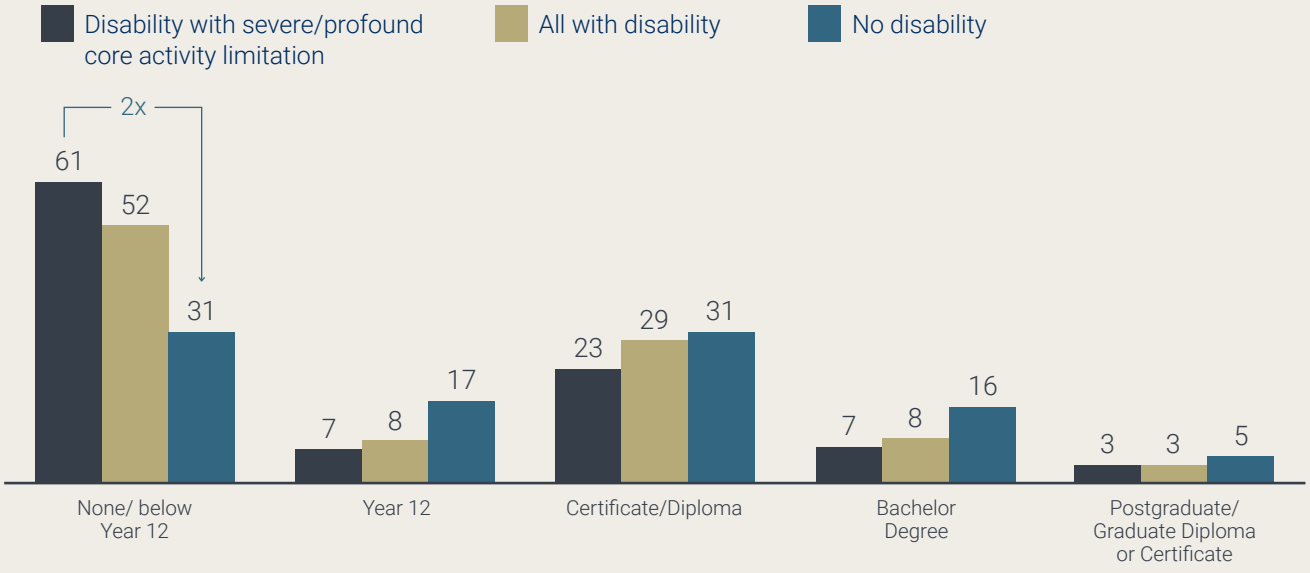
Source: Australia Productivity Commission. (2018). Report on Government Services 2018. Melbourne: Productivity Commission.

Figure 9: Year 10 to 12 retention rates by Indigenous status



Source: Australia Productivity Commission. (2018). Report on Government Services 2018. Melbourne: Productivity Commission.

Figure 10: Highest level of attainment for people aged 20 and over by disability status



Source: AIHW. (2017). Disability in Australia: changes over time in inclusion and participation in education. Cat. no. DIS 69. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

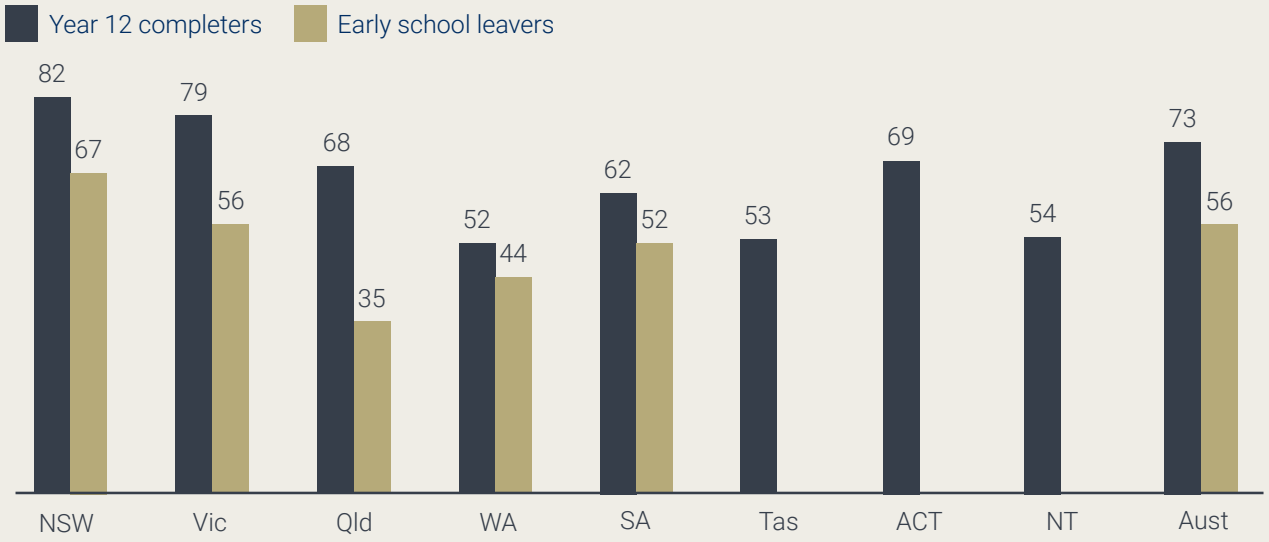
Children and young people who leave school early are more likely to be disengaged from work and study a year after leaving school, and are more likely to be disengaged from work or study on a long-term basis. The average early leaver costs the Australian Government $334,600 over a lifetime ($12.6 billion in total) and $616,200 in indirect, social costs such as the consequences of crime ($23.3 billion in total).[23]

23. Lamb, S., & Huo, S. (2017). Counting the costs of lost opportunity in Australian education. Melbourne: Mitchell Institute.

Figure 11: Proportion of school leavers fully engaged in work or study after one year of leaving

Proportion of school leavers fully engaged in work and/or study one year after leaving, by level of schooling completed

%, 2016–17

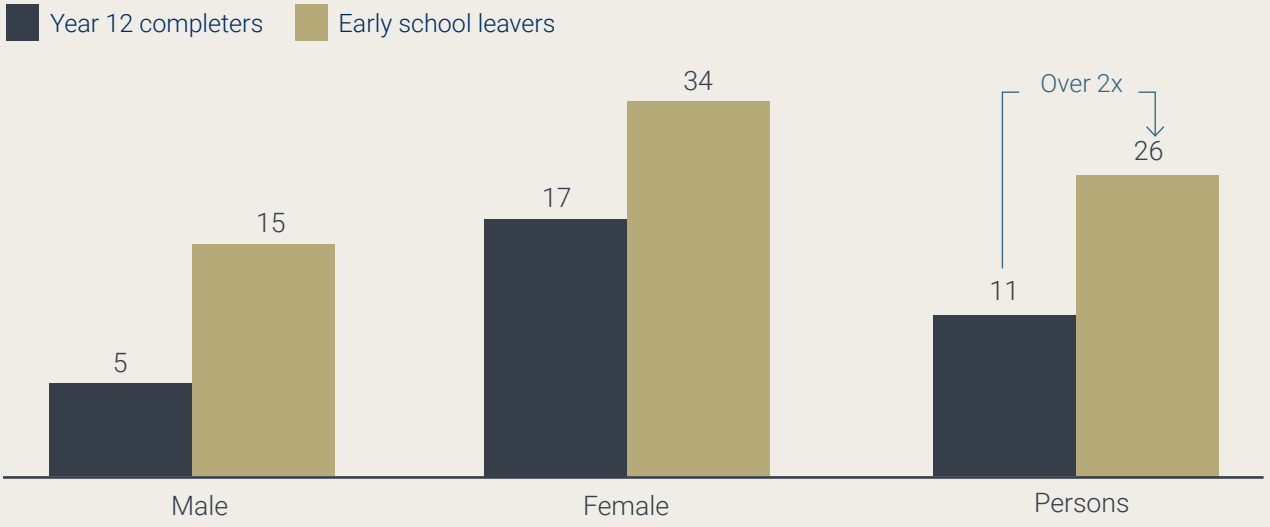


Source: Lamb, S, Jackson, J, Walstab, A & Huo, S. (2015). Educational opportunity in Australia 2015: Who succeeds and who misses out. Melbourne: Mitchell Institute.

Figure 12: Proportion of school leavers with long term disengaged from education and work

Proportion of early leavers and Year 12 completers with long term disengagement from education and/or work (2001–14)

%, HILDA longitudinal study



Source: Lamb, S. and Huo, S. (2017). Counting the costs of lost opportunity in Australian education. Melbourne: Mitchell Institute.

4. Ecosystem of support

Ecosystem overview

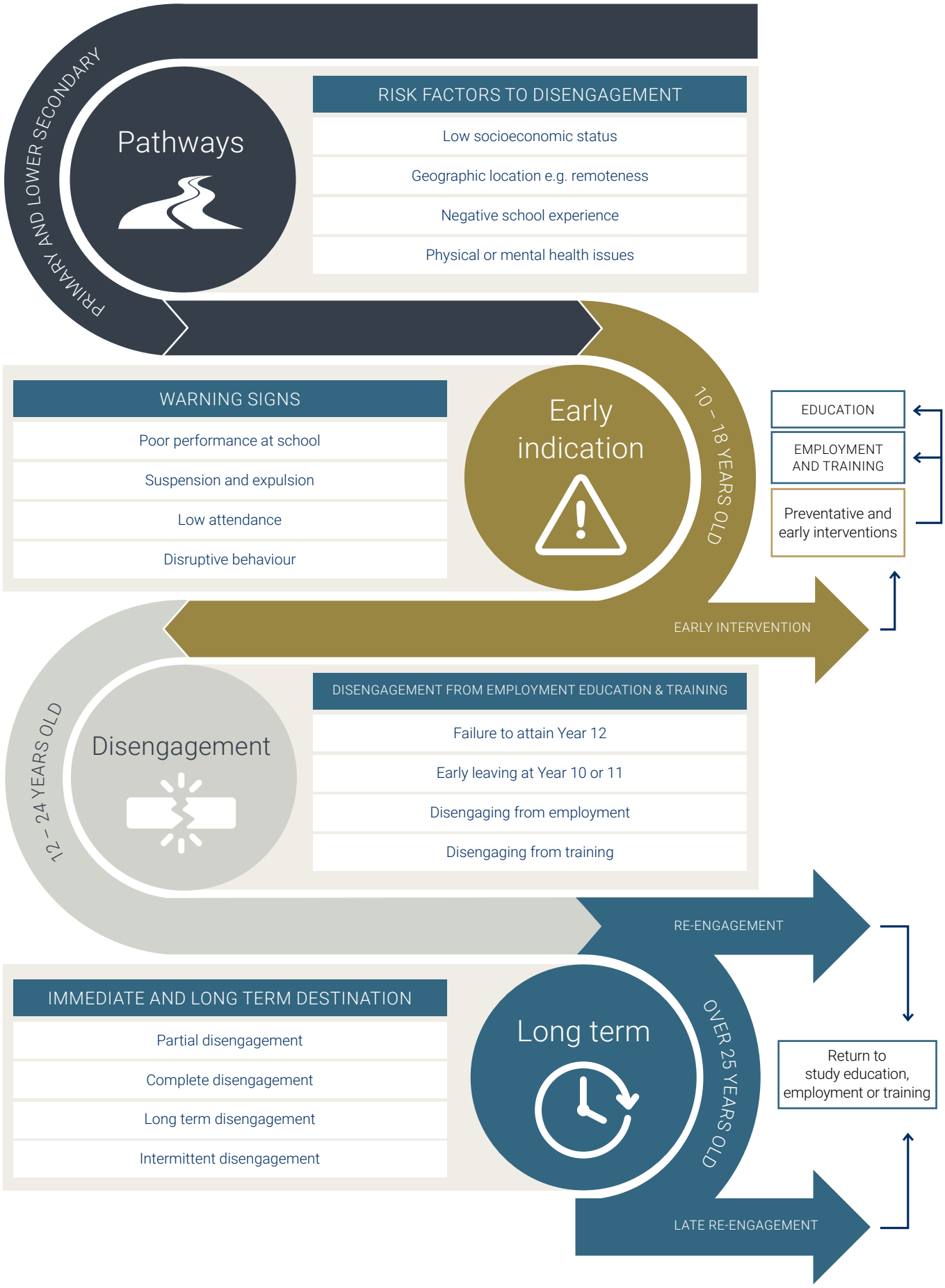
There are many stakeholders involved in youth disengagement across Australia, including but not limited to:

- Federal Government agencies related to education, employment, training and income support that develop federal policy, national partnerships and programs, and allocate funding to national initiatives, state agencies and other federally-funded bodies
- The education and training systems, including State Government departments, government and non-government schools and state vocational education providers (such as TAFEs), responsible for education and training policy and delivery
- Other government agencies and third-party service providers, such as child protection, disability and health services, responsible for providing services to support the engagement, participation and development of youth who are disengaged or at risk of disengagement
- Policy and advocacy groups that undertake research, advocate for youth, and create networks and alliances of organisations
- Children and youth who are disengaged or at risk of disengagement from school, and their families.

