

Navigator: program overview and specifications

The Navigator pilots will support disengaged learners, aged 12-17 years, to re-engage with an education or training pathway. Navigator services will seek out disengaged learners and actively work with them and their support networks, providing the support required for a successful return to education.

AN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION STATE

Education is the centrepiece of the Victorian state. Our education system underpins our shared social and economic prosperity, and strengthens Victoria's communities and culture. Education provides the means for Victorians to make a living and, even more importantly, to create a life.

The Victorian Government's Education State reforms are designed to develop an education system that ensures all Victorians have equal access to the benefits and opportunities that come from education. Ensuring that every Victorian learner is afforded the opportunity to succeed requires an inclusive education system.

An inclusive education system tailors its approach to all learners. By providing an inclusive and excellent education system, and by looking at the learner and not the problem, we can break the links between a person's postcode and their life chances. All students should be engaged in their education, and should they ever disengage from schooling, our education system should work toward their reinclusion.

SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

In Victoria, there are a significant number of learners who have been disengaged, or are vulnerable to disengaging, from education or training. In 2013, approximately 6,800 Year 9 to 12 government school students left school early and were not engaged in education and training by August the following year.¹

As Year 12 completion or equivalent has become the norm for Victorian learners, the negative consequences of a learner disengaging from education prematurely have intensified. Studies have shown that disengaged learners are four times more likely to make a poor transition to employment or further education than those who complete Year 12 or equivalent.² Learners who complete Year 12 or equivalent are significantly more likely to be employed, gain further qualifications, earn more, be healthier and make a meaningful contribution to society than those learners who do not.

Evidence from across Australia demonstrates that disengaged learners are disproportionately drawn from disadvantaged backgrounds. The likelihood of disengagement is enhanced by Indigenous status, having language other than English spoken at home, living in rural areas and low socio-economic status. Learners who have mental health issues and/or a disability are also more likely to be disengaged.³

Homelessness, alcohol and drug use, exposure to family violence and trauma also feature in the backgrounds of disengaged young people. Typically they have low self-esteem, low levels of literacy and numeracy and have difficulties in managing their behaviour, emotions and relationships with other learners when at school.

Fortunately, recent studies have shown that with the right intensive support and intervention, young people who fall behind and disengage can recover and catch up when they re-engage in education.⁴

STUDENT RE-ENGAGEMENT

Schools are best placed to work with learners vulnerable to disengaging from school and may employ a range of proven targeted strategies such as: mentoring; pathways and career planning and guidance; welfare support; family outreach; tutoring; and specific assistance for skill development.⁵ Schools now have greater capacity to deliver these strategies as a result of additional Education State funding that increases Student Resource Package (SRP) loadings for disadvantage.

When in-school strategies have not worked, re-engagement programs can provide education and support to children and young people. Re-engagement programs can operate in a school setting or registered external site. Schools will transfer or utilise SRP funding to support the delivery of these programs.

³ Op. cit. Lamb, S., Jackson, J., Walstab, A. and Huo, S. (2015)

⁴ Lamb, S., Jackson, J., Walstab, A. and Huo, S. (2015) *Educational opportunity in Australia 2015 Who succeeds and who misses out*. Mitchell Institute; and Dandolo Partners (2014). *Evaluation of the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions. A report for the Department of Education*

⁵ Lamb, S. and Rice, S. (2008). *Effective strategies to increase school completion report*. University of Melbourne

¹ Victorian Department of Education and Training (2015) unpublished

² Te Riele, K (2014). *Putting the jigsaw together: Flexible learning programs in Australia*. Final Report. Melbourne: The Victoria Institute for Education, Diversity and Lifelong Learning

Furthermore, schools may offer Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) qualifications, Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETiS). Schools may also support learners to transition to a TAFE or Registered Training Organisation if this suits a young person's interests and aspirations.⁶

THE NAVIGATOR SERVICE PILOTS

The Navigator pilots will seek out disengaged learners and actively work with them and their support networks to return them to education or training. Navigator will be delivered by community agencies, who will work closely with local areas, school communities and Regional offices.

The eight Navigator sites are spread across Victoria and are a mix of metropolitan and non-metropolitan Department of Education and Training (DET) Areas. Site selection was informed by rates of school disengagement and measures of social disadvantage.

Learner supports and strategies will be identified in partnership with learners and their families, be proportionate to their level of need and be delivered in a way which best suits the learner in their local context.

