

SACE Tracks: Standing in the Stories, Singing the Now, Imagining the Future



SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy **2017–2021**





Front cover image:
Coda Cox, *Catch the Dreaming* (2015)
Dot painting on bark, telling Coda's story
SACE Art Show 2016

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Message from the Minister



SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy 2017–2021

Education is a universal right for all people. It is globally accepted that education is crucial to improving opportunities and pathways and, more significantly, enhancing quality of life. The South Australian Government is committed to improving the overall well-being of Aboriginal South Australians.

The South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) is a highly valuable senior secondary education qualification that allows all students to develop the knowledge, skills, and understandings necessary for becoming active participants in an ever-changing world. For a young Aboriginal student, achieving the SACE qualification not only provides greater access to meaningful pathways such as further education, training, and employment, but can lead to the development of other essential capabilities such as personal, social, and emotional well-being, financial prosperity and security, and enhanced capacity for critical and creative thinking.

The SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy 2017–2021 aims to prepare Aboriginal students to achieve their SACE while maintaining their Aboriginal culture and identity, as well as positioning them to succeed in their local community and as global citizens. The strategy reflects a strong commitment from the education sector in South Australia to enhancing the learning outcomes and capabilities for Aboriginal students, and the voice of Aboriginal students and their families has informed this strategy.

This new strategy builds upon the success of the previous 2012–16 strategy and highlights recommendations for schooling sectors and other stakeholders to consider, which have proven to contribute to the SACE attainment for Aboriginal students. It also acknowledges that success in the SACE does not begin in Years 10 or 11, and that broader educational policy change is required. The focus for the SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy is on emerging practices that include building on strengths, encouraging pride in young Aboriginal people's cultural heritage, and emphasising proactive approaches to SACE attainment.

It is with great pride that the development of the 2017–2021 strategy has been guided by the findings and recommendations of state and federal strategies, including the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015*, the Government of South Australia's *Aboriginal Strategy 2013–2016*, and Aboriginal and school communities. The launch of the SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy 2017–2021 is the beginning of the next stage of collaborative engagement to make this strategy a reality.

Congratulations and best wishes.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Close".

Hon Susan Close MP

Minister for Education and Child Development



SACE Tracks: *Standing in the Stories, Singing the Now, Imagining the Future*

Foreword

The South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) is a high-quality, equitable senior secondary education qualification. The qualification allows all students to develop the knowledge, skills, and understandings necessary for becoming active participants in an ever-changing world. It is globally accepted that education is crucial to improving opportunities and pathways and, more significantly, enhancing quality of life. Acknowledging this, the SACE Board's mission is to equip young people with the 'capabilities to move successfully into further learning and work as confident and responsible citizens' (SACE Board 2016a).

Education is a universal right for all people. However, in an Australian context it is important to consider the concerning evidence indicating that Aboriginal young people are among the most educationally disadvantaged. Successful educational achievement enhances Aboriginal students' strive for social equality, and contributes to greater social and economic prosperity. Mercurio and Clayton (2001) state that the forty-six Aboriginal students having successfully completed their SACE certificate in 1999 was 'the cause of some jubilation by the education authorities' (p 1). Not surprisingly, the announcement that 295 Aboriginal students achieved their SACE in 2015 was equally celebrated by those in the education community. Although the SACE Board celebrates the success of past and current initiatives that have supported the growth in Aboriginal SACE completers, it also acknowledges the value of a senior secondary qualification for those Aboriginal students who are not actively working towards achieving their SACE.

For a young Aboriginal student, achieving the SACE qualification not only provides greater access to meaningful pathways such as further education, training, and employment, but can lead to the development of other essential capabilities such as personal, social, and emotional well-being, and enhanced capacity for critical and creative thinking. The SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy aims to align with the SACE Board's Strategic Plan 2016–2020 by positioning Aboriginal students in a global context; to support them to see their place within and beyond their home and community through a broader world perspective and the development of intercultural and ethical understandings.

This paper, 'SACE Tracks: Standing in the Stories, Singing the Now, Imagining the Future', introduces and contextualises the development of the SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy 2017–2021. The paper builds upon the success of the previous strategy (2012–16) and articulates a strengths-based approach to the emerging practice strategies that contribute to the success of Aboriginal young people in their senior secondary education. The strategy has been developed in partnership with Aboriginal and school communities and reflects the collaborative approach adopted by the SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy Steering Committee and the SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy Working Party.



'The recommendations try to drive positive change by acknowledging that success in the SACE does not begin just in Years 10 or 11, and recognising that broader educational policy change in the former years is required.'

The Steering Committee has approached the development of the strategy holistically, to acknowledge and respect the diversity of Aboriginal cultures and communities while reflecting the committee's commitment to consider the significance of every individual Aboriginal student.

The paper begins with a synthesis of local, national, and international literature, to explore and develop an understanding of the complexity of Aboriginal education in Australia. The paper then contextualises a South Australian perspective through a longitudinal analysis of SACE data. These data describe Aboriginal students' participation and achievement of success under the SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy 2012–2016. The paper concludes by articulating a range of aims, initiatives, and actions that are drawn from emerging practice and research. The recommendations try to drive positive change by acknowledging that success in the SACE does not begin just in Years 10 or 11, and recognising that broader educational policy change in the former years is required. The paper offers a range of interrelated recommendations for schooling sectors and other stakeholders to consider, and contends that sustained, positive improvement requires targeted initiatives, activities, and coordinated approaches at the school, sector, and state levels. The final section of the paper presents the formalised SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy 2017–2021.

In developing the strategy, the Steering Committee considered the findings and recommendations in this paper and their alignment with relevant state and federal policy and strategies. The SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy 2017–2021 has been guided by the seven identified priority areas of the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015* and the framework that it provides to jurisdictions for 'developing and implementing localised policies and actions to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' (Commonwealth of Australia 2015c, p 2). This paper also takes into consideration the targets and key strategies of the seven key priority areas of the Department for Education and Child Development's *Aboriginal Strategy 2013–2016* (Government of South Australia 2013). Specifically, the priority areas of 'Engagement and connections', 'Leadership, quality teaching and workforce development', and 'Pathways to real post-school options' have supported the Steering Committee's framing of this paper. There is also alignment with the underpinning principles of the South Australian Aboriginal Regional Authority Policy, particularly the principles of collaboration, partnership and mutual respect; Aboriginal self-determination, self-governance and Nation Rebuilding; capacity building; and sustainability (Government of South Australia 2016, p 4).



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Executive Summary

The SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy 2017–2021 aims to align with the SACE Board’s Strategic Plan 2016–2020 by positioning Aboriginal students in a global context. This strategy aims to develop the strengths and capabilities of young Aboriginal students in the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) through greater exploration of Aboriginal struggles, achievements, and stories. Further, it supports students to position themselves within and beyond their local communities and enhance their capacity to contribute to a sustainable and socially just world.

This paper, ‘SACE Tracks: Standing in the Stories, Singing the Now, Imagining the Future’, builds upon the success of the previous SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy (2012–2016) and articulates a strengths-based approach to the emerging practice strategies that contribute to the success of Aboriginal young people in their senior secondary education. In 2015, 295 Aboriginal students completed the SACE — the highest to date. Similarly, all other metrics demonstrate significant progress for Aboriginal students in senior secondary education in South Australia. Although these are worthy achievements for students, teachers, schools, and the community to celebrate, this paper acknowledges that a considerable proportion of Aboriginal students are not actively working towards achieving the SACE. Hence, the SACE Board is committed to harnessing successful emerging practice strategies and working with teachers and schools to build on these successes.

The 2017–2021 strategy:

- has been developed in collaboration with the SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy Steering Committee, the SACE Board Aboriginal Strategy Education Working Party, and Aboriginal and school communities
- has been guided by the seven identified priority areas of the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015* and the framework that it provides to jurisdictions for ‘developing and implementing localised policies and actions to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’ (Commonwealth of Australia 2015c, p 2)
- takes into consideration the targets and key strategies of the seven key domains of the *Aboriginal Strategy 2013–2016* (Government of South Australia 2013), particularly the ‘Engagement and connections’, ‘Leadership, quality teaching and workforce development’, and ‘Pathways to real post-school options’ domains
- has been informed by a synthesis of local, national, and international literature, which explores and develops an understanding of the complexity of Aboriginal education in Australia
- has been further informed by an analysis and evaluation of the SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy 2012–2016, including data on Aboriginal student outcomes during the 2012–2015 period relating to five areas: achievement, participation, recognition, sustainability, and representation.

¹ This paper consistently uses the terms ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘Aboriginal people’ to encompass a range of phrases used to represent Aboriginal people, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Indigenous Australian people, and First Nations people.

The 2017–2021 strategy includes:

- the presentation of the new strategic priorities:
 - empowerment: identity and belonging
 - respect: strong commitment and high-expectations relationships
 - leadership: people and culture
 - capacity building: culturally and contextually responsive curriculum and assessment
 - achievement: excellence, aspiration, and merit
 - transparency: data analysis and evaluation
- for each strategic priority, the development of recommended aims, initiatives, and activities for schooling sectors and other stakeholders to consider.

Recommendations

It is recommended that implementation of the SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy 2017–2021:

- focuses on emerging practices, including building on strengths, encouraging pride in young Aboriginal people's cultural heritage, and emphasising holistic, collaborative, and proactive approaches to SACE attainment
- drives positive change by acknowledging that success in the SACE does not begin just in Years 10 or 11, and recognising that broader educational policy change in former schooling years is required
- inspires schooling sectors and other stakeholders to consider the range of interrelated recommendations offered in the strategy
- promotes the targeted initiatives, activities, and coordinated approaches that are required at the school, sector, and state levels in order to achieve sustained, positive improvement.