There are several stages of disengagement for children and young people, as outlined in Figure 13. Some children may experience risk factors, such as low socioeconomic status or health issues, but never become disengaged from school. Some may exhibit clear warning signs of disengagement, such as low academic performance, poor behaviour and low attendance. Early intervention may support these children to stay engaged in school,[24] but other children may dropout. Some of these children may re-engage in education, employment or training, whilst others may remain disengaged on a long-term basis.

24. Rickinson, M., Kunstler, B. & Salisbury, M. (2018). Insights for Early Action Literature Review, Melbourne: Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership, Victorian Department of Education and Training.

Figure 13: An example of stages of disengagement from education



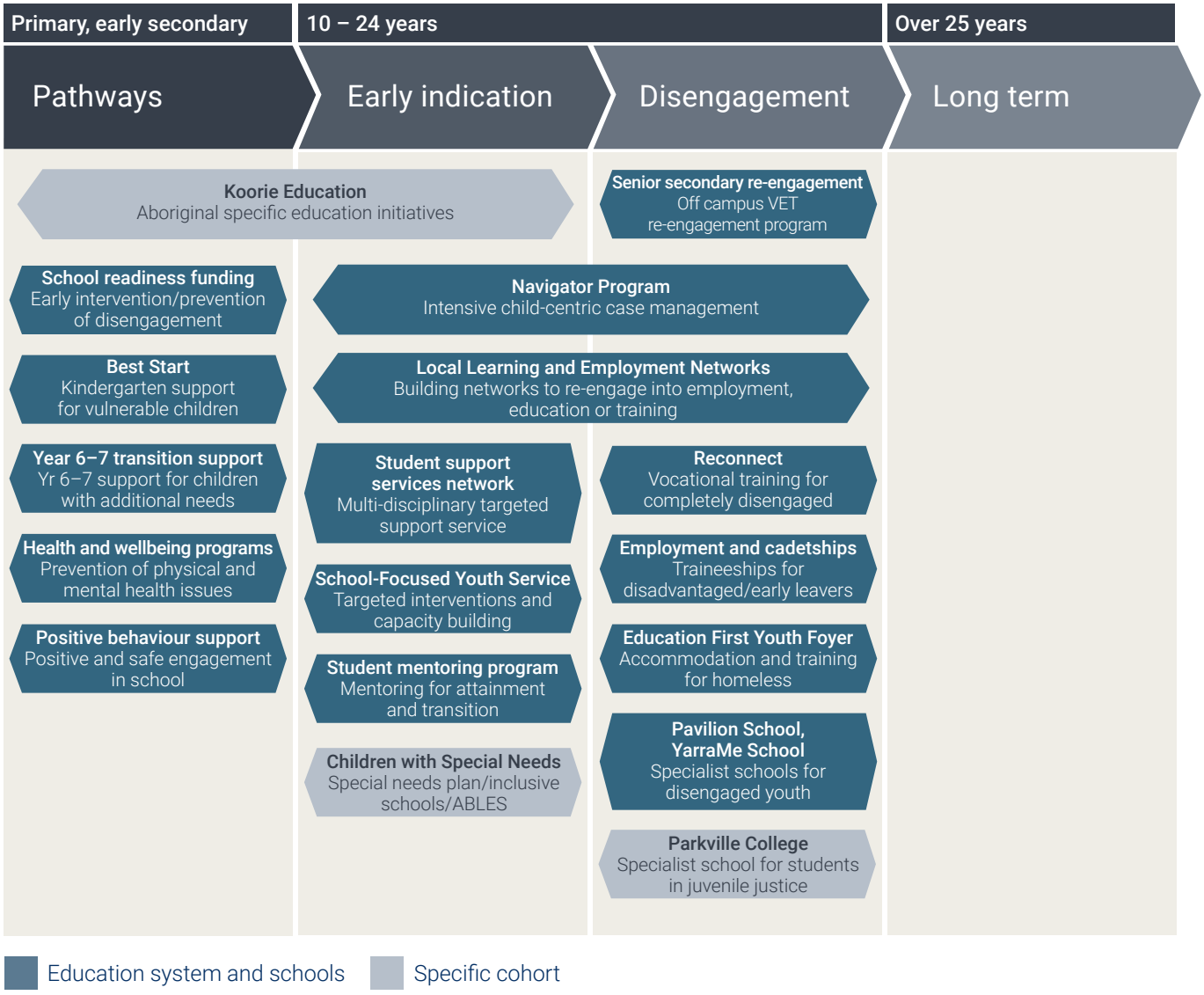
There are several types of activity to support children and youth experiencing vulnerability at each stage of disengagement, from prevention for all children, early intervention for those children showing signs of disengagement and intensive support or alternative pathways for children disengaged from school. Figure 14 summarises these types of activity.

Figure 14: An example of the types of activity to support youth at each stage of disengagement

Primary, early secondary	10 – 24 years		Over 25 years
Pathways	**Early indication**	**Disengagement**	**Long term**
• High quality early education i.e. early childhood education and care • Support for transition to primary school and from primary school to secondary school • Prevention initiatives e.g. health and wellbeing, positive behaviour	• Case management & support • Targeted school-based support services • Mentoring programs for students • Outreach programs • Alternative learning programs (based and not based in schools) • Support for transition from school into other pathways • Capacity building for staff supporting children at risk of disengagement	• Intensive case management & support (which may include active outreach) • Re-engagement programs • Employment and pathways support (including mentoring, cadetships and traineeships • Specialist schools • Alternative learning programs (based and not based in schools)	• Support to return to study, employment or training

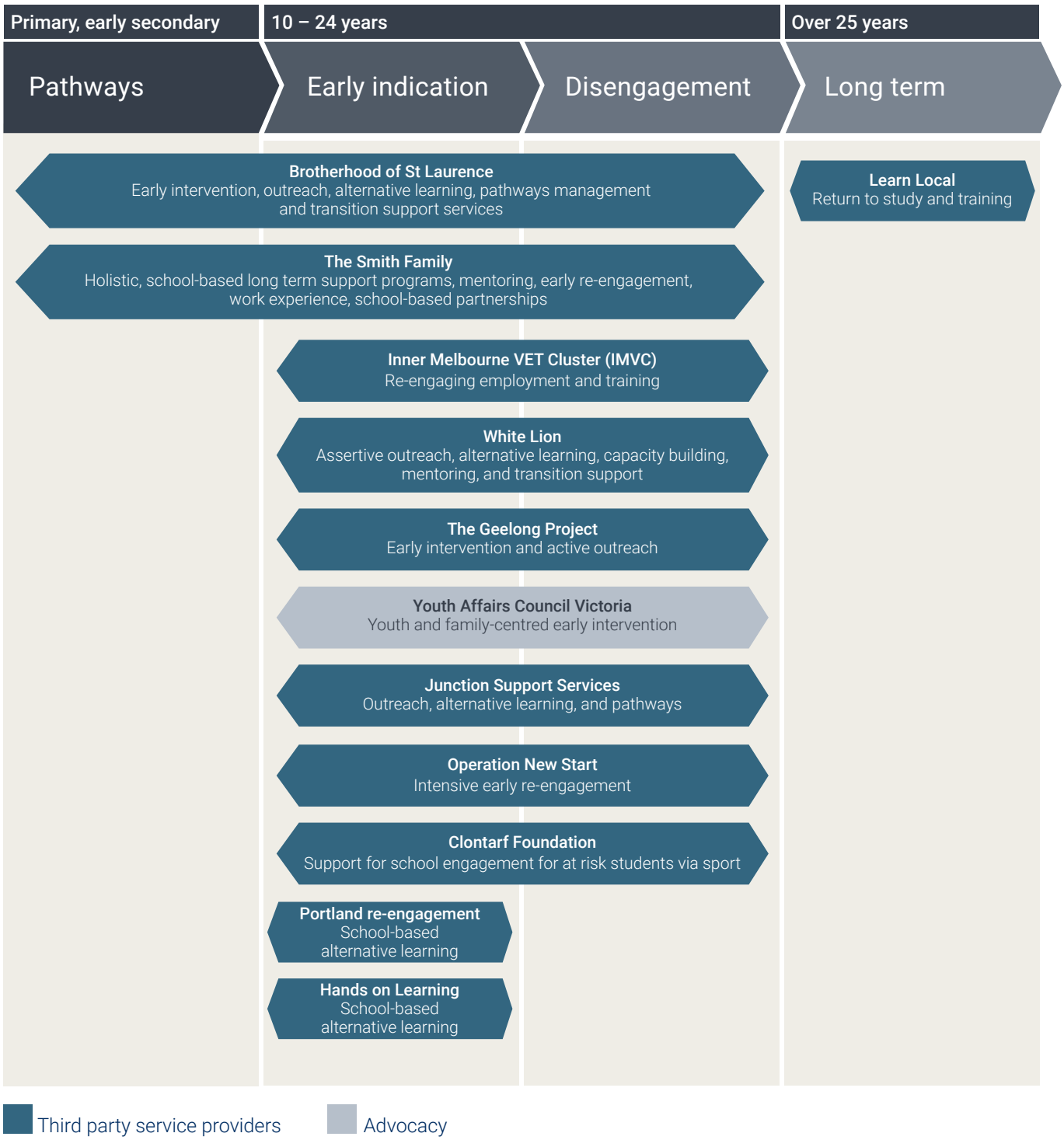
The Victorian Department of Education and Training, for example, implements prevention and early intervention strategies for all children such as School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support; specific interventions for children who are a member of a vulnerable cohort such as Koorie Education supports and special needs plans; targeted school-based interventions for children at risk of disengaging such as the School Focused Youth Service; and targeted outreach for children disengaged and not attending such as the Navigator program. Figure 15 depicts some of the supports provided by the Victorian Department of Education and Training.

