Stronger Smarter Institute
Research & Impact Footprinting

Full Reading Review

"Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage – Key Indicators, 2016"

Stronger Smarter Meta-Strategy links:
1. Acknowledging, embracing and developing a positive sense of identity in school →
3. High Expectations Relationships →
5. Innovative and dynamic school staffing models

This Reading Review discusses the 2016 Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage (OID) report conducted by the Productivity Commission (PC). The 2016 OID Report is the seventh report in a series commissioned by all Australian governments designed to measure progress in improving wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. The report complements a range of other reports on aspects of Indigenous policy, and is the precursor to the 'Closing the Gap' report.

The OID Report looks at wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders nationally in relation to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) targets and action areas. The research provides insights into what is working and how directions might be influenced in future policy development and focuses for jurisdictions. This collaborative and cross-jurisdictional approach has synergies with the national scope and delivery of the Stronger Smarter Approach. This Reading Review unpacks a number of OID research points that are specifically connected to the Stronger Smarter Institute's metastrategies.

Contents of this Review

*Figures keep the numbering from the original report.*

Research Approach and Framework

The OID Report[1] is produced by the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision which is made up of representatives of the Australian, State and Territory governments and observers from the ABS and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. The Steering Committee is chaired by the chairman of the PC.

The OID report was established initially from a recommendation of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in 2000. ATSIC was a member of the working group that advised the Steering Committee on the first edition of the report, and the National Congress of Australia's First People is represented in the working group for the 2016 report. Each section of the report has been reviewed by different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations or experts. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians contributed to a key refocus for the 2014 report to take a strength-based approach to move from concepts of 'disadvantage 'to conceptions of 'improving wellbeing'.

The OID have used a framework for Key Indicators which aims to bring together the best available evidence about the root causes of disadvantage and the positive factors that contribute to wellbeing. This is shown in a simplified form in Figure 2.1.1 below, and with the details in Figure 2.1.2. The framework uses a mixed method approach in providing both quantitative and qualitative data and analysis.

Figure 2.1.1   **Framework elements**

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1 http://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/overcoming-indigenous-disadvantage/2016
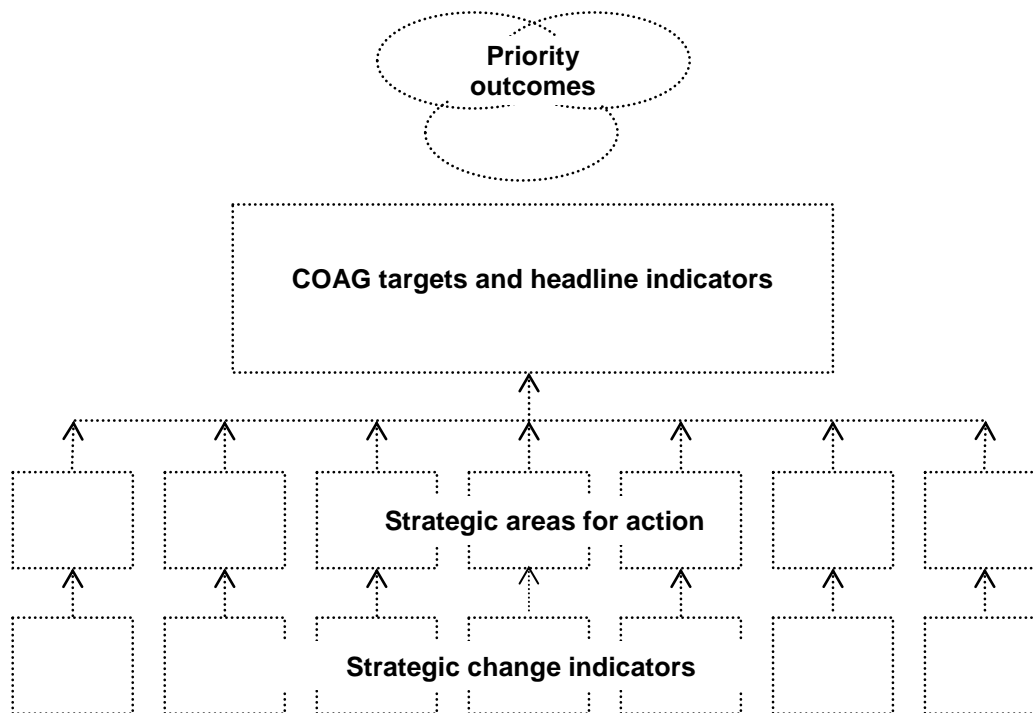
The logic behind the framework is that over time, improvements in the strategic change indicators will lead to changes in the COAG targets and headline indicators. This movement leads to progress toward priority outcomes. The elements of the framework are:

▶ At the top of the framework there are three interlinked priorities which reflect COAG's vision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to have the same life opportunities as other Australians.

