

POLICY STATEMENT

EDUCATION

The Country Liberal Party's aim is to improve outcomes for students, setting them up to leave school work ready and able to contribute to the NT's economic growth through participation in a diversified workforce. We will always will promote sustainability and fiscal responsibility of the Department of Education and all schools, with a strong focus on measurable educational outcomes.

A Country Liberal Government will focus funding on what works. We want students to be successful and ready for the next tier of education or work, and promoting an economy that is ready to receive them.

We recognise that students cannot achieve excellence without first achieving the basics, and that attendance at school and a relevant curriculum are instrumental to achieving the basics on which their lives will be founded.

A Country Liberal Government is committed to ensuring students leave school work ready and are able to contribute to the Northern Territory's economic growth. We will work with industry partners in fields such as mining, childcare, renewable energy, agriculture and horticulture, oil & gas, hospitality, health care, education, construction, information technology and other growing industries to further develop future pathway programs. Our goal is that all Territory students should have the opportunity to get a job and create a strong economy. A strong economy in turn will mean better outcomes for our children.

Targeted Funding and Infrastructure

Under a Labor Government, all that has been achieved is a record deficit for the Territory, a declining population and the worst performing economy in the country. This does not present a promising future for young people in Territory schools.

A Government that spends within its means is a responsible Government, and ensures that funding for critical areas like education can be maintained. A Country Liberal Government wants to target education funding towards initiatives that will have a measurable impact in the classroom and in student achievement.

Over the last 4 years attendance has declined 7%. NAPLAN scores remain the lowest in the country. We do not have enough school counsellors to service all our students. Our school-leavers have been left with the burden of a struggling economy, which means poorer job prospects.

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The state of the Territory budget highlights the need for education funding to be targeted towards making a meaningful difference to schools, something a Country Liberal Government will always do. It is paramount we ensure future spending on education will directly contribute to student achievement and building the Territory's future prosperity. All this is about ensuring we have a targeted approach to improving education outcomes for Northern Territory children.

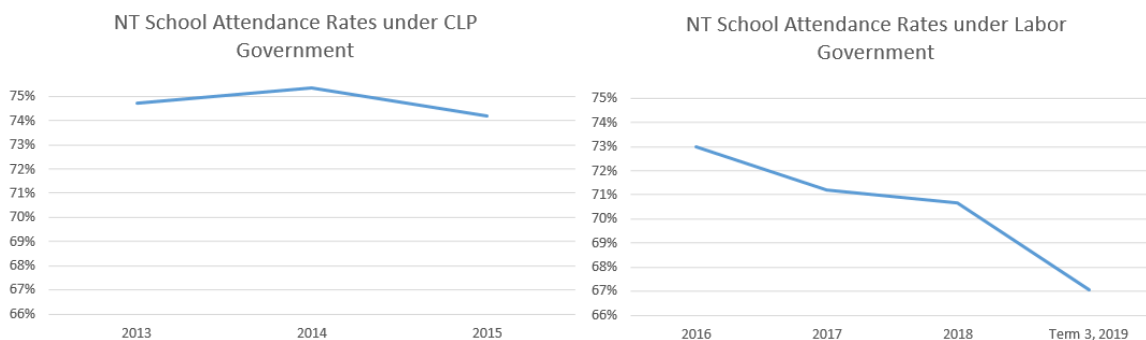
We will:

- Spend responsibly on programs that create meaningful change in education
- Target infrastructure spending towards schools with high projected growth, and those that have the highest level of need
- Fastrack planned infrastructure, including building a new school in Ali Curung
- Work with schools and regions to develop strategic plans and individual school master plans

Attendance

Research has shown that there is no safe threshold when it comes to missing school. Any absence from school has been found to reduce academic achievement rates, and that the effects of absence accumulate over time.¹

Over the past four years of Labor, we have seen average attendance rates drop steeply across the Northern Territory from a consistent yearly average nearing 75% under the Country Liberal Government, down to 67% in Term 3 2019 under the Labor Government. It has dropped every year since Labor came to power. This is simply unacceptable.



The 7% drop in attendance under a Labor Government represents nearly 2300 more students missing school, which is 2300 students falling through the cracks and not achieving their full potential.