Figure 15: Example of Victorian Department of Education and Training activities to support engagement in school



Third-party providers, such as community and local service agencies, also provide a range of supports to children and youth disengaged or at risk of disengagement from school. Whitelion, for example, provides tailored services to thousands of Australian young people between the ages of 10 and 25 who are at risk due to isolation from mainstream opportunities or the impact of trauma. Such services include wellbeing and prevention in schools; youth programs, outreach and case management; mentoring; and vocational pathways such as pre-employment, alternative education settings and employment placement. Figure 16 contains examples of some of the third party support provided to engage Victorian children and young people in school.

Figure 16: Example of some third-party provider activities in Victoria to support engagement in school



Gaps and issues

Recent reviews and reports identify the following key gaps and issues in the support for children and young people disengaged from education.

- *Children at risk of disengagement are not identified*

There are strong, reliable predictors of school dropout, such as academic performance.[25] However, data and information gathered on indicators of disengagement are not effectively used to identify and respond to youth at risk of disengagement. This is an issue related to a lack of knowledge, training and resourcing of educators and community members, and to poor sharing of student-level data between various organisations and government agencies.[26]

- *Prevention and early intervention programs are not adequately prioritised, targeted and resourced*

Early intervention programs such as dropout prevention programs can successfully reduce school dropout.[27] There is, however, large variability in the availability and quality of support available in schools to children with complex needs and behaviours.[28] Strategies to support student academic progress, for example, need to be implemented early in schooling and be properly targeted to schools with groups of at risk children.[29] Dropout prevention programs are more effective when they are:

- holistic
- include components across social, academic and behavioural factors
- tailored to children's needs
- focus on future goals valued by the child, and
- delivered in small groups by trained and consistent staff with appropriate resources and funding.[30]

- *Exclusions, expulsions, and suspensions increase disengagement*

Children who are suspended from school are 19 percentage points less likely to complete school.[31] Children who are expelled from one school often end up spending extended periods of time away from education.[32] A disproportionate number of expelled children have a disability, are in out-of-home care, identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, or come from backgrounds of significant trauma.[33]

A Victorian Ombudsman report on school expulsions estimated that somewhere between hundreds and thousands of children each year disengage from formal education at least in part as a result of pressure from schools. It found that schools need better support to deal with challenging behaviour and more visibility is needed on disciplinary actions across the system.[34]

- *Support for transition from school is inadequate*

Young people experiencing vulnerability face more difficult transitions from school to work or further education.[35] Positive school experiences, peer and community networks, transition programs and mentoring, and well-informed and appropriate careers advice can assist in young people making successful transitions from school.[36] However, schools and vocational education centres are not adequately resourced to support the successful transition of children and young people experiencing vulnerability.[37] Careers education and pathway discussions occur too late for many young people, and are not well connected to industry trends and potential employers.[38] Students from regional, remote and rural areas in particular have less access to careers information and events which are typically held in large regional centres and capital cities.[39]

25. Rickinson, M., Kunstler, B. & Salisbury, M. (2018). Insights for Early Action Literature Review, Melbourne: Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership, Victorian Department of Education and Training.
26. Lamb, S., Walstab, A., Teese, R., Vickers, M., & Rumberger, R. (2004). Staying on at school: Improving student retention in Australia. Brisbane: Queensland Department of Education and the Arts; Wierenga A and Taylor, J. (2015). The Case for Inclusive Learning Systems: Building More Inclusive Learning Systems in Australia. Sydney: Dusseldorp Forum.
27. Rickinson, M., Kunstler, B. & Salisbury, M. (2018). Insights for Early Action Literature Review, Melbourne: Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership, Victorian Department of Education and Training.
28. Victorian Ombudsman. (2017). Investigation into Victorian government school expulsions. Melbourne: Victorian Ombudsman.
29. Lamb, S., Walstab, A., Teese, R., Vickers, M., & Rumberger, R. (2004). Staying on at school: Improving student retention in Australia. Brisbane: Queensland Department of Education and the Arts.
30. Rickinson, M., Kunstler, B. & Salisbury, M. (2018). Insights for Early Action Literature Review, Melbourne: Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership, Victorian Department of Education and Training.
31. Homel, J., & Ryan, C. (2014). Educational outcomes: The impact of aspirations and the role of student background characteristics. Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 65. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research
32. Victorian Ombudsman. (2017). Investigation into Victorian government school expulsions. Melbourne: Victorian Ombudsman.
33. Victorian Ombudsman. (2017). Investigation into Victorian government school expulsions. Melbourne: Victorian Ombudsman.
34. Victorian Ombudsman. (2017). Investigation into Victorian government school expulsions. Melbourne: Victorian Ombudsman.
35. Liu, S. H., & Nguyen, N. (2011). Successful Youth Transitions: Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth. Briefing Paper 25. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research.
36. Lamb, S., Walstab, A., Teese, R., Vickers, M., & Rumberger, R. (2004). Staying on at school: Improving student retention in Australia. Brisbane: Queensland Department of Education and the Arts; Liu, S. H., & Nguyen, N. (2011). Successful Youth Transitions: Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth. Briefing Paper 25. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research.
37. Myconos, G., Dommers, E., & Clarke, K. (2018). Viewed from the margins: navigating disadvantage and VET. Melbourne: The University of Melbourne and Brotherhood of St Laurence.
38. Torii, K. (2018). Connecting the worlds of learning and work: Prioritising school-industry partnerships in Australia's education system. Melbourne: Mitchell Institute
39. Halsey, J. (2018). Independent review into regional, rural and remote education. Canberra: Australian Department of Education and Training.

- *Re-engagement programs do not reach or meet the needs of disengaged children*

Many approaches to re-engaging youth are not sufficiently focused on the person's situation, interests, capabilities or needs.[40] Many programs fail to incorporate an outreach element in order to identify and attract highly disengaged youth who are not interacting with any parts of the system. Although individual programs are unlikely to achieve transformational change,[41] many programs are not coordinated with other services, such as mental health, to provide holistic and readily accessible support. A number of programs are not linked with further education and employment to ensure a connection is formed to future prospects. Educators and others working with disengaged and vulnerable youth are not always equipped or resourced to deal with their complex needs.

- *Research and evaluation of programs and interventions is insufficient*

The quality of current evidence on the effectiveness of interventions for disengaged young people is limited[42] and rigorous comparative evaluations are often not available.[43] Despite the vast amount of education initiatives available, few are rigorously and independently evaluated. We know even less about how to scale promising and proven programs beyond the initial site or organisation.

Student experience of the system

A child's vulnerability arises from the multiple experiences of adversity and exposures to harm, and limited access to and use of resources that support them to cope with and recover from this adversity.

The key risk and protective factors that may impact this cohort depend on the child's experience to date, including their level of engagement and support through their education. A student's experience may include past or ongoing trauma, an unsupportive home environment, exclusions from school, lack of academic success, and poor relationships with school staff.

'Julia is born with cerebral palsy and has impaired motor skills and speech. Her family have a stable income and provide a safe and loving environment; she attends a specialised school which provides high quality support to meet her needs. Julia's parents and siblings treat her as an equal member of the family and community and expect her to participate fully in civic life. Due to the positive and resource-rich environment she is growing up in, Julia thrives and completes high school and enrols in university.

Kate is born healthy with an easy temperament. However, during her infancy, Kate's mother experiences significant mental health issues and begins using alcohol and drugs. Kate's father leaves her mother and during Kate's childhood, her mother is emotionally abusive towards her. Kate escapes her troubles at home by putting her energy into schoolwork; she achieves high marks and enjoys attending school. When Kate reaches high school her mother's new partner physically abuses Kate; she begins using drugs, withdraws from her friends and becomes very isolated. Kate drops out of school, her drug taking escalates and, in a drug-induced state, she burgles a house and is placed on a community order.

These simplified examples of the trajectory of two different young people illustrate the multiple factors – including the expectations from their family and school, the opportunities provided to them due the resources of their families and the systems and supports they subsequently have access to, and experiences of abuse and alcohol and drug issues – influence their pathways at different stages of childhood and adolescence.'

– The voices of children and young people from Western Australia

Commissioner for Children and Young People. (2018). It's like a big circle trap: Discussion paper on children and young people's vulnerability. Perth: Western Australia Commissioner for Children and Young People.

40. Burns, J., Collin, P., Blanchard, M., De-Freitas, N., & Lloyd, S. (2008). Preventing youth disengagement and promoting engagement. Canberra: Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth.
41. Mitchell Institute. (2018). Evidence scan of educational interventions for children and young people disengaged from education. Melbourne: Social Ventures Australia.
42. Mitchell Institute. (2018). Evidence scan of educational interventions for children and young people disengaged from education. Melbourne: Social Ventures Australia.
43. Lamb, S., Walstab, A., Teese, R., Vickers, M., & Rumberger, R. (2004). Staying on at school: Improving student retention in Australia. Brisbane: Queensland Department of Education and the Arts

A key risk factor for this cohort is negative experiences of school. Poor academic progress and school attendance, suspensions and expulsions, behavioural issues, lack of trusted adult relationships and low educational aspirations are predictors of school dropout.[44] Personal or family vulnerability can also make it difficult to engage in school. Poverty, lack of family support and aspirations, changes to family structure, poor health and wellbeing, disability and caring responsibilities can also signal school dropout.[45]

Students' reasons for disengaging from mainstream secondary school can be combinations of a perceived lack of support from staff, disruptive classrooms, bullying and intimidation from students and sometimes staff, a lack of understanding or interest in the content, too much pressure, and a lack of relevance and flexibility.[46]

Disengagement through a lack of understanding of the content

'Holly joined [Save the Children's] Out-Teach program in 2015 after coming through [the] Supporting Young People Through Bail program. She had a history of being suspended through primary school and her behavioural issues continued into high school. By the time she met Dane [a teacher in the Out-Teach program] she was failing all her subjects and not coping well with the classroom dynamics.

'I find it hard to concentrate when everyone's talking,' says Holly. 'And I find it hard to do things without having one-on-one work. Like being shown actually how to do the work. Otherwise I don't understand it. Then in the classroom, I'm just left sitting there thinking 'what do I do, how am I supposed to understand it".

– The voice of a young person supported by Save The Children's Out-Teach Program

Save the Children. (2017, January 22). Wheels of change: Impact of our Work. Retrieved from: https://www.savethechildren.org.au/Our-Stories/Wheels-of-change

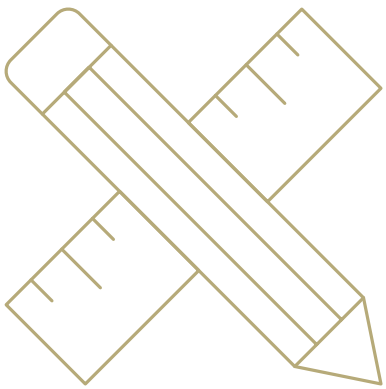
Disengagement through social exclusion

'First we didn't have anywhere to live, after when I started school everybody teased me, I didn't have any friends, my accent was different, I was an outsider. I didn't belong.' 16-year-old, Yugoslavia (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse children and young people Consultation)

'One of the reasons why I left school was 'cause I was getting bullied… I was getting bullied for my dark skin… it was also through my primary school to my high school and I dropped out in Year 9. I'm supposed to be in Year 12 today and I still haven't gone back to school.' 17-year-old (Youth Justice Consultation)

– The voices of children and young people from Western Australia

Commissioner for Children and Young People. (2018). It's like a big circle trap: Discussion paper on children and young people's vulnerability. Perth: Western Australia Commissioner for Children and Young People.