▶ The first layer of indicators is the seven COAG Closing the Gap targets, and 6 Headline Indicators.

▶ Below this, seven strategic areas for action have been chosen for their potential to have a significant and lasting impact in reducing disadvantage and improving wellbeing. Each of these areas form the Chapters of the Report.

▶ A second layer of indicators is a number of targeted, shorter term 'strategic change indicators' that have been used to measure progress for each strategic area of action. In the report, the PC uses the term 'indicator' as a broad statement of the concept to be measured, and the term 'measure' to refer to how an indicator will be measured.

They note that not everything can be reported using indicators, and have also used case studies of actions that are making a difference.

Understanding Indigenous disadvantage

The report provides some background on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations and factors based on June 2011 ABS Census data.

From the 2011 ABS Census data

▶ 670, 000 people identified as Indigenous - 90% of that population are Aboriginal.

▶ the largest Indigenous populations are in
  - NSW 31%
  - QLD 28%
  - WA 13%
  - NT 10%

▶ most Indigenous Australians live in major cities and regional centres
  - 35% in major cities
  - 22% inner regional areas
  - 22% outer regional
  - 8% in remote areas
  - 14% in very remote

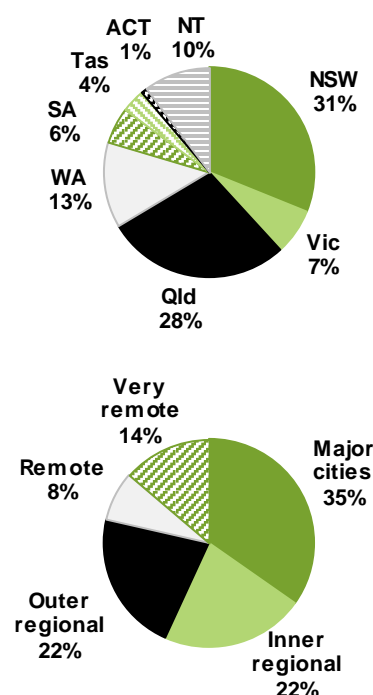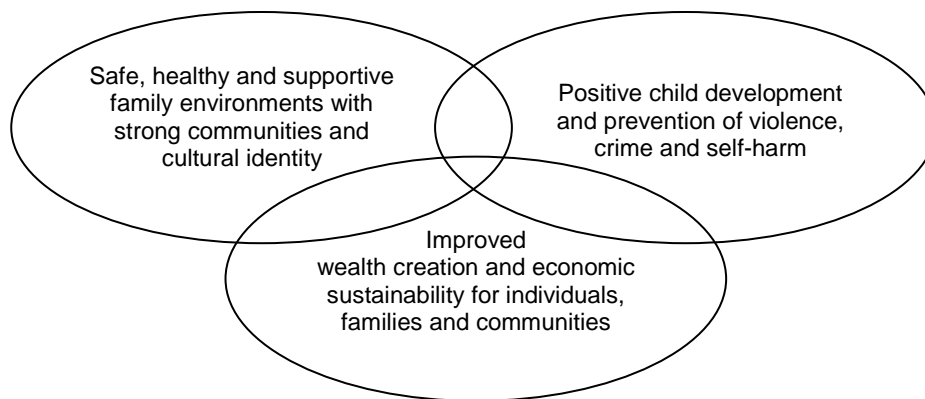Less than 2% of non-Indigenous live in remote and very remote areas.