¹ Hancock, K. J. (2013). *Student attendance and educational outcomes: Every day counts*. Subiaco, W.A.: Telethon Institute for Child Health Research.

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A Country Liberal Government will make attendance at school a high priority in the recognition of the lifetime effect school attendance can have on achievement. We want to see all Northern Territory students reach their full potential, and that means going to school every day.

We will empower schools to develop strong attendance strategies. Crucially, we want to make sure that these strategies are effective and catered to individual schools. We will look to which schools are attaining a high rate of attendance, and use their success to guide other schools of a similar cohort. Above all, we want to enable community-led solutions for improved school attendance.

We will continue to support the Commonwealth's expansion of the Remote School Attendance Strategy, which promotes community-led solutions for improved school attendance and creates remote jobs.²

We know that Labor scrapped School Attendance and Truancy Officers in favour of Engagement Officers and Compliance Officers. Since the change, no compulsory conference notices were issued, no attendance plans were issued, no compliance notices were issued, and only 35 infringement notices were issued. The Labor Government has also suspended prosecutions of parents for their child's continued non-attendance.

We do not believe this sends the right message of parental responsibility for a child's attendance at school, and Labor's record speaks for itself on the effectiveness of these measures. A Country Liberal Government will reverse the disastrous changes of Labor's failed attendance strategy.

We will:

- Bring back truancy officers that Labor scrapped
- Empower schools to develop their own attendance strategies based on what works for them
- Develop a Primary School Transitioning Policy and consider expanding transition support to include primary to middle school
- Support the Commonwealth's extension of the Remote School Attendances Strategy to involve community members in their schools

Early Learning and the Basic Building Blocks of Learning

Too many Territory students are struggling to read and write and too many are not meeting the national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy. Through all the investment in Education over the years, the Northern Territory remains the lowest achieving jurisdiction in NAPLAN results.

² <https://www.niaa.gov.au/news-centre/Aboriginal-affairs/remote-school-attendance-strategy-extended-keep-kids-school>

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We want the Northern Territory to continue to improve, and a new and innovative approach is sorely needed. We cannot continue to invest in the status quo and expect improvement. The basic building blocks of language, literacy and numeracy are the foundation for later learning.

A Country Liberal Government will declutter the curriculum in partnership with the Northern Territory Board of Studies, school teaching staff and parents, and provide curriculum resources to teachers which focus on language, literacy and numeracy.

Literacy difficulties that are identified early can be addressed early. A Country Liberal Government will also implement a trial of phonics screening similar to the successful UK model used in South Australia, where teachers value the test for its ability to identify gaps in phonics learning and all student groups have shown improvement after two years.³

Early Childhood

Quality early childhood education and family support are crucial to later learning and lifetime success. We are committed to engaging parents and carers in their children's early learning and development.

The Families as First Teachers program builds parental knowledge and skills while promoting childhood learning and collaboration with communities, supported by the evidence-based Abecedarian approach.⁴

Hearing health in childhood has been recognised as a significant factor in a child's future achievement. Menzies School of Health reports that nine out of 10 Aboriginal children who live in remote communities has some form of ear disease, which can cause hearing loss, impact the development of speech and language, and is linked to educational disadvantage and behavioural problems.⁵

Innovative solutions such as training teachers to recognise hearing difficulties, acoustic upgrades to schools and classrooms, and vaccination strategies to prevent otitis media are all on the table.

A Country Liberal Government will recognise the effect that hearing health can have on a child's attendance at school and future achievement, and develop a strategy to improve outcomes in the first 100 days of Government, in partnership with Government departments, the

³ <https://www.education.sa.gov.au/teaching/curriculum-and-teaching/literacy-and-numeracy/phonics-screening-check>

⁴ Page, J., Cock, M. L., Murray, L., Eadie, T., Niklas, F., Scull, J., & Sparling, J. (2019). An Abecedarian Approach with Aboriginal Families and Their Young Children in Australia: Playgroup Participation and Developmental Outcomes. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 51(2), 233-250. doi:10.1007/s13158-019-00246-3

⁵ https://www.menzies.edu.au/page/Research/Aboriginal_Health/Child_Health_and_development/Ears/

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Commonwealth, NGOs, Communities and stakeholders. The strategy will include infrastructure upgrades, firm timelines of actions, dedicated funding, and measurable outcomes.