44. Rickinson, M., Kunstler, B. & Salisbury, M. (2018). Insights for Early Action Literature Review, Melbourne: Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership, Victorian Department of Education and Training.
45. Rickinson, M., Kunstler, B. & Salisbury, M. (2018). Insights for Early Action Literature Review, Melbourne: Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership, Victorian Department of Education and Training.
46. Down, B., Choules, K., Hogan, J., Carr, D., & Stone, H. (2018). Promising practices: What students, parents and teachers say about learning in a Big Picture context. Key Findings of the The Big Picture Academy Research Project. Perth: Murdoch University

5. Evidence on education interventions

Children and youth at risk of disengagement

Research evidence supports early identification and intervention for students at risk of disengagement from education. Schools can usefully develop early warning systems to monitor all students in order to identify and proactively intervene with those who show early signs of academic, behavioural and attitudinal problems.[47]

Emerging research suggests that early warning systems should be:

- focused on specific indicators but also flexible to local contexts
- based on system-level quantitative data and practitioner expertise and judgement
- timely and accurate
- targeted to those at most risk but also monitoring of all students
- practical and easy to use
- helpful in the building of new capabilities and cultures, and
- be about early identification but also early intervention.[48]

There is a strong research base on dropout predictors, although there are more studies undertaken in the US than in Australia. As described in Figure 17, factors related to students such as educational performance and behaviour, and factors related to family such as socioeconomic status and parental educational support, are important contributors to dropout.

Figure 17: Predictors of disengagement synthesised from global research literature[49]

			LEVEL OF EVIDENCE
PREDICTORS OF DISENGAGEMENT	EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE	**Academic performance** (including exam success, grades, literacy and numeracy skills) as influencers of early leaving, specifically in upper primary and lower secondary school	**Well established**
		Grade retention or repeating and age gap significantly increases chances of early leaving	**Well established**
	STUDENT BEHAVIOUR	**High absenteeism** is correlated closely with disengagement	**Well established**
		Disruptive misbehaviour in and outside of high school including anti social behaviour, criminal behaviour, drugs and alcohol abuse	**Well established**
		Suspensions and expulsions significantly decrease chances of attainment	**Well established**
		Behavioural risk factors are seen as predictive as early as the sixth grade	**Recent and (or) few studies**
	DEMOGRAPHIC AND ATTITUDINAL FACTORS	**Males are more likely** to drop out than females	**Well established**
		Low socioeconomic status and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, alongside other predictors, are associated with low attainment rates	**Well established**
		Educational aspirations and expectations have an impact on educational outcomes	**Recent and (or) few studies**

47. Rickinson, M., Kunstler, B. & Salisbury, M. (2018). Insights for Early Action Literature Review, Melbourne: Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership, Victorian Department of Education and Training.
48. Rickinson, M., Kunstler, B. & Salisbury, M. (2018). Insights for Early Action Literature Review, Melbourne: Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership, Victorian Department of Education and Training.
49. Rickinson, M., Kunstler, B. & Salisbury, M. (2018). Insights for Early Action Literature Review, Melbourne: Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership, Victorian Department of Education and Training.

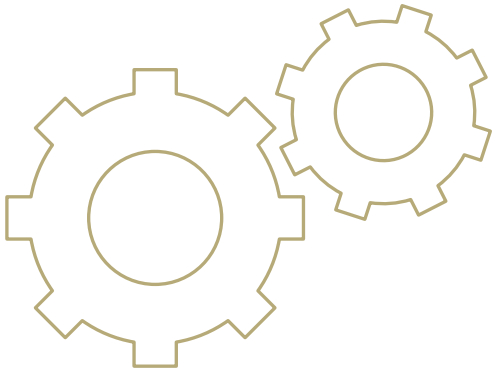
It is important to use a combination of quantitative data and practitioner expertise to identify and support students at risk of disengagement, and avoid stigmatising or stereotyping students on the basis of these predictors.

Research on interventions with students at risk of disengagement shows that dropout prevention programs can successfully reduce dropout and improve attendance, and truancy prevention programs can improve attendance but tend to have less marked impacts.[50]

The most effective intervention programs include:[51]

- family, school and community groups
- a safe environment and behavioural management
- student mentoring from a trusted adult
- teaching career-based skills
- using well trained staff, and
- focusing on goals that are important to the student.

Interventions need to be personalised to students' needs, include both behavioural and academic support, provide a connection to careers and or further study and help students to build supportive relationships and manage challenges.[52]



Children and youth disengaged from education

There is limited rigorous evidence about the effectiveness of interventions that strengthen educational and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people disengaged from education, and much more research is required to build the evidence base.[53] There is an inherent challenge in building the evidence base for this cohort, as effective interventions for disengaged young people are particularly variable and relative to context and background.

Whilst there is not a clear picture of a single effective intervention, a number of factors are consistently referred to across the literature as being associated with positive outcomes:[54]

- creating personalised or individualised supports
- addressing student wellbeing and any broader issues the young person is facing outside education
- creating relevant and meaningful pathways that reach beyond the period of the intervention
- fostering family and community involvement
- creating strong and trusting relationships
- creating a safe and comfortable setting, and
- creating a curriculum and pedagogy that mixes general curriculum with applied vocational learning for work.

Much of the research finds that individual programs are unlikely to achieve transformational change – rather a system of integrated and aligned services is needed, and further research is required to understand the interactive effects of these sets of services.

50. Freeman, J., Simonsen, N., Heppen, J., Bowdon, J., Taylor, S., & R., E. (2015). Examining the impact of policy and practice interventions on high school dropout and school completion rates: A systematic review of literature. Review of Educational Research, 85(2), 205- 248; Steinka-Fry, K., Wilson, S., & Tanner-Smith, E. (2013). Effects of school dropout prevention programs for pregnant and parenting adolescents: A meta-data review. Journal for the Society for Social Work and Research, 4(4), 373-389; Wilson, S., Tanner-Smith, E., Lipsey, M., Steinka-Fry, K., & Morrison, J. (2011). Dropout Prevention and Intervention Programs: Effects on school completion and dropout among school-aged children and youth. Cambell Systematic Review 2011: 8.
51. ICF International and National Dropout Prevention Center/Network. (2008). Best practices in dropout prevention. Report prepared for the Texas Education Agency. Austin: Texas Education Agency.
52. ICF International and National Dropout Prevention Center/Network. (2008). Best practices in dropout prevention. Report prepared for the Texas Education Agency. Austin: Texas Education Agency.
53. Mitchell Institute. (2018). Evidence scan of educational interventions for children and young people disengaged from education. Melbourne: Social Ventures Australia.
54. Mitchell Institute. (2018). Evidence scan of educational interventions for children and young people disengaged from education. Melbourne: Social Ventures Australia.

6. Drivers of better outcomes

Driver tree

SVA's Education Driver Tree describes the key drivers of better educational outcomes for all children (see Appendix on page 42). These drivers are designed to apply across settings and cohorts of students. The SVA Education Driver Tree for Children and Young People Disengaged from Education (outlined on page 6) builds from the general education driver tree to list drivers of educational outcomes that are specific for children and young people disengaged from education.

The SVA Education Driver Tree for Children and Young People Disengaged from Education includes three groups of drivers:

- **Home and community:** Children and young people disengaged from education need additional support from family and community to engage with the most appropriate form of education, training or transition to employment
- **System:** Children and young people disengaged from education may have complex needs that require additional support from the health, education and social services systems to assist them to engage in learning pathways (e.g. youth workers, youth advocates, mentors, financial support)
- **Formal education:** Children and young people disengaged from education may have had negative experiences of school and or may have experienced vulnerability that makes engagement with school difficult, necessitating formal education to provide additional support.

While the home and community environment and system supports are critical elements to improve educational outcomes for children and young people disengaged from education, this paper primarily focuses on examples from formal education.

The SVA Education Driver Tree for Children and Young People Disengaged from Education uses a 'Response to Intervention'[55] style model to indicate which drivers are universal and required to engage all children experiencing vulnerability in education (blue boxes), and which drivers are additional supports required for those students identified as disengaged or at risk of disengagement (brown boxes).

55. RTI Action Network. (n.d.). What is RTI? Retrieved from: http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/what/whatisrti

Home and community drivers

Children and young people who are vulnerable and at risk of disengagement from education need supportive home and community environments that are conducive to engaging in education.

A home environment that supports engagement in education is one that provides for a child's basic health and housing needs including sufficient nutrition, sleep, and exercise. These foundational needs contribute to overall wellbeing, which is linked to academic achievement.[56]

Children in this cohort need access to adult support and opportunities for development. A parent or carer who supports educational aspirations is a factor linked to school engagement.[57] A strong adult advocate can foster the interests and aspirations of a young person and help them to access the best learning pathway to meet these preferences. Strong advocates should be aware of the dimensions of a student and the system and take a non-judgemental but critical approach when considering a child's wellbeing and engagement.[58]

Support for learning needs is also an important driver of successful engagement in education. The quality of the home learning environment has a long-term impact on academic achievement.[59] Parents and carers can support the learning of children in the home through various interactions including reading, homework support, computer usage, expressive play and enrichment outings.

Parents, carers and other adults in a young person's life can foster opportunities to build social capital and belonging within local communities and groups through extracurricular activities such as sports, music, community events and local initiatives. This kind of extracurricular activity plays a role in student engagement.[60]

Young people may require additional support to remain engaged in school or re-engage in another learning pathway during times of increased risk of disengagement, such as transition periods, suspensions, moving schools or social crisis. This kind of support may involve outreach, early intervention, support services, and counselling.[61] At risk students often need additional support to access meaningful work experience through partnership with local industry, volunteering opportunities, apprenticeships, or programs.[62]

System drivers

As many children who experience vulnerability and disengagement have complex needs, the system plays a crucial role to ensure integrated and targeted service delivery at the nexus of education, training, employment, health and other youth-focussed services. Successful systems are configured to identify and respond to the personal needs required to successfully engage in education.

An effective system facilitates accessible and inclusive education that provides a variety of learning pathways for all children. Whether this education involves academic or vocational training inside or outside traditional schools, it must provide pathways to continued lifelong learning.[63] Agency of young people must be valued in decision-making about learning pathways.[64]

56. Kern, M. L., Waters, L. E., Adler, A., & White, M. A. (2015). A multidimensional approach to measuring well-being in students: Application of the PERMA framework. The journal of positive psychology, 10(3), 262-271
57. Polidano, C., Hanel, B., & Buddlemeyer, H. (2013). Explaining the socio-economic status school completion gap. Education Economics, 21(3), 230-247
58. Yonezawa, S., Jones, M., & Joselowsky, F. (2009). Youth engagement in high schools: Developing a multidimensional, critical approach to improving engagement for all students. Journal of Educational Change, 10(2-3), 191-209
59. Sammons, P., Toth, K., & Sylva, K. (2015). Pre-school and early home learning effects on A-level outcomes. London: Department for Education.
60. Feldman, A. F., & Matjasko, J. L. (2005). The role of school-based extracurricular activities in adolescent development: A comprehensive review and future directions. Review of educational research, 75(2), 159-210; Stuart, M., Lido, C., Morgan, J., Solomon, L., & May, S. (2011). The impact of engagement with extracurricular activities on the student experience and graduate outcomes for widening participation populations. Active Learning in Higher Education, 12(3), 203-215
61. Balfanz, R., Herzog, L., & Mac Iver, D. J. (2007). Preventing student disengagement and keeping students on the graduation path in urban middle-grades schools: Early identification and effective interventions. Educational Psychologist, 42(4), 223-235
62. Liu, S. H., & Nguyen, N. (2011). Successful Youth Transitions: Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth. Briefing Paper 25. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research.
63. Lamb, S., Walstab, A., Teese, R., Vickers, M., & Rumberger, R. (2004). Staying on at school: Improving student retention in Australia. Brisbane: Queensland Department of Education and the Arts; Wierenga A and Taylor, J. (2015). The Case for Inclusive Learning Systems: Building More Inclusive Learning Systems in Australia. Sydney: Dusseldorp Forum.
64. Wierenga A and Taylor, J. (2015). The Case for Inclusive Learning Systems: Building More Inclusive Learning Systems in Australia. Sydney: Dusseldorp Forum.