Figure 2.1.2 **Multi-level indicator framework**

Priority outcomes

Safe, healthy and supportive family environments with strong communities and cultural identity

Positive child development and prevention of violence, crime and self-harm

Improved wealth creation and economic sustainability for individuals, families and communities

COAG targets and headline indicators

COAG targets	Headline indicators
4.1 Life expectancy	4.8 Post-secondary education — participation and attainment
4.2 Young child mortality	4.9 Disability and chronic disease
4.3 Early childhood education	4.10 Household and individual income
4.4 Reading, writing and numeracy	4.11 Substantiated child abuse and neglect
4.5 Year 1 to 10 attendance	4.12 Family and community violence
4.6 Year 12 attainment	4.13 Imprisonment and juvenile detention
4.7 Employment	

Strategic areas for action

Governance, leadership and culture	Early child development	Education and training	Healthy lives	Economic participation	Home environment	Safe and supportive communities
5.1 Valuing Indigenous Australians and their cultures 5.2 Participation in decision making 5.3 Engagement with services 5.4 Case studies in governance 5.5 Indigenous language revitalisation and maintenance 5.6 Indigenous cultural studies 5.7 Participation in community activities 5.8 Access to traditional lands and waters	6.1 Antenatal care 6.2 Health behaviours during pregnancy 6.3 Teenage birth rate 6.4 Birthweight 6.5 Early childhood hospitalisations 6.6 Injury and preventable disease 6.7 Ear health 6.8 Basic skills for life and learning	7.1 Teacher quality 7.2 School engagement 7.3 Transition from school to work	8.1 Access to primary health care 8.2 Potentially preventable hospitalisations 8.3 Potentially avoidable deaths 8.4 Tobacco consumption and harm 8.5 Obesity and nutrition 8.6 Oral health 8.7 Mental health 8.8 Suicide and self-harm	9.1 Employment by full time/part time status, sector and occupation 9.2 Indigenous owned or controlled land and business 9.3 Home ownership 9.4 Income support	10.1 Overcrowding in housing 10.2 Rates of disease associated with poor environmental health 10.3 Access to clean water and functional sewerage and electricity services	11.1 Alcohol consumption and harm 11.2 Drug and other substance use and harm 11.3 Juvenile diversions 11.4 Repeat offending 11.5 Community functioning

Note: Numbers beside indicator names refer to section numbers in the report.

The June 2011 Census data estimates that around 3 percent of the Australian population are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin. Some Indigenous Australians experience little or no disadvantage while others are highly disadvantaged. Outcomes vary markedly by geography, age, sex and other socioeconomic factors. For instance, for most indicators, outcomes for Indigenous people worsen as remoteness increases.

The Report suggests it is important to consider the factors that have affected the outcomes, and reminds us that as well as the immediate social and cultural causes, the history of European invasion and settlement continues to have a deep impact.

Interaction between measures

Section 13 of the Report details the interactions between measures of wellbeing showing that a particular group in particular circumstances may have better outcomes. Identifying these groupings will enable Indigenous people and governments to effectively target policies / outcomes to improve outcomes.

The Report identifies some particular associations between education and other outcomes including employment, and between employment and other outcomes.

▶ **Level of education is associated with positive outcomes including employment:** there were strong associations between having a post-school qualification and positive outcomes such as employment, higher incomes, and living in uncrowded households.

▶ **Employment is associated with positive outcomes**: those who were employed were more likely than those who were unemployed to have higher incomes, live in uncrowded households and were less likely to be a daily smoker.

▶ **Remote versus non remote**: the proportion with a non-school qualification who were employed and had high incomes was similar in remote and non-remote areas, but for employment versus non-employment, some outcomes varied by remoteness.

Key Indicators and trends

Prevention and early intervention lie at the heart of the OID Report framework, and the focus is on encouraging action in strategic areas that will lead to improvements.

The Report uses the following approach to assessing change over time.

▶ The key consideration was the change in outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders not the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

▶ Change overtime has been assessed using the latest data with the earliest available data for each indicator. This means the time period is different for different indicators.

▶ If the apparent change was not statistically significant then it was recorded as no change.

▶ The focus has been on the main measures identified for each indicator.

► No trend is identified where it is not clear whether there is an observed change.

The Report deliberately chooses to aggregate the data at a national level to ensure the underlying causes of Indigenous disadvantage are being addressed. However, the Report acknowledges that outcomes do vary by other factors.