Part One:

Standing in the Stories

The following literature base and context provide a rationale for the development of the SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy 2017–2021 and highlight the direction of its agreed goals.

The majority of the educational literature acknowledges the broad and complex factors that influence an enquiry into the education of Aboriginal young people and recognises that ‘Indigenous students face additional barriers to positive educational outcomes that stem from historical dispossession and oppression’ (Griffiths 2011, p 70). Notwithstanding this, Doyle and Hill (2008) and Sarra (2011) argue that there has been a historical acceptance of the poor educational achievement by Aboriginal students. They contend that this complacency regarding the lack of educational success for Aboriginal students has had a cumulative effect: ‘It is based on the belief that Aboriginal children and young people will never reach their full potential and if they fall behind society then welfare will protect them. Their low level of educational success is accepted as a normative expectation’ (Doyle and Hill 2008, p 1).

Griffiths (2011) describes this bigotry of low expectations as ‘deficit theorising, in which lower achievement is associated with intrinsic deficits of the student or the student’s cultural background rather than considering the role of schools, teachers, and institutional racism’ (p 69). Perso and Hayward (2015) claim that deficit perceptions can be ‘prophetic’ (p 20), and lie in the belief that students’ lack of achievement is outside of their control. This premise was found to result in teachers having low expectations of Aboriginal students and a ‘focus on keeping students occupied and under control’ (Perso and Hayward 2015, p 20). A paper entitled ‘Aboriginal people’s perceptions and beliefs about quality teaching’ highlights the impact that this mindset has on students, in that ‘pre-conceived levels of student ability subsequently deepened student disengagement and lower achievement levels creating in effect, a self-fulfilling prophecy’ (Burgess and Berwick 2009, p 12). However, having high expectations may not be enough; the Stronger Smarter Institute’s 2014 report, which examines the foundations for quality learning in Australian schools, found that there was a distinct difference between teachers believing in high expectations and teachers enacting high expectations (p 1).



‘Indigenous students face additional barriers to positive educational outcomes that stem from historical dispossession and oppression’

Griffiths 2011, p 70

It seems clear, then, that if we are to make significant impacts upon Aboriginal educational achievement, we must 'reject the notion of an inherent deficit in education among Aboriginal youths in favour of a different framework in which success can be attained when alternative ways of being are fostered and nurtured in schools' (Fryberg et al. 2013, p 72). All stakeholders have a professional responsibility — and some say a moral obligation — to support the uncompromised equity of access to high-quality education for all Aboriginal students. In an overview of recommendations related to Aboriginal education, Schwab (1995) highlights the lack of significant improvement despite the great deal of effort, concern, and resources invested. Schwab claims that despite initiatives being designed with good intentions and admirable goals, the 'comparative lack of success can be attributed to a range of factors, including misguided or wrongheaded educational philosophies, a lack of political will and poor teaching standards' (Schwab 1995, p 18).

The research does not aim to formulate an attack on the teaching profession or on 'white Australia'; on the contrary, this paper acknowledges the professionalism of educators who 'have been at the vanguard of reforms' and notes that 'Indigenous people themselves have also been responsible for much of the reform and innovation where it has occurred' (Griffiths 2011, p 69). However, the findings of the Stronger Smarter Institute indicate that we cannot ignore how 'the underlying and "out of awareness" beliefs and assumptions that teachers may bring' can impact on Aboriginal student outcomes (Stronger Smarter Institute 2014, p 1).

The literature advocates recognising and integrating Aboriginal cultural competencies into teacher training and education processes, to support an understanding of cultural perspectives, knowledge, and experiences. MacFie (2015, p 7) goes as far as saying that 'Cultural awareness training and education ... should be mandatory for all educators'. Some commentators have made reference to the prominence that this knowledge is given in state and national professional teaching standards. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership's (AITSL) *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST)* identify two of the thirty-seven standards that relate specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (AITSL 2011). Further to this, Burgess and Berwick (2009, p 4) highlight that the 2003 National Framework for Professional Standards for Teaching identifies 'only two of forty-six specific elements ... that specifically address Aboriginal student needs'. Although this acknowledgment regarding teacher education is a significant move in the right direction, MacFie (2015, p 7) argues that 'ultimately, the key to improving the educational experiences of Indigenous students is ensuring that Australia's educators, curriculum developers and education policy-makers — who are predominantly from the dominant culture — have a better understanding of both Indigenous ontologies and their own ontologies'.

We must 'reject the notion of an inherent deficit in education among Aboriginal youths in favour of a different framework in which success can be attained when alternative ways of being are fostered and nurtured in schools'

Fryberg et al. 2012, p 72

Significance of Education for Aboriginal People

According to Griffiths, '[education] in settler countries was established as an essential part of the colonising process and functioned to actively enforce imperialist and colonialist world views' (2011, p 70). From this perspective, the enormity of redressing 200 years of colonial education in Australia becomes a significant challenge. According to Rahman (2010), the dilemma for Aboriginal people is that Western academic success is likely to be destructive of their culture and language. Hence, we must firstly acknowledge the significance of embedding Aboriginal culture and perspectives into the core of our educational philosophies, and secondly convince generations of Aboriginal people of the value of Australia's education system. Significantly, Mercurio and Clayton (2001), in their research *Imagining Themselves, Imagining Their Futures*, found that a common theme among Aboriginal South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) completers was that they had 'internalised the goal of completion of schooling, and the importance of education to future success as workers and citizens' (p 59).

Education is central to the economic, physical, social, and cultural well-being of all people and communities. Higher education is associated with economic benefits, greater employment opportunities, and higher incomes, but also with 'better health, longer life expectancy, stronger civic engagement and greater overall life satisfaction' (OECD 2013, cited in The Smith Family 2014, p 7). Although educational outcomes for Aboriginal students have improved gradually over recent decades, inequalities continue to exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student outcomes. If this inequity continues, it will 'limit the post-school options and life choices of students, perpetuating intergenerational cycles of social and economic disadvantage' (Doyle and Hill 2008, p 26). Current data sets confirm that this scenario continues to be the reality.

Mercurio and Clayton (2001) highlight, through the voices of Aboriginal students, the symbolic significance that a senior secondary certificate has for students; 'to the way they imagine themselves as students, as family members, and as members of the community' (p 75). In a *practical* sense, it is no surprise that 'the gap in employment outcomes would be "drastically reduced" if educational attainment levels of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were increased', as higher educational achievement directly correlates with improved outcomes (Karmel et al. 2014; cited in The Smith Family 2014, p 4). Student engagement and retention is critical to ensuring that Aboriginal students aspire to senior secondary certification, with research showing 'that strong academic achievement is associated with high levels of school attendance (with school attendance the strongest predictor of Year 12 completion' (Balfanz and Byrnes 2012; cited in The Smith

'Educational organisations, schools, and the community need to work collaboratively to reaffirm a commitment to the success of Aboriginal young people, and work towards a holistic approach that encompasses students and parents and their personal and cultural history.'

Family 2014, p 12). The 2012 World Health Organization findings particularly highlight the significance of educational success for young Aboriginal women and the resultant impact on their families and communities, 'as women are often instrumental in bringing about social change in disadvantaged communities' (World Health Organization 2012, cited in The Smith Family 2014, p 4).

The value and beliefs that parents of Aboriginal young people and their communities place on education contribute significantly to the success of these young people, as 'students who have the support of their families in their education, have better learning outcomes, including greater potentials for completing their secondary education' (Rahman 2010, p 73). However, Griffiths argues that some Aboriginal people tend to 'appropriate the aspects of Western education that they need and ignore other aspects that do not suit them or are not relevant to them' (2011, p 70). Educational organisations, schools, and the community need to work collaboratively to reaffirm a commitment to the success of Aboriginal young people, and work towards a holistic approach that encompasses students and parents and their personal and cultural history. As Doyle and Hill highlight, 'Indigenous student and parental engagement with school tends to improve where schools adopt an organisational culture and teaching approach that affirms Indigenous culture and identity' (2008, p 44). This view is strengthened when considered in concert with a recent perspective on school expectations: 'high expectations rhetoric will see a child suspended from school for swearing at the teacher. A high expectations relationship will try to understand all of the circumstances that caused them to swear in the first place' (Sarra 2014).

'requires the teacher having depth of knowledge of their subject area so they are able to rework curriculum to make it culturally appropriate to Aboriginal students' experiences and learning needs, without losing the intellectual quality of the content'

Burgess and Berwick
2009, p 12



Culturally Responsive Education

The 'organisational culture and teaching approach' referred to by Doyle and Hill (2008) is often acknowledged in the literature as 'culturally responsive education.' It is based in the common understanding that 'students are more likely to be engaged and willing to continue learning if their prior knowledge is valued and new learning is connected to their existing knowledge and skills' (MacFie 2015, p 6). Helme and Lamb found that the primary reasons for absences at secondary school 'relate to a lack of recognition by schools of Indigenous culture and history, a failure to fully engage parents, carers and the community' (2011, p 2). Further to this, Griffiths contends that teachers' unconscious bias may frame 'the western worldview ... as "natural" and Indigenous worldviews are dismissed as an "other"' (2011, p 70).

In contrast, schools that 'respected and valued the individuality of students, linked effectively with Indigenous families [and] created an environment that welcomed students' reported greater success in Aboriginal student retention and achievement (Martin 2006, p 35). Similarly, advocates of culturally responsive education have found that making classroom curriculum and structures more culturally compatible and consistent with the home cultures of students 'results in successful outcomes for students, including better school engagement, improved self-confidence and higher cognitive skills' (Rahman 2010, p 66). Some people in the education community cynically view culturally responsive education as a synonym for a watered-down curriculum and low expectations; however, far from 'being a justification for sub-standard achievement and expectations' (Pearson 2009, p 99), culturally responsive education 'is precisely in the interests of maintaining

the highest possible standards across all subjects' (Griffiths 2011, p 73) and 'gives students the belief that they can celebrate their own culture and still be smart academically' (Stronger Smarter Institute 2014 p 4).