An effective system must provide adequate and integrated health and welfare services to support engagement and success in education for young people. Provision of health and wellbeing services in conjunction with school programs is critical for school retention in communities in which there are high levels of poverty, family breakdown, and unemployment.[65] Improving school completion rates and re-engagement into employment and training involves co-operation between employment services and schools, and ensuring social support is accessible and sufficient.[66] The system should provide outreach services,[67] and ensure that significantly at risk children have a trusted advocate that can co-ordinate support services based on their needs.

Staff in an effective system have the capability and capacity to support effective transitions between school, further study and work. They support young people with complex needs to navigate the learning pathways best suited to them, providing intensive, case management style support where needed to overcome entry and transition point barriers.[68]

An effective system monitors education and wellbeing outcomes for students at risk of disengagement and disengaged from education not only to identify and provide additional support for these children, but also to monitor, share and improve upon interventions. Improving identification and follow-up of this cohort of young people and establishing a rigorous impact evaluation system for programs for at risk youth is an important step to build an evidence base on effective practice.[69]

65. Lamb, S., Walstab, A., Teese, R., Vickers, M., & Rumberger, R. (2004). Staying on at school: Improving student retention in Australia. Brisbane: Queensland Department of Education and the Arts
66. OECD. (2016). Investing in Youth Australia, Investing in Youth. Paris: OECD Publishing
67. OECD. (2016). Investing in Youth Australia, Investing in Youth. Paris: OECD Publishing
68. Wierenga A and Taylor, J (2015). The Case for Inclusive Learning Systems: Building More Inclusive Learning Systems in Australia. Sydney: Dusseldorp Forum.
69. OECD. (2016). Investing in Youth Australia, Investing in Youth. Paris: OECD Publishing

Formal education drivers

Quality formal education fosters engagement and success in school for all children and young people.

School-level factors such as school type are often less important predictors of school dropout than student-level factors, however there are some aspects of schooling, such as classroom and school climate and teacher attitudes that are important.[70]

A positive learning culture is particularly important in low socioeconomic schools.[71] The school and classroom culture must be inclusive and foster a sense of learning through supportive student-teacher relationships, positive behaviour approaches such as Schoolwide Positive Behaviour Support, and the use of suspensions and expulsions as a final resort.[72]

Teacher practice and teaching capability is important to foster engagement and respond to the learning and wellbeing needs of children. Teachers have the largest in-school impact on student learning.[73] Good teaching is important for students who have little motivation to undertake education or have little support at home, and good teachers can impact post-school study choices.[74] A high level of teacher commitment and expectations on student learning is important, as are mentoring programs, case management approaches and effective pedagogical strategies such as more individualised instruction.[75]

Schools must ensure they have systems to identify and intervene early for students at risk of disengagement. There are well-research predictors of dropout, and schools can use data and early warning systems to proactively intervene for students who show early signs for disengagement.[76] Tailored and holistic dropout prevention programs, focused on future goals valued by the student and delivered in small groups by trained and consistent staff are effective in reducing dropout.[77] Identification and intervention for language difficulties is critically important to prevent long-term disengagement. Approximately 50 per cent of young people in Victoria's youth prisons have a previously undiagnosed language disorder.[78]

High-performing schools have effective, accomplished school leaders.[79] These school leaders engage with evidence-based interventions, professional networks and other agencies to support students at risk of disengagement. They are critical to creating a school-wide positive learning culture.[80]

Schools and formal education systems must provide additional support for young people experiencing vulnerability and at risk of disengagement, particularly in relation to transitions, careers education, and vocational and alternative pathways. This might involve additional careers education and counselling, guided opportunities for work experience, in-school offerings of vocational education, transition mentoring for further education or employment, and specific support for excluded students or young carers to ensure they re-engage in education.[81]

70. Rickinson, M., Kunstler, B. & Salisbury, M. (2018). Insights for Early Action Literature Review, Melbourne: Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership, Victorian Department of Education and Training.
71. Polidano, C., Hanel, B., & Buddlemeyer, H. (2013). Explaining the socio-economic status school completion gap. Education Economics, 21(3), 230-247
72. Liu, S. H., & Nguyen, N. (2011). Successful Youth Transitions: Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth. Briefing Paper 25. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research; Sugai, G., & Simonsen, B. (2012). Positive behavioral interventions and supports: History, defining features, and misconceptions. Center for PBIS & Center for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, University of Connecticut, 1(1), 1-8. Victorian Ombudsman. (2017). Investigation into Victorian government school expulsions. Melbourne: Victorian Ombudsman.
73. Hattie, J. (2009). Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement. London: Routledge.
74. Anlezark, A., & Lim, P. (2011). Does Combining School and Work Affect School and Post-School Outcomes? Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research.
75. Lamb, S., Walstab, A., Teese, R., Vickers, M., & Rumberger, R. (2004). Staying on at school: Improving student retention in Australia. Brisbane: Queensland Department of Education and the Arts
76. Rickinson, M., Kunstler, B. & Salisbury, M. (2018). Insights for Early Action Literature Review, Melbourne: Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership, Victorian Department of Education and Training.
77. Wilson, S. J., & Tanner-Smith, E. E. (2013). Dropout prevention and intervention programs for improving school completion among school-aged children and youth: A systematic review. Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research, 4(4), 357-372
78. Snow, P. C., & Powell, M. B. (2011). Oral language competence in incarcerated young offenders: Links with offending severity. International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 13(6), 480-489
79. Day, C. et al. (2010). Ten strong claims about successful school leadership. Nottingham: National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services.
80. Lamb, S., Walstab, A., Teese, R., Vickers, M., & Rumberger, R. (2004). Staying on at school: Improving student retention in Australia. Brisbane: Queensland Department of Education and the Arts
81. Lamb, S., Walstab, A., Teese, R., Vickers, M., & Rumberger, R. (2004). Staying on at school: Improving student retention in Australia. Brisbane: Queensland Department of Education and the Arts; Liu, S. H., & Nguyen, N. (2011). Successful Youth Transitions: Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth. Briefing Paper 25. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research; Victorian Ombudsman. (2017). Investigation into Victorian government school expulsions. Melbourne: Victorian Ombudsman.

7. Drivers in action

This section provides examples of promising programs and practices that support the educational needs of children and young people disengaged from education, and indicates how that activity addresses one or more of the drivers of better educational outcomes.

Home and community drivers in action

Ganbina

An alumnus of SVA Ventures

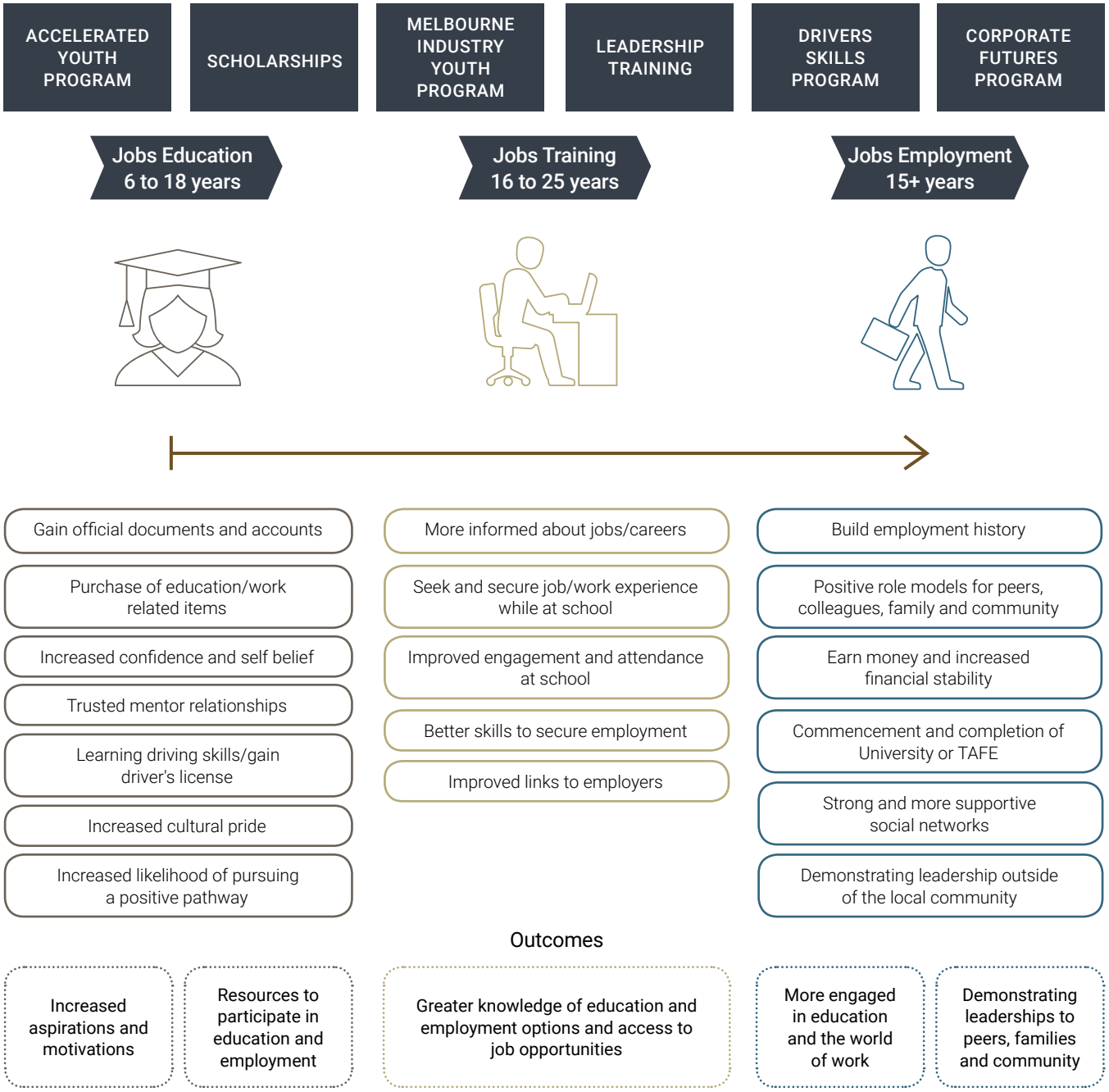
- **Primary driver**
  - Home/Community: Access to an adult who advocates and supports positive aspirations and engagement with the best learning pathway for the child
- **Secondary driver**
  - Home/Community: Opportunities to build social capital and belonging within local communities (e.g. extracurricular and community activities)
  - Home/Community: Additional support to access meaningful work experience in the community in partnership with industry

Ganbina aims to provide young Indigenous people the skills and support needed to access and engage with meaningful education and employment opportunities. Ganbina's school to work transition program involves the mentoring of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, from the ages of six to 25 years old, to help them gain the education, skills and experience they need to unlock their full potential. The program includes learning support, life skills training, cultural appreciation, career guidance and financial assistance. Since 2005, Ganbina has worked with over 1,000 young people in the Greater Shepparton region of Victoria, Australia.[82]

Participants typically progress through Jobs Education (six to 18 years), Jobs Training (16 to 25 years or more) and Jobs Employment (15 years or more) stages with Ganbina. In each stage Ganbina aims to support participants to experience a range of education, employment and leadership and life skills outcomes, as outlined in Figure 18.