We will:

- Commit to decluttering the overcrowded curriculum
- Commence a phonics trial to boost literacy
- Support the continued roll out of the Families as First Teachers program.
- Develop a strategic direction to address hearing difficulties in schools within the first 100 days of Government.

Behaviour management, safety and wellbeing

The safety and wellbeing of students and school staff is instrumental in ensuring an environment conducive to high student attendance and achievement, the attraction of quality teaching staff, and the expectation of parents.

Expectations have changed over the years, and schools are required to do more than ever to support children's social and emotional wellbeing.

Mental Health

In October 2019 the Productivity Commission released a draft report regarding mental health⁶. It made a number of draft recommendations regarding social and emotional learning programs in the education system. We have been strong advocates for social and emotional learning delivered in schools, and believe it is a Government's job to support school staff to deliver these effectively.

We will review existing programs that support school wellbeing initiatives, and establish whether funding could be redirected towards the employment of school wellbeing leaders in government schools.

Three quarters of mental health problems occur before the age of 25, and half occur before the age of 14.⁷ Our young people experience self-harm, suicide attempts, major depressive disorders, and high levels of psychological distress at a much higher prevalence than we would like.⁸

⁶ <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/mental-health/draft>, page 2 draft overview

⁷ Kessler, RD et al. (2005). Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 62: p. 593-602.

⁸ Lawrence D, Johnson S, Hafekost J, Boterhoven De Haan K, Sawyer M, Ainley J, Zubrick SR. (2015). *The Mental Health of Children and Adolescents. Report on the second Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing*. Canberra: Department of Health.

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Identifying issues early and getting a young person into the right support and treatment is crucial, however we recognise that young people are less likely than other age groups to seek out help for themselves.⁹

School counsellors

Over the past years, several school boards and individuals involved in the school system have raised concerns that their school counsellor is overrun by the large case-loads they are expected to manage, or that their school is having difficulty recruiting a counsellor at all.

Based on data from United Nations countries and best practice, the Australian Psychological Society recommends that the ratio of psychologists to students should be one psychologist to 500 students.¹⁰ There were 33 818 students enrolled in Term 3 2019, which means there should be at least 68 school counsellors across the Northern Territory.¹¹ Currently there are 28, with the Labor Government planning the recruitment of only one more.¹² That represents one counsellor for every 1166 students and falls well short of best practice.

School counsellors are an important avenue to identify and treat difficulties a student may be experience at school or at home. No student should fall through the cracks because of an overburdened system.

While a counsellor in every school may not be feasible or appropriate, a Country Liberal Government will be exploring additional positions and services to support the shortage of school counsellors, and to enhance the important role they play in our schools.

Physical Wellbeing

Schools should be safe, supportive and respectful teaching and learning communities that promote student wellbeing.

The Northern Territory is currently the only jurisdiction that does not have a funded Government program, according to Royal Life Saving Northern Territory. We be considering funding options swimming and water safety program to roll out to primary schools.

Physical fitness is an important part of childhood development. Multiple benefits have been associated with early participation in physical activity and sport. Childhood sport can lead to

⁹ Slade T, Johnston A, Teesson M, Whiteford H, Burgess P, Pirkis J, et al. (2009) The Mental Health of Australians 2: Report on the 2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing. Canberra: Department of Health and Ageing.

¹⁰ <https://www.psychology.org.au/for-the-public/about-psychology/What-does-a-psychologist-do/Psychologists-in-schools/Information-schools-resources/Framework-effective-delivery-school-psychology>

¹¹ <https://education.nt.gov.au/statistics-research-and-strategies/enrolment-and-attendance>

¹² Education Annual Report and NTG School Counselling Service Action Plan

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better health outcomes in including better cardiovascular health and lower obesity rates in later life¹³. It can also act as a protective factor in children exposed to adverse experiences¹⁴.

A Country Liberal Government will continue to make sports vouchers available to every enrolled and home-schooled child in the Territory.