There are 52 indicators used in the Report. Of these indicators, 51 provide quantitative measures and the other indicator, 'Case studies in governance', provides a qualitative measure. The table below provides examples of areas of change.

Improved	No change	Decline
Improvements in early child development, Year 12 attainment, transition from school to work, employment and access to traditional lands	*No or little change in areas of family and community violence, , Indigenous languages, and education (reading, writing & numeracy)*	*Decline for some areas in mental health, substance abuse and crime*
Since 1998 mortality rate for 0>1 year olds has gone down from 14 to 6 deaths per live 1000 births.	Rates of family and community violence were unchanged scoring around 22%. (from 2002 – 2015).	The proportion of adults reporting psychological distress increased from 27% to 33% with self-harm leading to hospitalization increasing by 56% (from 2002 – 2015).
Year 12 Attainment Education improvements included increases in the portion of 20-24 year olds completing Year 12 and above (from 2008 – 2015)	Portions of people learning and speaking Indigenous languages remained unchanged (from 2008 – 2015).	Substance abuse increased from 23% to 31% (from 2002 to 2015)
Improvement for 20 – 64 year olds attaining or working towards post-schooling qualifications (from 2002 – 2015).	There were some increases in reading, writing and numeracy but overall the changes are classified as 'unclear'. (from 2008 to 2015)	Adult imprisonment increased 77% (from 2000 & 2015).
Proportion of adults whose income was from employment increased from 32% to 43% (from 2002 – 2015). Household incomes increased over this period.		Juvenile detention decreased. However an Indigenous Jarjum is 24 times more likely to be imprisoned then a non-Indigenous youth.
Proportion of adults recognizing Traditional Lands increased from 72% to 74% (from 2002 – 2015).		

The diagram below shows the COAG Targets, the COAG Headline Indicators and the Strategic Areas for Action, and uses the indicators against each of these to show the amount of change.

Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage:
Key Indicators 2016 — trends in national outcomes

COAG targets and headline indicators

COAG Targets		
✓	4.1	Life expectancy
✓	4.2	Young child mortality
?	4.3	Early childhood education
?	4.4	Reading, writing and numeracy
➖	4.5	Year 1 to 10 attendance
✓	4.6	Year 12 attainment
?	4.7	Employment

Headline Indicators		
✓	4.8	Post-secondary education — participation and attainment
➖	4.9	Disability and chronic disease
✓	4.10	Household and individual income
?	4.11	Substantiated child abuse and neglect
➖	4.12	Family and community violence
✗	4.13	Imprisonment and juvenile detention

Strategic areas for action

Governance, leadership and culture	Early child development	Education and training	Healthy lives	Economic participation	Home environment	Safe and supportive communities
5.1 Valuing Indigenous Australians and their cultures (DG)	6.1 Antenatal care (✓)	7.1 Teacher quality (DG)	8.1 Access to primary health care (?)	9.1 Employment by full time/part time status, sector and occupation (✓)	10.1 Overcrowding in housing (✓)	11.1 Alcohol consumption and harm (➖)
5.2 Participation in decision making (DG)	6.2 Health behaviours during pregnancy (✓)	7.2 School engagement (DG)	8.2 Potentially preventable hospitalisations (?)	9.2 Indigenous owned or controlled land and business (✓)	10.2 Rates of disease associated with poor environmental health (?)	11.2 Drug and other substance use and harm (✗)
5.3 Engagement with services (✓)	6.3 Teenage birth rate (✓)	7.3 Transition from school to work (✓)	8.3 Potentially avoidable deaths (✓)	9.3 Home ownership (✓)	10.3 Access to clean water and functional sewerage and electricity services (➖)	11.3 Juvenile diversions (DG)
5.4 Case studies in governance*	6.4 Birthweight (✓)		8.4 Tobacco consumption and harm (✓)	9.4 Income support (✓)		11.4 Repeat offending (➖)
5.5 Indigenous language revitalisation and maintenance (➖)	6.5 Early childhood hospitalisations (?)		8.5 Obesity and nutrition (?)			11.5 Community functioning (➖)
5.6 Indigenous cultural studies (DG)	6.6 Injury and preventable disease (?)		8.6 Oral health (DG)			
5.7 Participation in community activities (?)	6.7 Ear health (✓)		8.7 Mental health (✗)			
5.8 Access to traditional lands and waters (✓)	6.8 Basic skills for life and learning (✓)		8.8 Suicide and self-harm (✗)			

Legend:
- ✓ The main measure has shown progress
- ➖ No significant change
- ✗ The main measure has shown regress
- DG Data Gap
- ? Results are unclear
- *Not applicable (case studies only)

Number beside indicator refers to section numbers in main report.
Code for each indicator determined using criteria on previous page.
Timeframes for trend assessment differ across indicators.