Martin (2006) champions the embedding of Aboriginal perspectives throughout organisational policy and practice, to facilitate 'greater awareness and understanding of Indigenous communities, culture and people by all' (p 33). Consequently, far from compromising the rigour and cognitive demand of the curriculum, culturally responsive education 'requires the teacher having depth of knowledge of their subject area so they are able to rework curriculum to make it culturally appropriate to Aboriginal students' experiences and learning needs, without losing the intellectual quality of the content' (Burgess and Berwick 2009, p 12).

'best practice in Aboriginal schooling highlights the need to balance a rigorous academic program with culturally relevant learning experiences'

Griffiths 2011, p 72



Curriculum, Learning, and Assessment

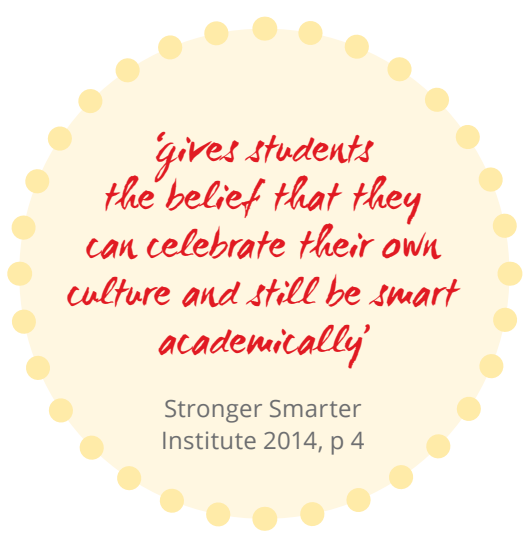
Rose (2012) discusses the stress that teachers experience when trying to enact the intended curriculum; many are anxious about experimenting and trialling new approaches to teaching and assessment, some remain conservative in delivering a 'tried and tested' curriculum, and, most significantly, some are apprehensive about addressing issues related to Aboriginal culture and perspectives for fear of offending or being misconstrued. The Stronger Smarter Institute claims that 'in the absence of knowledge, teachers wanting to do the right thing but afraid of getting it wrong take an easy option' (2014, p 3). One of the students who participated in SACE Board focus groups confirmed that she '... found that some teachers, especially in history, were scared about teaching an Indigenous topic. They were really worried about offending so they kind of just bypassed it a little bit; just did the safe stuff' (SACE Board of SA, 2015a). MacFie maintains that 'while teachers may feel constrained by curriculum regulations, there is still much they can do to make it more accessible for Indigenous learners' (2015, p 6). Helme and Lamb (2011) also found that 'providing a curriculum that is broad, diverse and flexible and can accommodate a wide range of student interests and skill levels is important to improving school engagement and retention' (p 6).

Innovation and flexibility in curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment requires teachers to be reflective practitioners with an open-minded approach to transforming their practice. In relation to Aboriginal education, Griffiths claims that 'best practice in Aboriginal schooling highlights the need to balance a rigorous academic program with culturally relevant learning experiences' (2011, p 72). Further to this, Burgess and Berwick's investigation into best-practice teaching found that 'teacher quality was perhaps the most significant element in the engagement of Aboriginal students and potential improvement in their learning outcomes,' and, more significantly, that 'quality teaching leads to higher achievement particularly the quality of assessment tasks students receive' (2009, p 3). Validity is a fundamental principle of quality assessment. Beyond the commonly accepted understanding of validity as 'assessing what we are intending to assess', cultural validity in assessment can be defined as 'ensuring that assessment *has the same meaning* for each individual attempting it' (Perso and Hayward 2015, p 173). Cultural validity acknowledges that students' cognitive functioning is influenced by the culture and environment that they have been raised in, and that this in turn may impact on the way they approach and respond to assessment tasks.

Therefore, it is critical that tasks designed for Aboriginal students 'take into account socio-cultural influences throughout the design and implementation of assessment' (Perso and Hayward 2015, p 174).

The literature prompts educators who are planning their learning and assessment programs to consider the ways Aboriginal students learn, as 'there exists a body of research attesting to the divergent learning styles that occur for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students' (Martin 2006, p 32). Rahman concurs, suggesting that 'Harris's [1990] "learning styles" theory has been arguably one of the most influential theories in Indigenous Australian education research' (2010, p 66). MacFie provides more practical findings, contending that teachers should consider 'creating more flexible modes of syllabus delivery, capitalising on Indigenous students' strong sense of group responsibility to allow more peer-to-peer teaching, more actively sharing assessment results and student records across schools ... would help to engage Indigenous students by preventing them returning to unfamiliar work, failing unfairly or repeating subjects unnecessarily' (2015, p 6).

Considering these findings on culturally responsive education, best practice in teaching and learning, and the significance of education for Aboriginal students, it is no surprise that 'successful schools take a holistic approach to Indigenous education, creating a common vision across teaching staff, students, families and the local community' (Griffiths 2011, p 75). Doyle and Hill's research on achieving improved primary and secondary education outcomes for Aboriginal students recommends the 'adoption of a holistic approach to schooling that delivers a culturally and contextually relevant and capability appropriate curriculum that relates students' learning to their life experience ... provides a highly supportive school environment and engage students, family and community in the design/ delivery of day-to-day schooling' (2008, p 8).



*'gives students
the belief that they
can celebrate their own
culture and still be smart
academically'*

Stronger Smarter
Institute 2014, p 4

Developing the SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy 2017–2021

Given this context, this paper aims to highlight the emerging practice strategies that have successfully supported Aboriginal students through to the completion of their secondary education. Research undertaken to complete this paper included:

- an annotated literature review
- longitudinal analyses of SACE Board (and other relevant) data
- focus interviews with school leaders and Aboriginal support officers from ten schools identified through SACE and sector data as having demonstrated success in support of Aboriginal students' SACE achievement
- an identified focus group of eight Aboriginal SACE completers
- a voluntary focus group of parents of Aboriginal students.

*'successful schools
take a holistic approach to
Indigenous education, creating
a common vision across teaching
staff, students, families and the
local community'*

Griffiths 2011, p 75



Part Two:

Singing the Now

The current literature provides a strong theoretical base that supports the conceptualisation and formulation of the SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy 2017–2021. However, rather than proceed solely on the basis of the literature, the SACE Board also took the opportunity to conduct a detailed analysis and evaluation of the current strategy, the SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy 2012–2016.



Following consultation and development with key stakeholders, the SACE Board approved the SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy 2012–2016 in May 2012. The 2012–2016 strategy, which built upon the previous (2009–2011) strategy, emphasised the SACE Board's commitment to improving the achievements of Aboriginal students and closing the achievement gap between Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students.

A cross-sectoral SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy Steering Committee was established in 2010 to support and monitor the strategy. In 2014 the Board re-appointed Mr Mark Williams as Chair, and the Steering Committee met quarterly to ensure that the activities and initiatives of the strategy contributed to the success of Aboriginal students' participation and achievement in the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE).

A SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy Working Party was also formed to undertake research and analysis of relevant data, under the direction of the Steering Committee. The Working Party met regularly and provided knowledge and expertise in relation to Aboriginal perspectives, while contributing to some decision-making processes within the SACE Board.

The SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy 2012–2016 aimed to improve access, participation, and successful outcomes for Aboriginal students in the SACE. It was designed with a focus on a number of key initiatives and activities that related to five strategy outcomes:

Strategy Outcome 1: Achievement

Increase the number of Aboriginal students entering the SACE at Year 10 and continuing to complete the SACE, to close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students' SACE completion rates.

Strategy Outcome 2: Participation

Increase the number of Aboriginal students participating in SACE subjects and accredited courses that lead to a wide range of pathways.

Strategy Outcome 3: Recognition

Increase recognition opportunities for Aboriginal high achievers in the SACE, including those with a TAFE SA Selection Score and Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR).

Strategy Outcome 4: *Sustainability*

Increase the number of innovative resources and professional learning support, including localised subjects and exemplars that support and are responsive to Aboriginal students' diverse language, literacy, numeracy, and information and communications technology (ICT) abilities and needs, and that support sustainability of natural and cultural heritage.

Strategy Outcome 5: *Representation*

Increase the number of Aboriginal people represented on SACE Board committees and groups, to inform decision-making processes within the SACE Board as well as provide Aboriginal perspectives for curriculum and support material developments.

The following information provides an overview of the SACE Board initiatives and activities in relation to these five strategic outcomes. It highlights the key findings from the 2015 student cohort. It also includes longitudinal data, to allow for analyses over the period of the 2012–2016 strategy and examination of the correlation between this period and the introduction of the 'new' SACE in 2011.