We will:

- Support the continuation of school-based policing
- Review existing programs that support school wellbeing initiatives, and continue to support the widespread use of social and emotional learning program in schools
- Consider additional services to support the shortage of school counsellors
- Explore funding options for swimming and water safety programs in primary schools
- Continue to supply sports vouchers
- Coordinate efforts with health to ensure allied health professionals (speech pathologists, etc.) are more accessible for early intervention
- Trial a rollout of defibrillators in Barkly Region schools in communities that do not have a health clinic

Local Decision Making

We believe that local school communities, parents, teachers and principals are the best placed to know what is best for their children. We want to increase autonomy for government schools and expect that this will lead to improvement in overall school performance.

Global school budgets and the introduction of Independent Public Schools were two successful initiatives to give schools autonomy of the last term of the Country Liberal Government.

Through global school budgets, paired with a student-centred, needs-based school funding model, schools were empowered to make local level decisions about staffing and financial resources through one line budget allocations.

The introduction of Independent Public Schools has given schools autonomy and freedom to make decisions about how schools are run, and greater scope to engage with school communities and businesses.

While Labor has failed to deliver a single Independent Public School, a Country Liberal Government is committed to continuing the roll-out of this important step towards school autonomy.

¹³ <https://www.thieme-connect.com/products/ejournals/abstract/10.1055/s-2002-28456>

¹⁴ <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/article-abstract/2734743>

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The Country Liberal Government supports a robust non-government school sector. Nearly a quarter of Territory students attend a non-government school, and parents should have the choice of how they want their child educated. To discount the non-government sector is to do a disservice to these children and their parents.

We will:

- Work with communities, parents, teachers and principals to develop community driven solutions
- Clarify and strengthen the role of school councils to strengthen local decision making
- Continue to support schools that want to take the step to become Independent Public Schools
- Support choices for parents, including a robust non-government school sector

Teaching and learning

We believe that quality teaching is the number one factor in student achievement. A Country Liberal Government is committed to supporting teaching staff to continuously improve and remain in the Territory.

Stability is important in schools. We want to see the Territory grow its own teaching staff, including helping senior teachers develop the capacity to become principals. This will include professional development opportunities, and a review of principal contracts and how quality principals can be better attracted and retained.

Remote teacher housing and safety has been a growing problem with retaining quality teaching staff in communities. We will take steps to ensure that teacher housing is always safe and secure by listening to what our remote staff are telling us, and responding with community-led solutions.

Growing our Aboriginal teaching staff, both in number and capacity, will be a priority. We will support the expansion of the Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education (RATE) to increase Aboriginal teaching staff.

Many families in the Northern Territory are isolated from mainstream schooling. A Country Liberal Government will undertake to work with the Commonwealth and service providers to ensure the reliability, availability and affordability of appropriate communications technology for all Territory students. All parents deserve a choice in where and how their children are educated. We will be examining how eligibility to receive boarding allowances can be made less restrictive for students attending interstate boarding schools.

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We will:

- Promote merit-based teacher selection and professional development opportunities
- Take measures to improve the attraction and retention of high quality teachers and principals for longer terms
- Increase job security through more permanent positions

Tertiary education and training

We believe that Vocational Education and Training should always be driven by economic development priorities, and led by business and industry needs.

The Country Liberal Government will engage with the relevant sectors to identify priority industry areas for funding of training to grow a skilled workforce to support local business. This will include financial incentives to employers to encourage them to take on apprentices and trainees. The training of Aboriginal Territorians is crucial in supporting community growth and development. We will support local training that is linked to community projects with measurable outcomes.

We believe that higher education must include avenues for future education and employment. We will work with the Commonwealth to increase funding or regional universities and incentives for students to attend. We support CDU's request for additional commonwealth supported places to facilitate growth of the university for the good of all Territorians.

A Country Liberal Government will always work towards a strong economy and private sector to promote job growth so that our Territory trained and educated students can keep their vast knowledge and talents in the Territory instead of moving interstate through necessity, and so that young people trained elsewhere see the Territory as an opportunity.

We will:

- Ensure vocational education and training are driven by economic development priorities
- Incentivise business and industry to take on apprentices and trainees
- Support local training linked to community projects
- Build a strong economy to support future jobs