82. SVA Consulting. (2016). Ganbina Impact Assessment. Sydney: Social Ventures Australia.

Figure 18: An overview of participant pathways through Ganbina's program and the typical outcomes experience[83]



83. SVA Consulting. (2016). Ganbina Impact Assessment. Sydney: Social Ventures Australia.

There are six key characteristics of Ganbina's approach, and these are consistent with best practice literature on effective school to work transition programs[84]:

- A long-term view in engagement of Indigenous young people, starting with foundational education, employment and life skills;
- Practical and hands on support including helping to acquire key documents (e.g. birth certificates, tax file numbers, bank accounts) and skills (e.g. leadership training, driver's licence, resume writing) to obtain employment
- Requiring participants to achieve standards of performance (e.g. attendance) and celebrating their success
- Focus on keeping youth in mainstream education by working closely with schools, their principals, teachers and other key staff
- Empowering participants to make the decision to be a part of the program through an opt-in mechanism each year

An independent evaluation of Ganbina by Price Waterhouse Coopers in 2014 found very high Year 12 completion rates (100 percent in 2014) and high retention rates (over 95 percent).[85] Compared to similar programs, Ganbina costs less to run and has higher retention rates, gender balance and age ranges.

A 2016 Social Ventures Australia Impact Assessment of Ganbina found that Year 11 to Year 12 retention rates increased from 62 percent in 2009–10 to 73 percent in 2015–16, which is considerably higher than the rate for Indigenous people in the Greater Shepparton area and national Indigenous rates. All participants aged 25 to 34 years who had been with Ganbina for five years or more had attained Year 12 or an equivalent qualification, surpassing the Greater Shepparton and regional Victorian rates and nearing the Victorian rate. A 2013 Social Ventures Australia Social Return on Investment report showed that every $1 invested in Ganbina created about $6.70 in social value.[86]

Ganbina is currently exploring expansion of their model to other areas in Victoria, New South Wales, and Queensland.

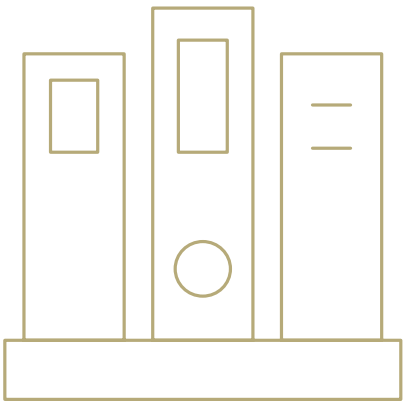
'Without Ganbina, I definitely would not be at university now. But Ganbina made me realise I could do it, and so they changed my life.'

'They helped me get through high school, apply to uni, organise accommodation and a cadetship and scholarships to help pay for my fees.' – Taylah

Taylah is studying for her Bachelor of Arts degree (double major in criminology and sociology) at the University of Melbourne. She has been invited to apply for the Charlie Perkins Scholarship and a Rhodes Scholarship for Cambridge or Oxford Universities.

– Participant stories from Ganbina

Ganbina. (n.d.). Participant stories. Retrieved from: ganbina.com.au/?page_id=148.



84. Social Ventures Australia. (2015). Fundamental Principles for Youth Employment. Sydney: Social Ventures Australia; SVA Consulting. (2016). Ganbina Impact Assessment. Sydney: Social Ventures Australia.
85. PwC's Indigenous Consulting. (2016). Measuring the Value of Ganbina's Programs 2015. Sydney: PricewaterhouseCoopers's Indigenous Consulting.
86. SVA Consulting. (2016). Ganbina Impact Assessment. Sydney: Social Ventures Australia; SVA Consulting. (2014). Social Return on Investment Evaluative Analysis. Sydney: Social Ventures Australia; PwC's Indigenous Consulting. (2016). Measuring the Value of Ganbina's Programs 2015. Sydney: PricewaterhouseCoopers's Indigenous Consulting.

BackTrack

Supported by SVA Ventures

- **Primary driver**
  - Home/Community: Health and housing needs met providing ability to engage in school (including safe housing, nutrition, sleep and exercise)
- **Secondary driver**
  - Home/Community: Access to an adult who advocates and supports positive aspirations and engagement with the best learning pathway for the child
  - Home/Community: Learning needs and interests are supported (e.g. tutoring, homework support)
  - Formal education: Additional support to access alternative or post-school pathways including vocational and further education (within or closely connected to schools)

BackTrack provides youth experiencing disadvantage and disengagement in regional communities the support, life skills and experience to pursue positive life pathways.

BackTrack is a non-profit, holistic life skills initiative for disengaged or at risk young people aged 11 – 19 years from rural and remote communities. The program gives vulnerable young people the practical and emotional support needed to stabilise their lives, helping develop self-esteem and skills for work. Almost nine in 10 young people supported by BackTrack move into work, education or training. To date, BackTrack has worked with more than 1000 young people in Armidale, New South Wales.[87]

All BackTrack program activities are designed to allow participants to gain a sense of belonging, strong positive identity and the self-belief to pursue their personal aspirations. BackTrack teaches non-judgementally, uses agreements instead of rules, has alternative learning programs such as dog training, and there is no expulsion. Although there is a curriculum, BackTrack's flexibility allows it to do whatever might be needed to achieve its goals, and is prepared to take as long as needed to get a young person back on track.

Effective wraparound support is provided to participants, which may include accommodation, support through the justice system, mental health support and individualised mentoring. Most existing services in Australia fail to effectively connect and serve the multiple needs of the most disadvantaged young people. This is sometimes the result of targeted funding for programs with tight eligibility criteria and short-terms outcomes measures. BackTrack takes a different approach, allowing all individuals to develop at their own pace. An evaluation by four universities has measured the following impacts due to a young person's participation in BackTrack over a six-month period:[88]

- 87 percent of graduating program participants in employment or further education
- School suspensions down 70 percent
- Severe psychological distress halved
- Weekly illicit drug use down 25 percent
- Reduced crime – juvenile crime has reduced by 55 percent in Armidale over the 7 years BackTrack has been operating

Thirteen-year-old John* had experienced significant hardship by the time he arrived at BackTrack in 2011. His family life had broken down and he had completely disengaged from school. He was on a path that many of the BackTrack kids are heading down including crime, homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse.

John's involvement with BackTrack sparked a turning point in John's life. His involvement with the justice system has considerably reduced and he has obtained Year 10 schooling qualifications, despite never getting past Year 7 in the traditional school system. He's had a transformative impact on how the justice department staff of this centre view support for juvenile detainees.

During a stint in detention, John started up his own BackTrack style program and ran daily case management and mentoring support for other boys in the centre. Since being released John has maintained meaningful employment and has aspirations to be a youth worker to help people like himself who are having a hard time.

– Stories from a BackTrack participant

Social Ventures Australia. (2017). Venture Philanthropy Impact Report 2017. Sydney: Social Ventures Australia.
* Name changed to protect privacy

87. Social Ventures Australia. (2017). Venture Philanthropy Impact Report 2017. Sydney: Social Ventures Australia.
88. Knight et al. (n.d.). Preliminary findings from an evaluation of an intervention for young people with multiple and complex needs. Sydney: National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre; Social Ventures Australia. (2017). Venture Philanthropy Impact Report 2017. Sydney: Social Ventures Australia.

System drivers in action

National Exceptional Teaching for Disadvantaged Schools (NETDS)

Supported by SVA Ventures

- **Primary driver**
  - System: System facilitates accessible and inclusive education that provides learning pathways for all children
- **Secondary driver**
  - System: Workforce capacity and capability is sufficient to support effective transitions between school, further study and work
  - Formal education: Teacher capability and teaching practice fosters engagement and responds to learning and wellbeing needs of children (e.g. interests, aspirations, resilience)

There is widespread agreement that effective teachers make a significant difference to student learning outcomes for young people living in poverty, and that it is extremely difficult to attract such highly-qualified teachers to schools serving these disadvantaged communities.[89] The National Exceptional Teaching for Disadvantaged Schools (NETDS), was developed by Professors Bruce Burnett and Jo Lampert in 2009 when they were part of the Faculty of Education at Queensland University of Technology (QUT). The program identifies, prepares and deploys high performing preservice teachers for work in challenging schools that serve low socioeconomic communities.[90]

NETDS is a unique scholarly cohort-based learning model. It allows graduates to apply knowledge to the distinctive setting of a low socioeconomic classroom through the use of a modified curriculum, mentorship, and professional experience placements. Selection into the program is based on a pre-service teacher's grade point average over the first two years of their Bachelor of Education degree.

Selected pre-service teachers work together as a cohort and are provided with a deep theoretical understanding of poverty, social disadvantage, and inequity in education. Only then do they undertake scaffolded Professional Experience in schools that commonly have a high prevalence of disengagement and underperformance. Pre-service teachers are able to identify areas that require specialised information or guidance, and are then offered professional development to address such needs, for example sessions on behaviour management led by expert principals of schools from low socioeconomic communities.

89. Burnett, B. and Lampert, J. (2015). Teacher Education for High Poverty Schools in Australia: The National Exceptional Teachers for Disadvantaged Schools Program. In J. Lampert & B. Burnett (Eds.), Teacher Education for High Poverty Schools. (pp. 73-94). New York: Springer International Publishing.
90. Burnett, B. & Lampert, J. (2019). The Australian national exceptional teaching for disadvantaged schools programme: a reflection on its first 8 years, Journal of Education for Teaching, 45:1, 31-46

Key themes identified over the first eight years of the program include:

- quality teaching within disadvantaged schools not only requires a passion for education in these contexts, but also meaningful knowledge related to low socioeconomic contexts
- high levels of content/discipline knowledge
- high expectations for what students can achieve
- personal characteristics such as the ability to build meaningful relationships with students, families and communities, and
- elements of resilience to resist common misperceptions about poverty.[91]

The program generated a 250 percent increase in high-performing pre-service teachers from Queensland University of Technology choosing to begin their careers in low socioeconomic schools.[92] Data from Queensland University of Technology shows that approximately 90 percent of NETDS graduates selected to work in low socioeconomic status schools.[93]

In 2013-2017, backed by Social Ventures Australia, the Origin Foundation, the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation and the Eureka Benevolent Foundation, the NETDS program grew nationally to seven universities across NSW, Queensland, South Australia, and Victoria. Well over 100 Australian schools in four state education systems have benefited from having high performing and specially trained teachers as a result of the NETDS.

91. Burnett, B. and Lampert, J. (2019). Educating Teachers for High-Poverty Schools. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education. Published online March 2019.
92. Social Ventures Australia. (2017). Case Study on NETDS. Sydney: Social Ventures Australia.
93. Burnett, B. and Lampert, J. (2015). Teacher Education for High Poverty Schools in Australia: The National Exceptional Teachers for Disadvantaged Schools Program. In J. Lampert & B. Burnett (Eds.), Teacher Education for High Poverty Schools. (pp. 73-94). New York: Springer International Publishing.

'If I hadn't had the NETDS experience my placement probably would have broken me because I wouldn't have been used to the level or the behaviour management of the kids and just the low literacy and numeracy and all that goes with it.'

– NETDS Graduate

Social Ventures Australia. (n.d). A Bright Spot in Australian Education: National Exceptional Teachers for Disadvantaged Schools (Case Study). Sydney: Social Ventures Australia.