Education and Training – What works

The OID Report provides information on 'what works' for each of the seven strategic areas for action. In this review, we have looked at the information provided for the Education and Training area. The information for 'what works' for Education and Training draws on the PC's June 2016 Report on Indigenous Primary School Achievement (see Stronger Smarter Research Review [2]).

The COAG target of Reading, Writing and Numeracy

Comparing 2008 to 2015, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieving at or above the National Minimum Standard (NMS) increased for Years 3, 5 and 7 for Reading, and for Years 5 and 9 for Numeracy. The OID Report classifies this as 'results are unclear.'

The Report notes that Indigenous students start school at a disadvantage:

- ▶ they have lower levels of access to, and participation in early childhood education
- ▶ they have less access to home educational resources, and
- ▶ their parents tend to have lower levels of education.

In addition:

- ▶ On average Indigenous students have higher rates of later arrival, absence for consecutive months of schooling, and multiple changes of school.

The Report quotes the PC 2016 Indigenous Primary School Achievement about 'what works' as including:
- ▶ effective use of data
- ▶ high expectations, including a student's expectations of him or herself
- ▶ positive student wellbeing – which facilitates engagement
- ▶ strong student-teacher relationships
- ▶ supportive school and system leadership
- ▶ cultural recognition, acknowledgement and support.

As two examples, the OID Report mentions the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy Initiative of the Class, Club and Culture domains, but notes that the June 2016 Queensland Department of Education and Training review recommended broadening the teaching and learning approaches to include contextualized curriculum to meet the diverse needs of students in Aurukun.

QuickSmart and ABRACADABR are also mentioned as for literacy and numeracy literacy and numeracy programs that have had some success for Indigenous students.

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[2] http://strongersmarter.com.au/indigenous-primary-school-achievement/

Indicators

The Indicators for Education and Training (Chapter 7) are:

▶ **teacher quality** – a key determinant of student outcomes but defining and measuring teacher quality is difficult

▶ **student engagement** – defining and measuring student engagement with schooling is complex, research suggests that relevant dimensions include positive self-identity, belonging, participation, and attendance

▶ t**ransition from school to work**— the transition from school to work is a critical period. Young people who are actively engaged in education and training, or employed are at a lower risk of long term disadvantage.

Teacher quality – Key messages

- Teacher quality is considered the most important 'in-school' influence on student educational outcomes.
- However, there is currently no nationally agreed measure of teacher quality.

The Report describes highly effective teachers are those who:

▶ create an environment where all students are expected to learn successfully

▶ have a deep understanding of the subjects they teach

▶ direct their teaching to student needs and readiness

▶ provide continuous feedback to students about their learning

▶ reflect on their own practice and strive for continuous improvement.

The particular characteristics of quality teachers of Indigenous students can include cultural awareness, awareness of individual student needs and setting ambitious learning goals. Increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers could help foster student engagement and improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

School engagement – Key messages

- Student engagement with school and learning is essential to achieving improved educational outcomes.
- There is currently no nationally agreed definition of school engagement.

From the literature, the Report identifies the following as being important for Indigenous student engagement.

▶ **positive self-identity** — including feelings about one's self and culture. A positive sense of culture was positively related to school engagement.

- **belonging** — including both broad cultural connectedness, and group connectedness (with peers), which is closely linked to self-identity

- **participation** — including choosing to be actively involved in learning tasks

- **attendance** — including being present at school. However, merely being present did not mean that a student was engaged in school, and conversely, absenteeism did not mean that a student was not engaged (for example, cultural reasons for absences could mean a student is engaged in learning that is important to their self-identity and belonging).