Significant Findings

Significant findings on the success and achievements of Aboriginal students in 2015 and under the 2012–2016 strategy include the following:

- 295 Aboriginal students completed the SACE in 2015, the highest to date and an increase of 42 students from 2014. This indicates a 103% increase in the number of Aboriginal SACE completers over the period of the strategy, with the number of Aboriginal SACE completers in 2011 being 145.
- The gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal completion rates continues to close. The 2015 Aboriginal SACE completion rate (93.7%) was 2.5% lower than the whole student cohort. This was an improvement from 2014, where the Aboriginal SACE completion rate was 3.8% lower than the whole student cohort. The gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal completion rates has closed significantly since 2011, when the gap was 11% and the Aboriginal SACE completion rate was 80.6%.
- In 2015, twenty Aboriginal potential completers did not successfully meet the requirements of the SACE. The main requirement not met continued to be 60 credits at Stage 2; this has been a consistent trend over the past 5 years.
- In 2015, 140 Aboriginal SACE completers received an ATAR (compared with 136 in 2014 and eighty-three in 2011), and 194 Aboriginal SACE completers received a TAFE SA Selection Score (compared with 178 in 2014 and ninety-nine in 2011). Since 2011, the number of Aboriginal students receiving an ATAR has grown by 68% and the number of Aboriginal students receiving a TAFE SA Selection Score has grown by 96%.
- In 2015, the most popular Stage 2, 20-credit, three-subject combination for Aboriginal SACE completers was English Communications, Mathematical Applications, and Psychology.
- In 2015, eighty-one Aboriginal SACE completers also completed a vocational education and training (VET) certificate — an increase from seventy-three students in 2014. Of these eighty-one students, sixty-eight completed a qualification at Certificate III level, forty-seven of which were in Sport and Recreation.
- In 2015, Aboriginal students achieved a total of five merits, and the fourth Governor of South Australia Commendation — Aboriginal Student SACE Award was presented to the Aboriginal student with the highest overall achievement in the SACE.
- The seventh SACE Aboriginal Student Pathways Conference was held at the University of Adelaide, with over 150 students attending from twenty-eight schools across country and metropolitan regions.

The following pages provide more detail about the student outcomes relating to these five strategy outcomes (Achievement, Participation, Recognition, Sustainability, and Representation).

Achievement

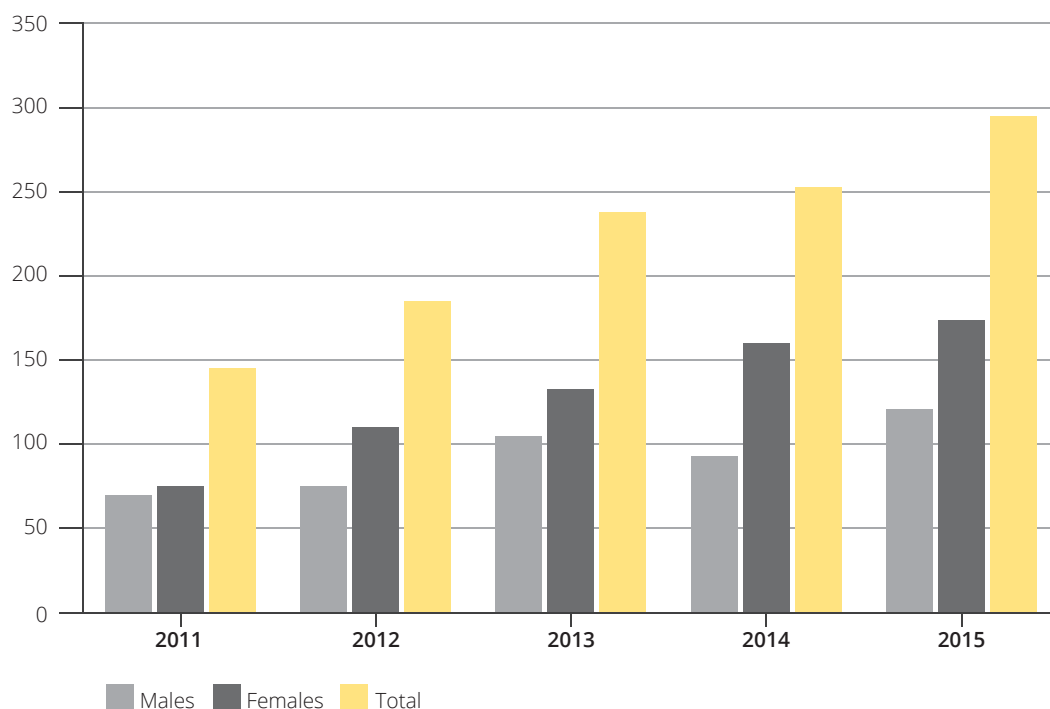
Caveats for SACE completion and ATAR data:

- The completion rate is calculated from completers/potential completers. Potential completers are those students who, based on their enrolments, were attempting to complete the SACE.
- The number of completers as a percentage of potential completers was calculated based on the current requirements for SACE completion.
- The data includes only students who are either self-declared or sector-confirmed as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.
- Total numbers for Aboriginal students are low, so caution should be used when extrapolating from percentages.
- This paper presents analyses relating to a specific 5-year period, 2011–2015. Data from the 2016 student cohort have not been included or analysed.

Aboriginal Student SACE Completion Data

In 2015, a total of 295 Aboriginal students completed the SACE, of whom 174 (59%) were female and 121 (41%) were male. This is an increase of 103% from the 2011 number of Aboriginal SACE completers. Significantly, the increase in female Aboriginal SACE completers is not being matched by male students, and the achievement gap between the genders is continuing to grow.

Graph 1: SACE completion rates: Aboriginal students, 2011–15



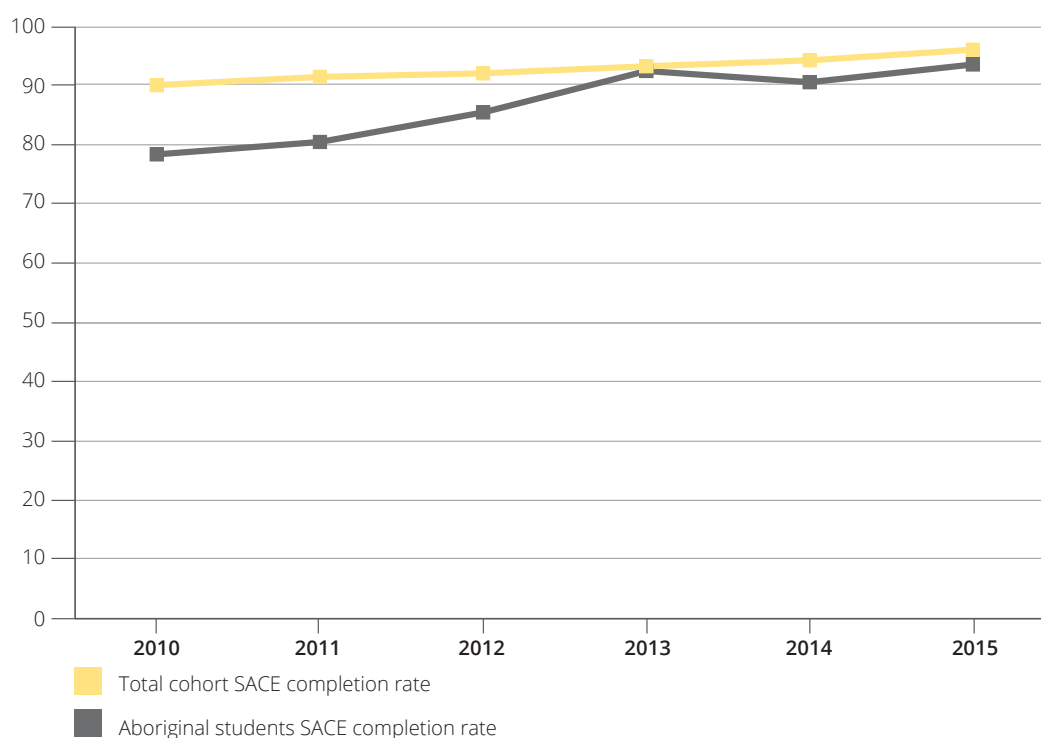
Since the introduction of the 'new' SACE in 2011 there has been an average 20% year-on-year increase in the number of Aboriginal SACE completers. This is a significant achievement for teachers, schools, and the community to celebrate, particularly when viewed in comparison with Australia's population growth rate. The Australian population growth rate in 2012 was 1.7%, which decreased to 1.3 % in 2015; the rate for South Australia (SA) was 0.7% in 2015. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) indicates an estimated Aboriginal population growth rate of 2.0% over the next 10 years (ABS 2015).

In 2015, the following were achieved:

- SA had a SACE completion rate of 96.2% for all students, including Aboriginal students. This has increased year-on-year, from 90.2% in 2010 to 96.2% in 2015.
- The completion rate for Aboriginal students was 93.7%, an increase of 15.2% from the 2010 completion rate (78.5%).

A comparison between the completion rates for Aboriginal students and the total cohort of SACE completers shows 'a closing of the gap' from 11.7% in 2010 to 2.5% in 2015, as shown in Graph 2 below.

Graph 2: SACE completion rates: Aboriginal students and total cohort, 2010–15



In 2015, a total of 140 Aboriginal students received an ATAR. This figure has been trending upwards since 2011, when eighty-three Aboriginal students received an ATAR. The number of Aboriginal students receiving an ATAR has continued to grow between 2011 and 2015, with an increase of 72% for males and 66% for females (Table 1).

Table 1: Aboriginal SACE completers receiving an ATAR, 2011–15

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Females	50	65	74	89	83
Males	33	36	56	47	57
Total	83	101	130	136	140

There has been considerable discussion regarding the significance of the number of Aboriginal students eligible for an ATAR, and whether or not the rank is an accurate indicator of achievements and overall performance in the SACE. Regardless of this tension, Biddle and Cameron (2012) found that 'once Indigenous students receive a tertiary admission rank they are as likely as non-Indigenous students to go to university' (p 3).

Table 2 illustrates a similarly positive trend in the increase in Aboriginal students receiving a TAFE SA Selection Score, with a total of 194 students receiving a score in 2015.