Navigator Program (Victorian Department for Education and Training)

- **Primary driver**
  - System: System invests in adequate and integrated health and social services to support engagement and success in education
- **Secondary drivers**
  - System: System proactively identifies and takes early action for children at risk of disengagement (across agencies)
  - System: System facilitates accessible and inclusive education that provides learning pathways for all children

The Victorian Department of Education and Training (the Department) supports young people aged 12 to 17-years-old who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging from school through the Navigator Program. The program provides intensive case management and assertive outreach to support young people to re-engage in education.

Navigator is delivered in a partnership model between community agencies that work closely with young people, their families and support networks, local education settings and local area representatives from the Department. Navigator service providers link young people to support services and interventions, and work with schools to support re-engagement planning. There is one lead provider per area. Lead providers include Berry Street, Mission Australia, Anglicare Victoria, and the South East Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN).[94]

Students who have less than 30 percent attendance in the previous term, and who live or have most recently been enrolled in an education setting in a Navigator area can be referred to the program. Once referred, service providers work with the young person to identify their learning needs, capabilities and goals to develop an education re-engagement plan that involves family, school and local community supports. The program supports a young person as they re-engage in education.

The Navigator Program launched as a pilot in eight areas across Victoria in 2016, and will expand to further areas over 2019–2021. The Victorian Government invested $16.9 million in the program up to the end of 2018 and a further $44 million to expand the program.

In 2016 the Department commissioned a third party to conduct an initial process and impact evaluation of the first 12 months of the pilot. The evaluation found that young people reported increased levels of wellbeing and readiness for education including learner confidence, self-discipline and sense of identity. As of the end of March 2018:

- 1,841 Navigator referrals were received
- 1,219 young people had case management support provided
- 860 young people returned to education
- 105 young people successfully exited the program (maintaining an average attendance of at least 70 percent for 26 weeks), and
- 390 young people were on the waitlist.[95]

94. Victorian Department of Education and Training. (2019, July 31). Navigator Program. Retrieved from: https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/navigator.aspx
95. Victorian Department of Education and Training. (2018, June). Navigator Pilot Evaluation Snapshot. Retrieved from: https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/NavigatorEvaluationSnapshotJune2018.docx

The evaluation concluded that there are a number of factors supporting the successful implementation of the Navigator model, including:

- *Effective joint efforts that include a shared vision, effective and transparent communication and shared resources and knowledge.*
- *Skills in intensive, trauma informed case management including assertive outreach. Providers have specialist expertise to enable an approach that targets and engages young people who are experiencing multiple complex barriers to engaging in education.*
- *A client-centred approach, that supports a young person while understanding the broader context of their family, their school and other support services*
- *Skilled and committed staff that can work and manage across the eco-system of school disengagement – with young people, families, schools, community and government.*
- *Consistent, regular, adaptable communication and engagement approaches with all stakeholders.*

– Navigator Pilot Evaluation Snapshot

Victorian Department of Education and Training. (2018, June). Navigator Pilot Evaluation Snapshot.
Retrieved from: https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/NavigatorEvaluationSnapshotJune2018.docx

Formal education drivers in action

Hands on Learning

SVA supported Hands on Learning's early development

- **Primary driver**
  - Formal education: Children at risk of disengagement are supported through effective early identification and interventions that meet their needs
- **Secondary drivers**
  - Formal education: Additional support to access alternative or post-school pathways including vocational and further education (within or closely connected to schools)
  - Formal education: Teacher capability and teaching practice fosters engagement and responds to learning and wellbeing needs of children (e.g. interests, aspirations, resilience)

Hands on Learning (HOL) is an early intervention educational program delivered in schools to keep young people engaged in education. The program seeks to have a positive impact on students' personal skills, relationship skills, behaviour, and functional literacy and numeracy skills. It aims to have students have a better sense of themselves as people and learners, achieve success at school, and form and maintain quality relationships with peers and adults.

The program was established and piloted at Frankston High School in 1999 with the initial impetus to give schools an alternative to exclusion. Hands on Learning now operates programs in more than 100 schools across Queensland, New South Wales, Tasmania and Victoria.[96]

Hands on Learning is made up of four fundamental elements to help young people to grow in confidence, engage and achieve at school:

- A place to belong: a physical sanctuary at school
- People to belong to: Small teams working together, sharing meals and building strong relationships
- Real things to do: Engaging in creative and meaningful projects
- A chance to give back: Making valuable contributions to their community, building self-esteem and connection.[97]

Small groups of 10 students involved in the program spend one day a week out of the classroom to undertake creative construction projects in their school or community with two specialist staff ('artisan teachers' employed by the school). The students are referred by wellbeing staff, year level co-ordinators, and school leadership teams according to the criteria for selection. The projects are identified by the school administration and must be of value to the school and community. Hands on Learning teachers communicate regularly with classroom teachers about the progression of students in the program.

The Hands on Learning approach incorporates professional development for teachers, sharing of information and experiences across the schools running the program, and quality assurance from the Hands on Learning school support team. The team is employed by Hands on Learning Australia, which joined forces with Save the Children in 2017.

96. Hands on Learning. (n.d.). Hands on Learning Overview. Retrieved from: http://handsonlearning.org.au/wp/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/2017-HoL-Overview.pdf
97. Hands on Learning. (n.d.). Hands on Learning Overview. Retrieved from: http://handsonlearning.org.au/wp/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/2017-HoL-Overview.pdf

Hands on Learning has demonstrated 'that it is effective in increasing retention rates among program participants and, more broadly, in the schools which these students attend.'[98] It was estimated that for every $1 spend on Hands on Learning, there is around a $12 return on investment due to re-engagement or disengagement prevention.[99]

A University of Melbourne case study of Hands on Learning at Benalla College found that the program is resulting 'positive impacts on the well-being, confidence, and self-esteem of a significant cohort of [at risk] young people' and there is improved academic engagement as well as praise from students and staff.[100] An internal survey of past Hands on Learning participants found 76 per cent employed, 22 per cent in post-school training, and 2 per cent unemployed.[101]

Hands on Learning regularly collects data about priority outcome areas via a Connections, Capacities and Meaning framework developed in collaboration with the University of Melbourne.[102] Hands on Learning students report an increased connection with school, improved learning and use of skills at school, improved meaning in relation to school activities, and improved enjoyment of school. Teachers report improved behaviour, contribution and effort at school for Hands on Learning participants.[103] A 2018 survey of 149 parents conducted by Save the Children found 95 percent believed their children had improved their chances of employment by undertaking such projects, and 85 percent said Hands on Learning was the main reason their children had been motivated to attend school.[104]

Peter transferred into Benalla College, very reluctantly, in Year 8, following a period of upheaval at home. '*I just wanted to leave ... I hated everybody ... I didn't get on with people*'.

Peter credits HOL with providing 'a different environment' which gave him responsibilities, built his confidence, and enabled him to form strong friendships. '*It's totally changed my attitude … helped me feel I'm part of the school … I'm much more confident about speaking up in class … I've got friends … I get along better with most of the teachers*.'

Peter reports that his enjoyment of HOL helped his attendance and that the HOL experience taught him a lot about patience (particularly when working with people who might 'snap' easily) and enriched his people-skills and knowledge of 'life'. In the past year, he has successfully applied for and started a part-time job.

– Peter, a Hands-on Learning participant

Turnbull, M. (2013). Positive, Practical and Productive: A case study of Hands on Learning in action. Melbourne: University of Melbourne Youth Research Centre.

98. Deloitte Access Economics. (2012). The socio-economic benefits of investing in the prevention of early school leaving. Canberra: Deloitte Access Economics.
99. Deloitte Access Economics. (2012). The socio-economic benefits of investing in the prevention of early school leaving. Canberra: Deloitte Access Economics.
100. Turnbull, M. (2013). Positive, Practical and Productive: A Case study of Hands on Learning in action. Melbourne: University of Melbourne Youth Research Centre.
101. Hands on Learning. (n.d.). The End Game: Where they are now. Retrieved from: http://handsonlearning.org.au/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/HoL-Past-Student-Quotes.pdf.
102. Hands on Learning. (n.d.). New national framework measuring what works to keep kids engaged at school. Retrieved from: http://handsonlearning.org.au/wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/New-National-Framework.pdf.
103. Hands on Learning. (n.d.). Hands on Learning Overview. Retrieved from: http://handsonlearning.org.au/wp/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/2017-HoL-Overview.pdf.
104. Save the Children. (2019). Future Directions, Hands on Learning: Keeping young people connected to education and building capacity for future success. Melbourne: Save the Children.

Pavilion School

- **Primary driver**
  - Formal education: School culture is inclusive and fosters belonging (e.g. supportive relationships, positive behaviours, few suspensions)
- **Secondary drivers**
  - Formal education: Teaching practice fosters engagement and responds to learning and wellbeing needs of children (e.g. interests, aspirations, resilience)
  - Formal education: Additional support to access alternative or post-school pathways including vocational and further education (within or closely connected to schools)

Pavilion School is a Victorian Government school that aims to provide education for young people aged 12 to 20 who are disengaged or excluded from mainstream education. Established in 2007 with 20 students, the school has grown to approximately 240 students and operates across two campuses. About 20 percent of students are from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background.[105]

Pavilion School aims to provide students with a learning environment that is supportive and productive and seeks to create literate, numerate and curious learners. The school offers the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL, Years 10-12), youth work support, electives, extension activities as well as a bridging to VCAL program for younger students. Regular electives include art, personal training, boxing, music, drug and alcohol education, mental health awareness and anger management.

Working with local agencies and youth services, Pavilion School provides students with an individually tailored education program. The school offers smaller classes and more intensive hours for students, supplemented by external services and educational programs.

These activities are negotiated between staff and students based on the student's needs and might involve an accredited educational program, part-time work or links to support agencies. An Individual Learning Plan, developed in consultation with the student, describes the negotiated curriculum, assessment and reporting process and contractual agreements regarding participation, transition and behaviour.

Each class at Pavilion School is no larger than 15 students with a teacher, youth worker, and a teacher assistant. Students negotiate learning outcomes and set personal and academic goals for a particular class, and teachers use explicit teaching strategies to ensure each student has an understanding of the class goals.

Students are self-referred to Pavilion School or are referred by a friend, family member, teacher or case worker. Pavilion School students must be of secondary school age; not able to attend a full-time mainstream school close to home due to school exclusion, severe behavioural problems or other complex personal difficulties; be willing to continue their education; and, alongside their parent or carer, be willing to accept a flexible program with a reduced timetable.

Pavilion School has a psychologist and a wellbeing team, with counselling, mediation, restorative practices and a health and wellbeing curriculum offered to students. Pavilion School also offers a tailored transition into employment and further education called 'The Pathways Program' and has partnerships with the Beacon Foundation, AIME, The Institute for Koorie Education, Melbourne Polytechnic and Local Learning & Employment networks.

About 85 per cent of the school's graduates go on to further education or the workforce.[106]

'Everyone has a right to education no matter what your background, how bad your behaviour, how aggressive you are or how chronically disengaged you are from school.'

'It's about not judging or blaming kids for the situation they are in, rather, we pull them closer in and provide them with the support they need. I think that's the difference to what a lot of schools are able to offer.'

'The [students] feel safe and they feel comfortable coming to school knowing that no-one's going to look at them differently or pick on them or anything like that.'

– Josie Howie, Principal, The Pavilion School.