Navigator will operate according to the following principles:

- i. Having high expectations of the learner's educational ability and growth prospects
- ii. Ensuring young people are enrolled and engaged in school, or appropriate education and training, wherever possible and building the capacity of schools and other community services to work with disengaged young people
- iii. Prioritising a timely response to disengagement
- iv. Listening to the learner and co-developing plans which draw upon their strengths and the strengths of their family support networks and community
- v. Driving improvements in engagement, personal development and education outcomes such as attendance and attainment
- vi. Ensuring services are culturally competent and meet, for example, the cultural needs of Aboriginal learners and learners who are refugees
- vii. Supporting the learner in the context of changes in family arrangements and school environment
- viii. Ensuring positive and meaningful relationships between the worker and young person
- ix. Supporting local area solutions, with schools and community networks showing commitment to supporting vulnerable young people, pooling resources and working together

- x. Understanding and addressing the impact of mental health issues, i.e. anxiety and depression, and the impact of trauma and family violence

NAVIGATOR ELIGIBILITY AND REFERRALS

Learners referred to Navigator must be aged between 12 and 17 years of age. Navigator providers will target learners who have been disengaged from school for one term or more.

Disengagement will be measured by chronic non-attendance for this period, i.e. unexplained absence for at least 70% of the term. Learners could have been enrolled in school at the beginning of the year but have subsequently exited during the school year. They may also not be enrolled at any school.

Learners must live in, or be currently (or most recently) enrolled in a school in, the Area which a Navigator service operates.

Learners are likely to be referred to Navigator (via their local DET region office) by schools, families, Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs), police, child protection, youth justice or by other community agencies who work with young people and families.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

In collaboration with local School Focused Youth Services (SYFS) and LLENs, schools will also implement a range of strategies for learners vulnerable to disengaging from school such as: team-based approaches to teaching and wellbeing; dedicated spaces for specific needs; flexible learning options; additional language and literacy classes; pathways planning and career guidance; and parent and community engagement⁷. The relationship is outlined in Figure 1.

Research has demonstrated that schools which adopt the principles of early and sustained engagement, and have multifaceted approaches which are tailored to the school and local community, are most successful in reducing levels of disengagement.⁸

Unfortunately, despite these learner support initiatives and strategies, a significant number of learners have disengaged from their school. To that end, Navigator services will target those students who have disengaged from education for at least one term (or 13 weeks), as shown in Figure 2, below.

⁶ Myconos, G. (2012) *Re-engagement, training and beyond: evaluating the second year of a Community VCAL education program for young people*. Brotherhood of St Lawrence

⁷ DET's participation and engagement supports are at: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/participation/Pages/default.aspx>

⁸ Polidano, C. and Tseng, P. (2012) *A Second Chance at Education for Early School Leavers*. University of Melbourne