Table 2: Aboriginal SACE completers receiving a TAFE SA Selection Score, 2011–15

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Females	59	82	88	115	115
Males	40	60	71	63	79
Total	99	142	159	178	194

Student Enrolment

In 2015, 1742 Aboriginal students had a completed Stage 1 enrolment (732 from SA country schools and 1010 from SA metropolitan schools). This is an increase from 2014, when 1400 students had a completed Stage 1 enrolment. These 1742 students may have been undertaking the Personal Learning Plan (PLP) as a Stage 1 subject in Year 10 and may also have been undertaking subjects at Stage 2.

A total of 468 Aboriginal students had a completed Stage 2 enrolment in 2015 (174 from SA country schools and 294 from SA metropolitan schools), an increase from the 453 students in 2014. These analysis include students who have at least one completed Stage 2 enrolment, and so may include students undertaking the Stage 2 Research Project in Year 11. The SACE provides flexibility regarding when (i.e. during what years) students undertake SACE subjects, hence it is difficult to determine accurately the number of Aboriginal students enrolled in Stage 1 or Stage 2 in any given year. However, as shown in Table 3, the number of Aboriginal students engaged in SACE subjects has been steadily increasing since the introduction of the 'new' SACE in 2011.

Table 3: Aboriginal students with at least one Stage 1 and Stage 2 enrolment, 2011–15

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Stage 1	1288	1283	1196	1400	1742
Stage 2	281	372	413	453	468
Total	1569	1655	1609	1853	2210

A 2015 analysis by the Department of State Development revealed critical and relevant data. Of particular interest is the estimated number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in senior secondary education (Years 10–12). The analysis indicates that 2024 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were engaged in senior secondary education, as a subset of the 9593 employment-age Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 'Not in Labour Force'.

The 2014 ABS data support this estimation and disaggregate the data by year level, showing that in 2014 there were 811 Aboriginal students in Year 11 and 593 Aboriginal students in Year 12 (ABS 2015). When we consider these figures in relation to the 2014 and 2015 Aboriginal SACE completers data, we can clearly identify a significant gap. The 2015 SACE data identified 315 Aboriginal students as 'potential completers' (i.e. those students who had achieved 200 credits and had been enrolled in all of the compulsory requirements); of these, 295 students achieved their SACE certificate. This suggests that a significant number of SA Aboriginal students aged 17–19 have not yet completed their secondary education. The 2015 *Closing the Gap* report found that the attendance rates between non-Aboriginal students and Aboriginal students continues to widen; this gap increases as students reach their senior years and widens to a more significant extent in remote and very remote areas (Commonwealth of Australia 2015a, pp. 12–13). These findings highlight the correlation between school attendance and senior secondary qualification completion.

As highlighted earlier in this paper, it is very encouraging to note that the number of Aboriginal students completing the SACE has increased steadily over the last few years, from 145 students in 2011 to 295 students in 2015. It is also pleasing to note that the SACE completion rate (calculated as a percentage of potential completers) for Aboriginal students has increased from 80.6% in 2011 to 93.7% in 2015, which is close to parity with the whole cohort percentage of 96.2%.

These figures reflect well on the effectiveness of the current SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy (2012–2016) and, more particularly, on the success of strategies being implemented by schools and school sectors. However, we must acknowledge the significant proportion of Aboriginal students who are not actively working towards achieving their SACE. This paper is committed to harnessing the success of emerging practice strategies and working with teachers and schools to build on this success.

It is critical that the SACE Board continues to work in partnership with all stakeholders to provide opportunities for Aboriginal students to not only

participate in SACE subjects and achieve the SACE certificate, but to do so with excellence. Aspirational goals are essential if Aboriginal students are to be afforded the best chance to be involved in further training, higher education studies, or meaningful employment. Moving beyond merely 'closing the gap', the next iteration of the SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy strives to empower young Aboriginal people to position themselves both within their own world and in a global context, and to aspire to personal excellence and meritorious achievement.



Aspirational goals are essential if Aboriginal students are to be afforded the best chance to be involved in further training, higher education studies, or meaningful employment.

Participation

This outcome acknowledges the need for schools, and Aboriginal students and their families, to make informed choices in relation to subject selection when considering the range of pathways for individual students beyond the SACE.

The following information provides an overview of the participation of Aboriginal SACE completers in Stage 2 subjects and recognised learning.

Aboriginal Student Participation in SACE Subjects and Recognised Learning

The following information about the 2015 Aboriginal SACE completers has emerged:

- English Communications remains the most popular subject for Aboriginal SACE completers, followed by Workplace Practices and English Pathways.
- In SA country schools the most popular Stage 2, 20-credit, three-subject combination for Aboriginal SACE completers was English Communications, Mathematical Applications, and Psychology. In SA metropolitan schools the most popular combination was Biology, English Communications, and Physical Education.
- Certificate III in Sport and Recreation was the most popular VET qualification undertaken by Aboriginal SACE completers, followed by Certificate III in Business.
- A total of eighty-one Aboriginal SACE completers also successfully completed a VET qualification. This was an increase from seventy-three students in 2014.
- A total of ten Aboriginal students received recognition for Self-directed Community Learning, as was the case in 2014.

Table 4 shows the Stage 2 20-credit subjects most commonly studied by Aboriginal SACE completers in 2015. This table excludes the Research Project, which is a compulsory subject requirement for SACE completion.

Table 4: Most popular Stage 2 20-credit subjects: Aboriginal SACE completers, 2015

Subject name	Number of students
English Communications	94
Workplace Practices	50
English Pathways	49
Mathematical Applications	42
Integrated Learning II	40
Food and Hospitality	37
Integrated Learning I	34
Physical Education	30
Biology	30
Psychology	29
Information Processing and Publishing	26
Society and Culture	26

Tables 5 and 6 illustrate the most popular three- and four-subject combinations for 2015 Aboriginal SACE completers. The information is inconclusive, as the study patterns for this small cohort of students were too varied.

Table 5: Most popular Stage 2, 20-credit, four-subject combinations: Aboriginal SACE completers, 2015

Number of students	Subject 1	Subject 2	Subject 3	Subject 4
2	Chemistry	Physics	Specialist Mathematics	English Communications
2	Chemistry	Physics	Mathematical Studies	English Communications
2	Chemistry	Physics	Specialist Mathematics	Mathematical Studies
2	Biology	Physical Education	English Communications	Drama
2	Mathematical Applications	English Communications	Information Processing and Publishing	Communication Products I
2	English Communications	Legal Studies	Psychology	Society and Culture
2	Aboriginal Studies	Child Studies	English Pathways	Food and Hospitality
2	Aboriginal Studies	English Pathways	Food and Hospitality	Information Processing and Publishing
2	Health	Mathematical Applications	Outdoor Education	Integrated Learning II

Table 6: Most popular Stage 2, 20-credit, three-subject combinations: Aboriginal SACE completers, 2015

Number of students	Subject 1	Subject 2	Subject 3
5	Biology	English Communications	Physical Education
5	Aboriginal Studies	English Pathways	Food and Hospitality
4	English Communications	Mathematical Applications	Physical Education
4	Biology	English Communications	Mathematical Applications
3	Chemistry	Physics	English Communications
3	Chemistry	Physics	Specialist Mathematics
3	Chemistry	Physics	Mathematical Studies
3	Mathematical Studies	Specialist Mathematics	Physics
3	English Communications	Mathematical Applications	Psychology
3	Business and Enterprise: Modified	English: Modified	Health: Modified
3	English Communications	Information Processing and Publishing	Mathematical Applications
3	English Communications	Legal Studies	Psychology
3	English Communications	Legal Studies	Society and Culture
3	English Communications	Modern History	Psychology
3	English Communications	Psychology	Society and Culture
3	English Communications	Food and Hospitality	Visual Arts — Art

VET Qualifications for Aboriginal SACE Completers in 2015

When reviewing the range of SACE subjects studied by Aboriginal SACE completers in 2015, it is important also to consider the industry areas of VET that were studied. In 2015, eighty-one Aboriginal SACE completers completed a VET qualification, an increase from seventy-three in 2014.

Table 7: Aboriginal SACE completers also completing a VET certificate, 2015

Location	Gender	Number of students
SA country	Female	16
	Male	12
	Total	28
SA metro	Female	27
	Male	26
	Total	53
Total	Female	43
	Male	38
	Total	81

In 2015, 130 of the 295 Aboriginal SACE completers undertook at least one module of competency towards a VET qualification; the majority of these modules were at a Certificate III level in industry areas ranging from Sport and Recreation to Health to Business and Finance. Table 8 lists the most popular VET qualifications studied by Aboriginal SACE completers in 2015.

Table 8: Most popular VET qualifications*: Aboriginal SACE completers, 2015

Course name
Certificate III in Sport and Recreation
Certificate III in Business
Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care
Certificate III in Community Services Work
Certificate III in Technical Production

** Students must have been studying at least one unit of competency towards the qualification in 2015.*

Of the eighty-one Aboriginal SACE completers who also completed a VET certificate, sixty-eight completed a qualification at Certificate III level; of these, forty-seven qualifications were in Sport and Recreation. Table 9 illustrates the certificate qualification level of all eighty-one Aboriginal SACE completers.

The SACE qualification provides one certificate for all students and acknowledges that students will continue on to a range of pathways. Through the policy 'Recognition Arrangements for Vocational Education and Training (VET) in the SACE', students have the option to achieve their SACE through a balance of SACE-accredited subjects and vocational education and training that best suits their strengths and goals. The Certificate III in Sport and Recreation requires students to undertake training in a range of units that reflect the multi-skilled role of individuals working in the industry; for example, organising personal work priorities, providing quality services, developing and extending critical thinking skills, facilitating groups, and developing and maintaining stakeholder relationships (Commonwealth of Australia 2015b).