Jacobs, C. (2016, August 7). The Pavilion School in Melbourne welcomes community's most at-risk teenagers. Retrieved from: https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-08-07/pavilion-school-welcomes-communitys-most-at-risk-teenagers/7698290

105. Jacobs, C. (2016, August 7). The Pavilion School in Melbourne welcomes community's most at-risk teenagers. Retrieved from: https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-08-07/pavilion-school-welcomes-communitys-most-at-risk-teenagers/7698290
106. Jacobs, C. (2016, August 7). The Pavilion School in Melbourne welcomes community's most at-risk teenagers. Retrieved from: https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-08-07/pavilion-school-welcomes-communitys-most-at-risk-teenagers/7698290

Western Port Secondary College

Part of SVA's Bright Spots Schools Connection

- **Primary driver**
  - Formal education: Children at risk of disengagement are supported through effective early identification and interventions that meet their needs
- **Secondary drivers**
  - Formal education: Additional support for key school transitions (e.g. between school/s and to/ from any exclusions from school
  - Formal education: School leadership engages with evidence-informed interventions, networks and services to support students at risk of disengagement

Western Port Secondary College opened in 1974 in Hastings, Victoria and currently has 600 students across Years 7 to 12. The school offers the Victorian Certification of Education (VCE), the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Schools programs, and emphasises pastoral care, and positive approaches to student wellbeing.

The school serves a community that faces intergenerational disadvantage and focusses on providing effective education for disengaged students and those at risk of disengaging from school. The school believes that a cradle to tertiary approach (Based on New York's Harlem Children's Zone 'Cradle to College' model) is the best approach to support children experiencing vulnerability. Western Port Secondary College works closely with several feeder primary schools to support this vision and encourage early engagement in school.

Western Port Secondary College has a formal transition program that provides a positive primary to secondary school transition experience. This program provides information and social activities for students (and their parents) in Years 5 and 6 of feeder primary schools that continues into Year 7 at the college.

Western Port Secondary School are committed to a Learning Guarantee for students – that is, supporting more students to achieve at or above grade level by the end of Year 9, to ensure they have the best possible opportunity of success through the senior years and a transition into meaningful pathways after school.

To achieve the 'Learning Guarantee', Western Port Secondary College works with two feeder primary schools to identify and address the potential causes of disengagement from school from an earlier age. Early identification and intervention for students at risk of disengagement is critical[107], and many Year 7s arrive at Western Port Secondary behind their peers academically, which increases their risk of disengagement. Using philanthropic funding, Western Port Secondary College staff assist in monitoring and early intervention for Year 4 students in two partner primary schools.

The 'Learning Guarantee' project has several aspects:

- parents of Year 4 students are engaged via a 'Learning Guarantee' sign-up process;
- Year 4 students in the partner primary schools are transported to Western Port Secondary College to complete nationally-benchmarked online assessments in literacy and numeracy
- Western Port Secondary College staff visit the partner primary schools to provide teacher relief time for primary school teachers to plan learning interventions for students that need additional support based on the online assessments, and
- the staff from the schools involved collaborate on the data and interventions.

The project supports transition to secondary school by helping Year 4 students to become familiar with secondary school students, teachers and facilities and by engaging parents early on in their child's learning and transition.

The partnership helps teachers across primary and secondary schools to share data and build knowledge to better support students to succeed in school. By sharing consistent and standardised data across the three schools, teachers can discuss students in similar situations and thus share resources, curriculum expectations, interventions, successes and additional supports needed. This information is available to Western Port Secondary College teachers when the student transitions to high school, enabling continuity in the provision of learning plans and additional supports for the student.

107. Rickinson, M., Kunstler, B. & Salisbury, M. (2018). Insights for Early Action Literature Review, Melbourne: Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership, Victorian Department of Education and Training.

In 2019, Western Port Secondary School is expanding the data collection to capture contextual, social and family factors to identify contributing factors that might be beyond the school's influence and have the information needed to engage external support services. The school plans to have the 'Learning Guarantee' project evaluated in 2019.

Once at secondary school, Western Port Secondary College offers a range of programs to engage students in school, including an outreach program, vocational education pathways and connections to community-based programs and supports. The school has an extensive student support team including a student wellbeing co-ordinator, an Australian Defence Force transition mentor, a health promotion nurse, and a chaplain, with access to a Victorian Department of Education and Training educational psychologist and a social worker. The Student Support Team provides individual support, delivers intervention programs and uses external agencies to help deliver a whole-school approach to health promotion.

Western Port Secondary College's national literacy and numeracy test data (NAPLAN) and Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) median study scores have improved, no student has fallen below the national minimum standard in numeracy, and the school's retention rate has almost doubled.[108] The school has already achieved its target that by 2020, 70 percent of Year 9 students will be at or above the expected level, as determined by the Victorian Curriculum in Literacy and Numeracy.[109]

'...With these islands of disadvantage, a birth-to-adult learning model is life-changing. Education is really the key to breaking the cycle of disadvantage.'

– Michael Devine, Principal, Western Port Secondary College

Dubecki, L. (2018, April 29). The ABC of changing lives: When the teachers change the rules, anything is possible. Retrieved from: https://lens.monash.edu/@monash-life/2018/04/29/1358917/the-abc-of-changing-lives.

108. Dubecki, L. (2018, April 29). The ABC of changing lives: When the teachers change the rules, anything is possible. Retrieved from: https://lens.monash.edu/@monash-life/2018/04/29/1358917/the-abc-of-changing-lives.
109. Information supplied by Western Port Secondary College

8. Conclusion and Next Steps

This paper provides a perspective on the educational and wellbeing needs of children and young people disengaged from education and experiencing vulnerability. It identifies the key drivers to improve educational outcomes for this cohort of children.

Children disengaged from education and experiencing vulnerability face a number of challenges in their home, community and formal education environments. Support provided by the education system is not meeting the complex needs of these children, with one in five Australian children not completing Year 12 in an uninterrupted, linear fashion from the start of high school.[111]

There are some key drivers and promising practices, but more investment, evidence and the prioritisation of early intervention is needed to keep this cohort of children engaged in education, training or employment. Return to education, employment or training is much less likely for those who are long-term disengaged and every attempt must be made to keep school-aged children and young people engaged in a suitable learning pathway. To help achieve this aim, we need further Australian research on the most effective interventions for students at risk of disengagement and those newly disengaged from education.

We hope that this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of this cohort's needs and a recognition of the additional supports they require to address their circumstance that makes it difficult to successfully engage in education, training or employment pathways.

We invite readers to interpret and apply the drivers of better educational outcomes identified in this paper to their own work, and continue the conversation with us about the interventions that work to support the needs of this group of children vulnerability and young people. We will use the learnings in this paper to inform SVA's work with partners in this area.

We welcome feedback and reflections on this paper; both on how you have used it and what more or different content could be added, especially in relation to activity in other Australian states and territories. We will capture this feedback in future versions of this paper.

Thank you

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SVA also thanks the researchers and educators who provided input, and the organisations that shared stories on the drivers in action.

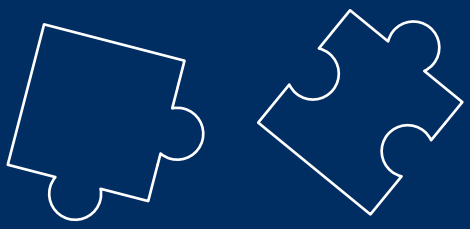

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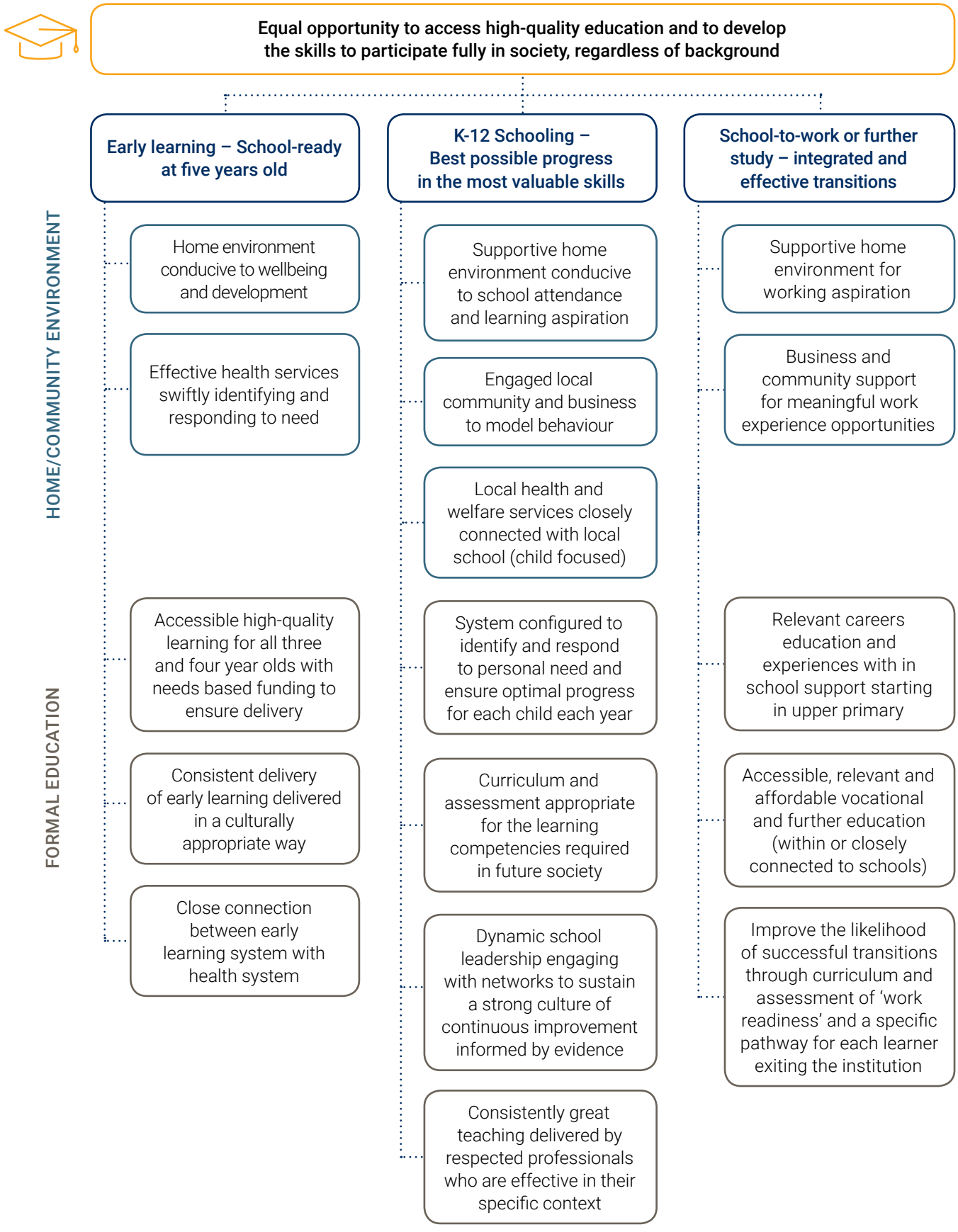
Photo credentials

Page 1, 2, and 33: BackTrack Youth Works
Page 24 and 28: Photographer: Vikki Foord on behalf of SVA
Page 26 and 40: Save the Children
Page 34: National Exceptional Teaching for Disadvantaged Schools (NETDS)
All other photos are stock photos.

110. Deloitte Access Economics. (2012). Youth Transitions Evidence Base: 2012 Update for the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. Canberra: Deloitte Access Economics.

Appendix

Figure 19: SVA Education Driver Tree



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