Figure 1: Continuum of supports

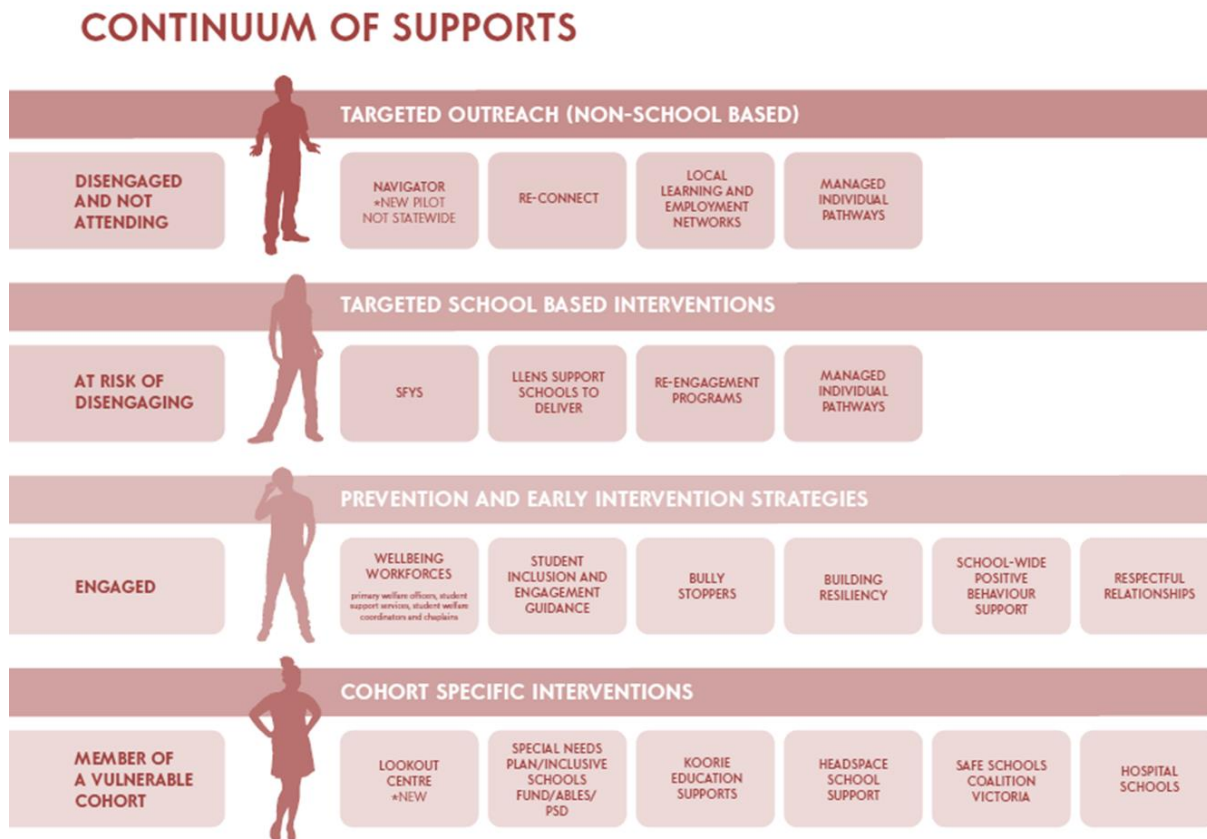
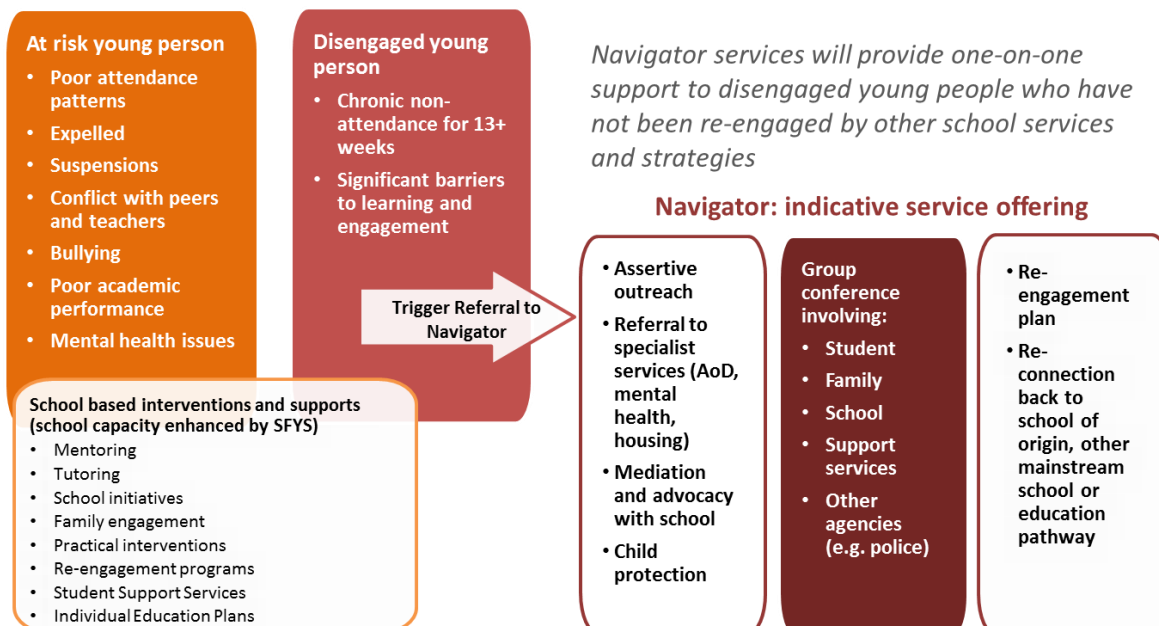


Figure 2: Navigator – indicative service offering



NAVIGATOR SERVICE CAPABILITIES

Navigator providers will be required to demonstrate the knowledge and experience outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: INPUTS