Table 9: Aboriginal SACE completers also completing a VET certificate*, by certificate qualification level, 2015

AQF certificate level	Gender	Number of students
Certificate III	Female	36
	Male	32
	Total	68
Certificate II	Female	7
	Male	4
	Total	11
Certificate I	Female	3
	Male	4
	Total	7

** Students may be studying towards more than one certificate at different Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) levels.*

The SACE Board recognises that learning happens not just in the classroom, but in a variety of settings. SACE students can earn credits for learning that occurs in the community and other learning contexts in two ways: through community-developed programs and through self-directed community learning.

In 2015, forty-nine Aboriginal students were granted recognition for community-developed programs, and ten Aboriginal students received recognition for self-directed community learning.





Recognition

The success of the SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy is reliant on the SACE Board working in partnership with school sectors and school leaders to promote Aboriginal student achievements in the SACE and to recognise and celebrate outstanding Aboriginal student achievements.

In 2015, recognition of achievement in the SACE included the following:

- The annual Aboriginal SACE Completers poster was produced, and featured Aboriginal students who have successfully completed the SACE. The 2015 poster celebrated the achievements of the 295 Aboriginal students' success in the SACE by acknowledging the names and photographs of those students who responded to the requests to publish their image.
- Five subject merits were achieved by Aboriginal students in 2015, for Research Project B, Chemistry, English Communications, Arts and the Community, and Food and Hospitality. These achievements were recognised and celebrated at the SACE Merit Ceremony at Government House. Significantly, these subject merits were all awarded to female students.
- The fourth Governor of South Australia Commendation — Aboriginal Student SACE Award was awarded to the Aboriginal student with the best overall performance in the SACE. This award was also recognised and celebrated at the SACE Merit Ceremony at Government House and acknowledged in the South Australian media. All four Governor of South Australia Commendation — Aboriginal Student SACE Award winners have been female students.

Sustainability

In 2015 a range of areas of development supported this strategy outcome, including:

- the delivery of a series of professional learning workshops to Aboriginal education teachers (AETs) and other key personnel working with young Aboriginal students
- the development and delivery of a series of advice and strategies documents for the tracking and monitoring of Aboriginal students to ensure their successful completion of all SACE requirements
- the inclusion of an Aboriginal cultures and perspectives statement in all SACE subject outlines. The statement encourages teachers to engage with their local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities to devise curriculum that is inclusive of Aboriginal knowledge, cultures, and perspectives. This statement was endorsed by the SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy Steering Committee and approved to appear in the redevelopment of SACE subjects with the integration of the Australian Curriculum
- the creation of a range of exemplars of learning and assessment plans and assessment tasks to encourage and support the inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge, cultures, and perspectives. These exemplars were published and promoted via a dedicated section on the SACE website entitled 'Aboriginal perspectives in subjects'
- the development of a dedicated page on the SACE website for support materials that have an Aboriginal perspective or focus, and the production of a document entitled 'Research Project: Topics with a Focus on Aboriginal Knowledge, Cultures, and Perspectives' that offers suggestions to students who would like their Research Project to have an Aboriginal focus
- the delivery of the seventh Aboriginal Student Pathways Conference at the University of Adelaide. The conference was designed to help students explore the study and career options available to them and to encourage students to consider a university pathway. More than 140 students had the opportunity to listen to a range of speakers who inspired them towards goals, dreams, and university pathways. They also participated in activities that showcased various university faculties while experiencing the campus lifestyle. Keynote speaker Dwayne Coulthard, a young Aboriginal man completing his fifth and final year of Bachelor of Law degree at the University of Adelaide, encouraged students to believe in themselves and their ambitions to complete Year 12 and aspire to continue on to meaningful pathways.



Representation

To support the achievement of this strategy outcome, the SACE Board encouraged the engagement of Aboriginal people wherever possible. Representation was sought from the three schooling sectors, universities, and training and employment agencies.

Fifty per cent of the members of the Aboriginal Education Strategy Steering Committee are Aboriginal, and include the Committee Chair and the Deans of Indigenous Education from the South Australian universities. The Steering Committee met four times in 2015 to provide strategic guidance and high-level advice regarding the implementation of the strategy.

The SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy Working Party, also comprising 50% Aboriginal representation, met eight times throughout 2015. The Working Party contributed to the collection, analysis, and synthesis of data to provide Aboriginal perspectives when contributing to some of the decision-making processes within the SACE Board.

It is noted that there are very few Aboriginal secondary teachers currently teaching in schools in South Australia. The SACE Board is looking into measures to identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers who participate in the SACE quality assurance processes.

Summary

The SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy 2012–2016 was developed for a 5-year period. The SACE Board would like to acknowledge its partnership with the Steering Committee and the Working Party. This partnership has contributed to the success of Aboriginal young people in the SACE. The results outlined in this paper provide a platform for the continued success of Aboriginal young people in 2017 and beyond.

Part Three:

Imagining the Future

In light of the literature base and the emerging data on student outcomes, the five strategies identified in the SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy 2012-2016 will be superseded by a new set of strategies. The findings of this paper recommend a focus on emerging practice Aboriginal education strategies that encompass:

- building on strengths
- encouraging pride in young Aboriginal people's cultural heritage
- emphasising holistic, collaborative, and proactive approaches to South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) attainment.

The recommendations try to drive positive change by recognising that success in the SACE begins not just in Years 10 or 11, and acknowledging that broader educational policy change is required in the former years. The Board also appreciates and values the significant commitment and support that Aboriginal parents, caregivers, and Elders provide to Aboriginal students completing their SACE. This part of the paper offers a range of interrelated recommended strategies for schooling sectors and other stakeholders to consider, and contends that positive change requires targeted and coordinated approaches at the school, sector, and state levels. These strategies are:

- **Empowerment:** identity and belonging
- **Respect:** strong commitment and high-expectations relationships
- **Leadership:** people and culture
- **Capacity building:** culturally and contextually responsive curriculum and assessment
- **Achievement:** excellence, aspiration, and merit
- **Transparency:** data analysis and evaluation.

The research in Australia and overseas that points to the success of these strategies in secondary schools is broad and varied, but this paper has also been informed by the unique experiences of the South Australian (SA) Aboriginal population.



Empowerment: identity and belonging


This strategy aims to develop the strengths and capabilities of young Aboriginal students in the SACE through greater acknowledgment of Aboriginal struggles, achievements, and stories. Additionally, it supports students to position themselves beyond their local community and enhance their capacity to contribute to an ever-changing world. The SACE Board welcomes the opportunity to work in collaboration with schooling sectors towards the 'adoption of a holistic approach to schooling that ... relates students' learning to their life experience...[and] provides a highly supportive school environment and engage[s] students, family and community' (Doyle and Hill 2008, p 8).

This approach was reflected in the practices of those SA schools identified as demonstrating consistent success in supporting Aboriginal students to achieve their SACE.

Emerging strategies highlighted in the literature and adopted by identified schools included:

- creating a school environment that accommodates and respects cultural differences in behaviour and communication styles
- formally recognising the cultures of Aboriginal students
- enhancing students' sense of worth, connection, and belonging by providing students and families with an opportunity to share and celebrate their cultures
- adopting a formal family engagement policy, providing welcoming and safe access to dedicated forums for communication and community consultation
- fostering Aboriginal student leadership and contribution to the school community
- placing a dedicated focus on identifying individual student needs, which then inform the creation of individual learning plans (ILPs).

Senior secondary education has a critical role in empowering students to identify their strengths, limitations, and self-worth. A quality certificate must also support students to acknowledge the value that their successful attainment of the SACE affords them and to recognise the significance of their contribution to the local and global communities.



'I want my child to become independent, economically viable, while keeping and embracing their culture.'

The following reflections on the significance of senior secondary education were captured from focus groups of Aboriginal students who had completed their SACE and parents of these students. The reflections are representative of the themes emerging from the focus group data.

Some participants felt that the desire to achieve SACE completion is a pathway to being strong in two worlds:

'I want my kid to be strong culturally, in community, but look globally.'

'I want my child to become independent, economically viable, while keeping and embracing their culture.'

'I want schools to broaden the vision of the future they [students] are exposed to. I got a glimpse of another world, different possibilities, and it opened up a whole new perspective for me.'

For others, the importance of breaking new ground, in the sense of being the first in the family to achieve the SACE, was also important:

'Mum didn't graduate and Dad just passed Year 12 ... They understood that I really wanted to go to uni and get good grades.'

'My dad was the first person in his family to finish Year 12 so he was the first one that had done that really hard transition. It made it easier for us.'

'I left school when I was 14. I want to push them to be a better man than me, empower them to think big.'

Some students spoke specifically about the value of the SACE in strengthening their education experience:

'SACE plants a seed of exponential growth.'

'For me, in Years 8 and 9 the workload was all facts but you didn't have to be an ethical or critical thinker. That was the difference, with Stage 2 you definitely had to read between the lines.'

'PLP [Personal Learning Plan] helped me figure out what I wanted to do in Year 11 and 12.'

'I think I enjoyed my Research Project purely because I chose something I enjoyed ... I got the best grade of my Year 12 results. I was pretty surprised about that.'

'I think SACE prepared me to have an academic future and then day-to-day living.'

In some cases, parents and students identified struggles with managing other responsibilities and uncertainty:

'They wanted me to be at home more so I could take on that carer role, but my studies were important to me.'

Others expressed limited opportunities for empowerment and participation in an educational dialogue:

'I learnt more about the SACE in the last 5 minutes than I have all my life.'

'Students valued teachers who 'believed in their ability to succeed academically, use explicit teaching instruction and showed a personal interest in students and their schooling progress'

(Rahman 2010, p 74)

Respect: strong commitment and high-expectations relationships

Acknowledging and addressing the complexities identified in this paper must begin with the commitment to invest in the development of genuine and dependable, high-expectations relationships (Sarra 2014). Overwhelming data from SA and across the world identify that above all, students valued teachers who 'believed in their ability to succeed academically, used explicit teaching instruction and showed a personal interest in students and their schooling progress' (Rahman 2010, p 74). This demonstration of commitment can — and must — extend to the school, and beyond to schooling sectors and the SACE Board. Doyle and Hill (2008) assert that 'perceived staff attitudes towards and interest in students, their family and community have been identified as being particularly important in influencing how students and families experience the [educational] environment' (p 44).

These values were reflected in national and international literature, and in the practices of SA schools that have been identified as demonstrating consistent success in supporting Aboriginal students to achieve their SACE.

Emerging strategies highlighted in the literature and adopted by identified schools included:

- recognising that high expectations must begin in the early years and be maintained and reinforced throughout the years
- emphasising the importance of positive teacher and student relationships for better educational outcomes for Aboriginal students
- tutoring and mentoring by past students
- immersing students in high performance and high expectations, and encouraging them to act on this
- recognising that Aboriginal students generally succeed when teachers take an interest in their learning and attempt to understand their life outside of school
- ensuring that relationships are at the heart of everything that schools do
- establishing an Aboriginal Coordinator role to provide pastoral support for students
- setting up flexible arrangements to accommodate students who return home, for reconnecting with family and overcoming homesickness
- using outside, local community support when required
- actively supporting applications for grants and scholarships, and being vigilant about identifying programs and support available to young Aboriginal people

- supporting staff members to be committed and prepared to put time and energy into developing relationships with Aboriginal students
- establishing an Aboriginal Education Team that fosters relationships between staff and students, and allows students to have somebody who is approachable and supportive of their learning
- allocating advocates, case managers, and/or dedicated staff to every Aboriginal student.

The following reflections on the significance and impact of commitment and high-expectations relationships were captured from focus groups of parents of Aboriginal students, and Aboriginal students and their teachers, and are representative of the themes emerging from the focus group data.

Many participants commented and reflected on the positive relationships developed between students and teachers, but of greater significance is the power that these high-expectations relationships can have:

'There were three or four teachers that came and checked on you and you really built a bond with those teachers.'

'The teachers that helped me were the ones who were really passionate about teaching.'

'If teachers take a personal interest in you then you feel like, they just stuck out for me.'

'Not seeing teachers as the enemy but knowing that they wanted me to achieve as much as I wanted to achieve. Knowing that was true made a really big difference to me.'

However, these were not the experiences of all students. The following quotes highlight the areas of greatest concern:

'It started in Year 10; they said "You didn't do well in these subjects, so you can't do them in Year 11".'

'One student who was successful was self-motivated and had support from home. The other student was frequently absent and had huge extended family responsibilities. She was not self-motivated and her teachers really had to try very hard to get her to produce any work.'

'I remember when I was doing Year 12 subject selections I was choosing all maths and science and they said "oh that's interesting" and gave me a dirty look.'

'My friend who dropped out didn't have the same support system as I had.'

Although we must expect a level of responsibility from both parties in high-expectations relationships, the following reflections identify more serious underlying values and beliefs in our education system:

'We didn't know we were Aboriginal. The moment I ticked that box, my life, and the life of my son, changed forever. And don't think that's in a good way.'

'She wasn't really interested in what she was doing. So the teachers didn't engage with her either.'

'My son, they put him in the "too hard" basket. They convinced him to go and get a job.'

Leadership: people and culture

A strategy to support Aboriginal students must demonstrate a commitment to collaborate with the local community to develop schools that demand outstanding educational achievement for all Aboriginal young people. Evidence shows that schools providing a high-quality education that is challenging for Aboriginal students and acknowledges their practices and beliefs, often have improved outcomes for students and higher SACE completion rates. As Rahman (2010) contends, in the 'work towards increasing the number of Indigenous students staying on at school to achieve the SACE, it was strongly apparent that more cultural input and inclusiveness in schools is needed to achieve this' (pp. 68–9). Leadership plays a significant role in driving genuine change; the cultivation of a supportive culture that focuses on engagement with students, parents, and the community, and on a demand for high expectations and accountability, is vital to success (Helme and Lamb 2011).

This approach was reflected in national and international practices, and in the practices of SA schools that have been identified as demonstrating consistent success in supporting Aboriginal students to achieve their SACE.

Emerging strategies highlighted in the literature and adopted by identified schools included:

- recognising that leadership engagement with Aboriginal families is critical to student success, and allowing support to be put in place where relevant
- actively seeking and building relationships with Aboriginal community organisations
- arranging resourcing to allow each student to be case-managed by a school leader
- providing a dedicated Aboriginal student support space that is staffed by school leaders
- systematically and strategically celebrating culturally significant events
- encouraging school leadership to request Aboriginal leaders and local Elders to speak to all staff about Aboriginal students' needs and cultural understandings
- developing a whole-school Reconciliation Action Plan
- endorsing and promoting Indigenous Youth Parliament and youth leadership programs
- strategically appointing expert, quality teachers as mentors for Aboriginal students and staff
- openly and publicly acknowledging and recognising Aboriginal culture at all school events
- giving Aboriginal place names to significant school buildings and spaces
- identifying and combating barriers to school attendance and educational achievement.



*'Our principal said,
"I will go 100%, I will go that
extra mile, to do whatever it
takes to support their needs".'*

Research by Rahman (2010) supports the focus on people and culture as being a significant factor in Aboriginal student success. Rahman found that 'almost all students who considered themselves academically successful positively identified as Indigenous and believed that their school was warm and welcoming towards Indigenous people and culture' (p 71). Interestingly, some parents and students in the SACE focus groups stated the following:

'The best teacher my child ever had was a principal who really made an effort to meet and understand my son.'

'We had the languages area map and we pointed out where we were from and each week we would talk about that area, the history and everything.'

'My child's school really invited and encouraged local interaction.'

'The principal asked me and my daughter to present at an induction session, to learn from the school families about our history and aspirations.'

'Our principal said, "I will go 100%, I will go that extra mile, to do whatever it takes to support their needs".'

'The teachers were really supportive; if they didn't know about your topic then they would work out who might be able to help ... They might not have known the answer but they helped you look for resources.'



However, the following reflections from parents and students in the focus groups highlighted a lack of perceived leadership in this area:

'Some schools have a good idea, a good policy, but by the time it filters down, the teachers don't have the same philosophy.'

'A lot of the leaders there didn't know about that stuff [Aboriginal culture], their background where they came from and I think a lot of the teachers were the same.'

'I don't know if any teachers knew that I was Indigenous.'

'I said I wanted to learn a bit about Aboriginal culture. But she said she didn't think that was a good idea. Maybe she didn't know about it. My town, I grew up with ... it's still very white-based. A lot of people who have really developed themselves in the town are very white Australia. They don't like any colour in the town at all.'

'I think a lot of kids weren't interested or the subjects they were offered; they weren't interesting to them. I think there are rules about the number of kids wanting to do a subject and whether the subject gets offered, I think it varies between schools.'

'My son wanted to finish Year 12; he's capable, but I had to fight for him constantly with the school.'

'We had the languages area map and we pointed out where we were from and each week we would talk about that area, the history and everything.'

Capacity Building: culturally and contextually responsive curriculum and assessment

This paper has found that knowledge and understanding of students' individual circumstances and awareness of their strengths and challenges leads to improved student engagement and achievement. Analysis of successful practice strategies identified that schools and teachers can adopt flexible, adaptive approaches to curriculum and assessment and, more significantly, 'centre the learning process on the culture of the child rather than that of the teacher, legitimising the worldview of the student and the culture in which they reside' (Griffiths 2011, p 73). This acknowledgment must also extend to organisations and policymakers, to ensure effective consideration of Aboriginal culture and perspectives. Hence, organisations must 'establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of ... secondary education services for their children' (Doyle and Hill 2008, p 22).

Further to this, the SACE Board and schooling sectors must take steps to equip all staff with a broad knowledge and deep understanding of the education of Aboriginal students: 'teachers of Indigenous students in particular need support in understanding the different worldviews, life experiences and knowledge which their students bring to the classroom, but all Australian educators would benefit from this understanding' (MacFie 2015, p 7). To support the retention, engagement, and achievement of Aboriginal students in their education, the SACE Board, in collaboration with key stakeholders, must develop and deliver professional learning that focuses on enhancing the professional capacity of teachers to deliver high-quality teaching, learning, and assessment.

This approach was reflected in national and international practices, and in the practices of SA schools that have been identified as demonstrating consistent success in supporting Aboriginal students to achieve their SACE.

Emerging strategies highlighted in the literature and adopted by identified schools included:

- encouraging local experts and Aboriginal Education Officers to provide cultural respect/safety training to all staff
- ensuring that every opportunity to build cultural perspectives into subjects is taken
- maintaining a balanced focus on developing students' transversal skills, deep content knowledge, and technical skills

- making links between what is being learned and students' own experiences and backgrounds, and then enhancing the learning by challenging students through new contexts and perspectives
- committing to a strong ethos of supporting the individual, so that differentiation and personalised learning form a part of the educational success of Aboriginal students
- providing choice in topics, and flexibility in the mode of evidence for assessment of student learning, which greatly improves Aboriginal students' opportunity to clearly communicate their understanding
- focusing on equity in assessment submission policies through better accommodation of Indigenous students' absences, transience, and community commitments, which will also improve their engagement and achievement
- supporting students' time management by co-constructing an annual planner of key dates and milestones
- ensuring that career counsellors have a good understanding of who their clients are as individuals and as Aboriginal Australians, and the issues that Aboriginal people face
- inviting local Elders to appear as guest speakers, to complement the teaching and learning for individual classes or speak to the whole cohort of students
- promoting Aboriginal Studies as a subject for all students to study
- recognising that a range of vocational education and training (VET) programs can be important in retaining Aboriginal students. VET in senior school years increases school attendance and completion, and improves the employment prospects of school completers.