1. A sound knowledge of the:

- Victorian education system, education and training pathways and relevant legislation , including the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*, the Victorian Curriculum, Primary and Secondary schooling (including alternative schools) and other training options such as Learn Locals and TAFE institutes
- local context in the Area where they propose to operate
- the key stakeholders in the Area
- supports available to young people to assist them overcoming barriers to education
- student inclusion and engagement guidance and re-engagement policy
- services and support operating within the DET, including social and emotional learning curriculum and resources

2. Experience in:

- working with vulnerable young people who encounter barriers to engaging in education or training such as alcohol and other drug (AoD) issues, anxiety, depression, family conflict, caring responsibilities or homelessness
- working with schools, local education providers and support services (such as School Focused Youth Service and Local Learning and Employment Networks)
- working with Indigenous learners and learners from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and developing interventions and programs that are culturally appropriate to these learners
- planning and delivery of services to young people over a wide geographical area
- establishing or linking with existing governance committees to oversee work and impact
- assessing the learning needs of young people

Navigator providers will required to demonstrate the ability to deliver the key service components that are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: PROCESSES

1. Assertive outreach

- Seeking out, and connecting with, learners who have disengaged from schooling
- Following up on referrals from schools or agencies, making personal contact with the young person and developing effective working relationships

2. Assessment and planning

- Undertaking a preliminary assessment of the learning needs, capabilities and aspirations of the learner, including psycho-social assessments if required
- Using the outcomes of assessments to complete an education re-engagement plan that involves family, carers, school and community supports
- Identifying pathways through schools and/or training providers to reach identified goals

3. Group conferences

- Planning and facilitating group conferences with the learner and their family, school and support networks

4. Supporting young people and their growth

- Delivering individual coaching and mentoring to assist young people to enhance wellbeing and develop resilience, self-efficacy and social skills
- Providing advocacy support to successfully engage support services within schools and other education settings, as well as for re-engagement with family or community networks
- Assisting young people to overcome learning, social and other barriers so that they can successfully engage and transition through education to the completion of Year 12 or equivalent

5. Collaborative working relationships with local agencies and schools

- Working with other agencies to form a functioning network of services that will identify and support young people who are disengaged, or vulnerable to disengaging, from school and training
- Establishing strong working relationships and referral pathways with key agencies who provide services to vulnerable, complex and marginalised young people in the local Area (for example AoD, mental health, homelessness and family violence)
- Working with schools leaders, teachers and communities
- Working closely with local DET Region staff
- Working closely with other governance bodies and programs targeting disengaged learners, or learners vulnerable to disengagement such as the Education Justice Initiative, Children and Youth Area Partnerships, School Focused Youth Service (SFYS) and Local Learning and Employment Networks

6. Follow up in schools

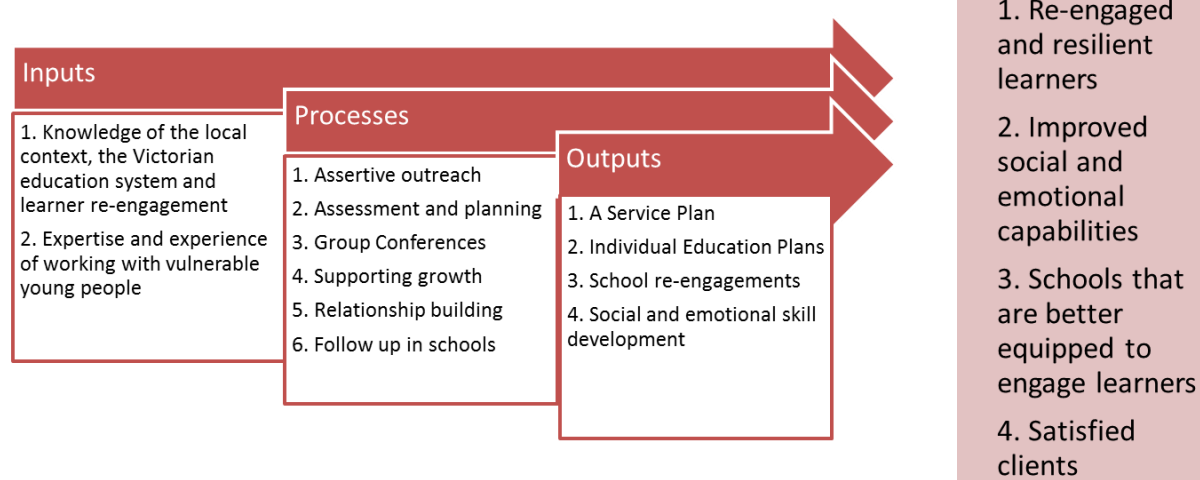
- Monitoring learner integration in the school for the first two months following re-engagement
- Referring learners to services that can support them in school, including SFYS

Navigator providers will produce the outputs outlined in Table 3.