The following reflections on the significance and impact of flexible, adaptive approaches to curriculum and assessment were captured from a panel of Aboriginal students and parents, and are representative of the themes emerging from the focus group data.

'I find [the SACE] a lot of work, it doesn't just happen easily, that process for me does take effort; but if they told us all of the things that would be happening early in the year it would have been easy to have it mapped out.'

'There's this big stigma about the workload and how much there's going to be; but if you organise your time well you still get time to do the things you want to do like sport, job, social life.'

Many students and parents questioned the approach to curriculum and assessment:

'Why is it always a test? A lot of kids stay home when they know the test is on tomorrow.'

'Some of my friends have dropped out three-quarters of the way through Year 12. The topics they're doing and the way they're trying to teach them and the way they're being involved doesn't suit them.'

'I've seen essays and reports on the Eiffel Tower and the Great Wall of China, but I haven't seen a project on Aboriginal history and culture.'

The focus groups identified a clear need for greater support for teachers to develop their expertise in the area of Aboriginal education:

'Our kids look up to teachers as educators, but who educates the teachers? We all need to be educated on Aboriginal culture and history; to close that gap between student-teacher relationships.'

'The teacher said, "I'm sorry, I don't understand Aboriginal children, I don't know how to help them, there is nothing I can do".'

'There was a lot of assumption, not everyone is a dot painter ... or an elite athlete ... just because they're Aboriginal.'

'[My Research Project topic was] Aboriginal education in remote communities. And my teacher basically said to me "I have no idea, I can't support you, you're on your own" so I basically did everything by myself.'

Responses clearly acknowledged the rigorous demands of the SACE and the value of mastering these challenges. The views of students reflect Mercurio and Clayton's findings of the empowerment of 'discipline-time' (2001, p 50).

Achievement: *excellence, aspiration, and merit*

A review of Aboriginal SACE data in this paper highlights the tension between celebrating the improvements of the current strategy, whilst acknowledging the significant proportion of Aboriginal young people who are without the benefits of the senior secondary qualification to which they are entitled. Helme and Lamb's national report shows that '74% of young Australians achieved Year 12 and 44% of Aboriginal students. The gap between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous students is greatest in very remote locations, at more than 50%' (2011, p 4). This strategy aims to exceed the success of the current strategy by moving beyond participation and achievement to strive for excellence, aspiration, and meritorious achievement.

This philosophy was reflected in national and international practices, and in the practices of SA schools that have been identified as demonstrating consistent success in supporting Aboriginal students to achieve their SACE.

Emerging strategies highlighted in the literature and adopted by identified schools included:

- having a 'growth mindset', adopting high expectations of all Aboriginal students, and fostering the belief that all students have the potential to complete their SACE and be successful in their career pathway of choice
- promoting the significance of the SACE to Aboriginal students and their families
- providing a role model for younger Aboriginal students by appointing an Aboriginal School Captain/ Ambassador
- placing a dedicated focus on identifying Aboriginal students' goals and aspirations
- systematically recognising and celebrating Aboriginal student success
- maintaining an alumni database and regularly inviting past students to address the current cohort.

The following reflections on the significance of the achievement of senior secondary education were captured from a panel of Aboriginal students and parents, and are representative of the emerging themes from the focus group data.

Many participants discussed the importance that SACE attainment represents:

'Our kids and our people need hope.'

'I want them to be comfortable and confident in themselves; confident that they are qualified to contribute and participate in two worlds.'

'My parents have an expectation that all of my sisters and I complete Year 12, that's the minimum that we have to do.'

'Even though uni's hard I still look back and think Year 12 was the hardest year of my life.'

'I found that I valued my SACE certificate so much.'

Some students spoke more specifically about the requirements of the SACE and generated some engaging discussion and reflections:

'It's important that you have the skills to be an independent learner coming into the senior years and people who don't have that really struggle.'

'A lot of people don't understand the value of some things in the SACE, like the PLP. Those skills are relevant now. I didn't take PLP seriously because I didn't understand how important it was.'

'I'm a huge advocate of the Research Project. I loved it last year. You're in control of your own learning. You're not being spoon-fed.'

'My parents have an expectation that all of my sisters and I complete Year 12, that's the minimum that we have to do.'

Transparency: data analysis and evaluation

The approach to the analysis and evaluation of the current SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy, and development of the next iteration, has had a strong focus on the collaborative data exchange between key stakeholders and a forensic analysis of all available data. Dreise et al. recently asserted that 'it is important to improve data collection and analysis at both system and program levels' and acknowledged that 'there is a lack of consistency in the data collected across jurisdictions' (2016, p 16).

This approach was reflected in national and international practices, and in the policies of SA schools that have been identified as demonstrating consistent success in supporting Aboriginal students to achieve their SACE.

Emerging strategies highlighted in the literature and adopted by identified schools included:

- recognising that systematic data tracking is one of the most effective strategies for directly assessing an individual student's needs, targeting appropriate assistance, and monitoring progress
- implementing a 'traffic light' system to monitor Aboriginal student weekly progress and achievement
- pledging a whole-school commitment to, and accountability for, the successful retention of all Aboriginal students from their PLP through to their Research Project
- providing an open dashboard/database where all teachers, students, and parents are able to track an individual student's progress and achievement
- committing to tracking post-SACE pathways each year.







Part Four: SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy 2017–2021:

Respecting Your Place, Valuing Our Future

A vision across schools, students, and the community for the empowerment, aspiration, and excellence of Aboriginal students in the SACE.

The SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy aims to align with the SACE Board's Strategic Plan by positioning Aboriginal students in a global context. It seeks to support Aboriginal students to firmly embrace the culture and language of their home and community, but also to consider their future through a broader world perspective. The South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) supports young Aboriginal students to develop the essential capabilities for succeeding in an ever-changing world, while maintaining their cultural identity.

The SACE qualification enables young Aboriginal students to progress towards, and access, social, cultural, and economic equality and prosperity.

The qualification provides opportunities for pursuing meaningful pathways such as further education, training, and employment, and also leads to the development of essential capabilities such as personal, social, and emotional well-being and enhanced capacity for independent, critical, and creative thinking.

The foundations of this strategy lie in the identified Aboriginal education strategies that build on strengths, acknowledge the value of young Aboriginal people's cultural heritage, and emphasise holistic, collaborative, and proactive approaches to SACE attainment.



Strategic Priorities

1. Empowerment: identity and belonging

Aim: Continue to empower Aboriginal SACE students and their families, through the following initiatives and activities:

- strategically engaging with Aboriginal families to support students' completion of, and achievement in, the SACE
- actively promoting the significance of the SACE to the broader Aboriginal community
- increasing the representation of Aboriginal people in SACE Board publications
- documenting Aboriginal student voices
- celebrating and promoting Aboriginal SACE graduates.

2. Respect: strong commitment and high-expectations relationships

Aim: Enhance the SACE Board's commitment to high-expectations relationships, through the following initiatives and activities:

- embedding cultural respect and safety training for SACE Board staff
- establishing formal channels for parent consultation in relation to SACE Board policies and procedures
- increasing the representation of Aboriginal people on SACE Board staff and assessment panels
- supporting the development of an advocates and mentors program.

3. Leadership: people and culture

Aim: Increase the SACE Board's leadership in acknowledging Aboriginal culture and history, through the following initiatives and activities:

- adopting a holistic organisational approach to the respect and acknowledgment of Aboriginal people and culture
- promoting Aboriginal people's participation in the subject renewal project
- developing a SACE Board Reconciliation Action Plan
- developing a SACE Board 'Acknowledgment of Country' protocol
- increasing the public representation of Aboriginal people and culture throughout the SACE Board building.

4. Capacity Building: culturally and contextually responsive curriculum and assessment

Aim: Extend the professional learning provided to schools for supporting the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students in the SACE, through the following initiatives and activities:

- increasing the number of support materials and exemplars containing Aboriginal perspectives
- renewing the Australian Languages subject
- renewing the Aboriginal Studies subject
- increasing the promotion of the flexibilities in the SACE, including vocational education and training (VET)
- highlighting the complementary connection between individual learning plans (ILPs) and the Personal Learning Plan (PLP)
- developing targeted professional learning courses for classroom teachers and leaders which align with the emerging strategies that support Aboriginal student success in the SACE.

5. Achievement: excellence, aspiration, and merit

Aim: Continue to support schooling sectors to enhance the success of Aboriginal students from the early years through to the SACE, through the following initiatives and activities:

- promoting the significance of SACE attainment for Aboriginal students
- developing targeted strategies to increase the participation and achievement of identified cohorts of Aboriginal students
- reconceptualising and expanding the SACE Aboriginal Student Pathways Conference
- reviewing the criteria for awarding the Governor of South Australia Commendation — Aboriginal Student SACE Award
- collaborating with schooling sectors to establish an Aboriginal Student Ambassador program
- expanding the distribution of the Aboriginal SACE Completers poster
- tracking the post-SACE pathways of Aboriginal SACE completers.


6. Transparency: data analysis and evaluation

Aim: Continue to undertake extensive analysis and evaluation of Aboriginal students' data, through the following initiatives and activities:

- developing data exchange initiatives for key stakeholders
- comprehensively analysing and evaluating data
- monitoring PLP retention data from Year 10 enrolment to SACE completion
- developing new data reports to be accessed via *Schools Online*
- accurately and systematically capturing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage of staff on SACE Quality Assurance and Assessment Panel registrations, and of students on electronic registration forms.

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