Table 3: OUTPUTS

1. A Service Plan, updated yearly
2. Number of learners engaged by the Navigator provider
3. Number of learners who enter a Navigator program
4. Number of Individual Student Education Plans activated and completed
5. Number of learners who re-engage in mainstream schools
6. Number of learners who re-engage in other educational settings, including TAFE
7. Number of learners who undertake social and emotional training
8. Number of learners who do not re-engage in education and training
9. Survey results that measure the satisfaction of Navigator participants

Figure 3: Navigator theory of Change



OUTCOMES AND EXPECTATIONS

Figure 3 outlines how, by successfully delivering the inputs, processes and outputs of the Navigator model, providers will be able to deliver the key outcomes of the program: re-engaged learners, students with greater social and emotional capabilities; schools that are better equipped to engage all learners, and satisfied clients.

1. Re-engagement. The key outcome of the Navigator program is to re-engage as many young Victorians back into education as possible. Navigator should aim to enable learners to return to their school of origin. This is in recognition of the inherent benefits of their originating school for the learner, including friends, links to community, proximity, shared history and understanding. Where it is not practical for a learner to return to their school of origin, providers should work with the learner to identify a school, flexible learning program, TAFE or other RTO that can meet their needs. Given that this cohort of learners typically experiences barriers to strong engagement with learning, providers will also be expected to support learners in their transitions back into education and reconnect with learners who disengage again.

2. Growth of social and emotional capability. Growing learners' resilience and social and emotional capability will strengthen their ability to manage the re-engagement process. Research has shown that developing socio-emotional capabilities such as resilience, determination, self-control, self-esteem and motivation play an instrumental role in succeeding at school, work and in social relationships.⁹

These capabilities are not static traits. They need to be learnt and developed alongside the development of cognitive skills.

To this end, the Navigator service will also need to focus on holistic outcomes for learners, including:

- improved resilience, self-confidence and skills in problem solving
- the development of career goals and pathways
- being more active members of the local community
- improved skills in language and literacy

3. Working with schools. An indirect outcome of Navigator is that schools will be supported to develop a better understanding of how to cater for learners vulnerable to disengaging and reconnect with learners who cease

attending. Through close collaboration with providers, schools will be able to learn and access the supports and practices available to help overcome the barriers that stop some of their learners from fully engaging in schooling.

REPORTING

The specific performance levels that each Navigator provider is to meet will be negotiated in consultation with that provider and will be detailed in their first Service Plan due 1 June 2016. The Service Plan, updated yearly, will outline how, and when, the agency will deliver the service in their Area, including:

- Employing staff and commencing service
- Establishing networks, governance and communications for the service
- Collecting data to support young people and the Navigator evaluation
- The agreed outputs, outcomes and expectations for the Navigator service

Each quarter the Department will monitor the Navigator provider's progress towards meeting performance targets.

For the first reporting period (ending June 30 2016), providers will be primarily assessed by their actions, such as developing a Service Plan. For the subsequent reporting periods, providers will be assessed against the outputs (outlined in Table 3) and outcomes (outlined in Figure 3) that will be collected as part of the Navigator evaluation.

EVALUATION

Navigator will be fully evaluated over the pilot period. Providers will be expected to participate in the evaluation. The evaluation will examine the desired outcomes of the Navigator in terms of re-engagements and improvements in students' health and wellbeing. To do this, the evaluators will utilise quantitative data on the number of successful re-engagements and will seek qualitative metrics such as ascertaining whether the learners have improved self-confidence, health, problem solving skills and education/vocation goals.

The evaluation will also explore impacts including levels of learners' social engagement and life satisfaction, as well as the impact of Navigator on supports provided in schools.

⁹ McNeil, B., Reeder, N. and Rich, J. (2012). *A framework of outcomes for young people*. The Young Foundation