- **confidence in ability** — performance in maths and science was strongly associated with self-efficacy, and positively correlated with self-concept. On average, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students reported significantly lower levels of confidence in their abilities.

Transition from school to work - Key messages

- Young people who do not successfully make the transition from education to work are at risk of long-term disadvantage.

- The gap in workforce engagement closes with education level – for Indigenous Australians with a Bachelor degree or above, workforce participation is similar to non-Indigenous students.

- Between 2002 and 2014-15, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 17–24 year olds in post-school education, training or employment has increased.

Low educational achievement and poor decisions about learning can particularly disadvantage young people entering the labour market.

Governance – What works

The Closing the Gap Clearinghouse identified the following high level principles and practices that underpin successful programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. These success factors are closely related to the six determinants of good governance described in Chapter 5 of the OID Report.

- flexibility in design and delivery so that local needs and contexts can be taken into account

- community involvement and engagement

- building trust and relationships

- a well-trained and well-resourced workforce, with an emphasis on retention of staff

- continuity and coordination of services.

Summary of 'Key Points' from the Report

▶ Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have improved in some of the areas, including some COAG targets. In Education, the area of improvement is in

  o the proportions of Indigenous 20-24 year olds completing Year 12

  o the proportion of 20-64 year olds with or working towards post-school qualifications

▶ There is clearly more work to be done within education to improve outcomes.

  o Year 1 to 10 attendance is not improving.

  o Results for reading, writing and numeracy are unclear.

▶ Level of education has a relationship with other factors including employment. Employment then also has a relationship with other factors relating to wellness.

▶ The things that matter in education are teacher quality and school engagement, but for both there is no commonly agreed definition or measure. The Report provides some ideas about what these both involve, and all relate to the Stronger Smarter Approach (i.e. positive self-identity, positive sense of culture, and sense of belonging).

▶ The things that matter in governance also relate to the Stronger Smarter Approach (i.e. local solutions, community engagement, building trust and relationships).

▶ The data alone cannot tell the complete story about the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, nor can it fully tell us why outcomes improve (or not) in different areas. The Report has included case studies of 'things that work', but they note that the relatively small number of case studies included reflects a lack of rigorously evaluated programs in the Indigenous policy area.

Stronger Smarter Recommendations and Provocations

▶ The OID Report suggests there are gaps in the information about 'what works' in relation to teacher quality and school engagement. The Report notes that case studies are important to tell the complete story, and that more case studies are needed. There are comprehensive research links and insights that the PC could gain from deeper dialogue and collaboration with the Stronger Smarter Institute, and there is an opportunity for the Institute to provide case studies from schools who are implementing a Stronger Smarter Approach.

▶ An overwhelming and consistent message from expert Indigenous panelists was that the process had to be strength based and move away from referring to Indigeneity with a deficit focus. This included expressing negative indicators in the

positive and looking at what works best. As the forerunner in Indigenous education practice and process development underpinned by a strengths-based framework, the Institute is the best poised and has the deepest pool of participants to draw from and provide insight into a strength-based approach to Indigenous education.

▶ The Report's direction and articulation of the Indigenous voice also speaks to the growing Indigenous Australian research voice of and on our identity construction. To this point we would signal the latest field research conducted by Indigenous quantitative leads, Maggie Walter and Chris Anderson. Their work on 'nahra kati' or 'good numbers' goes a significant way in redefining and repositioning Indigenous quantitative data analysis away from the production of a 'gaps' conversation and direction (Walter, M. & Anderson, C. 2013).

The Stronger Smarter metastrategies support the Research Paper's recommendations

Using a qualitative mapping technique, the Institute has gauged which "targets" and "areas of action" relate to the Stronger Smarter Metastrategies.

▶ *Meta-strategy 1: Acknowledging, embracing and developing a positive sense of identity in schools* – The report notes that a positive sense of culture was positively related to school engagement.

▶ *Meta-strategy 3: 'High expectations' leadership to ensure 'high expectations' classrooms, with 'high expectations' teacher/student relationships:* Teacher quality is considered the most important 'in-school' influence on student educational outcomes. This includes teachers who create an environment where all students are expected to learn successfully and who direct their teaching to individual student needs.

▶ *Meta-strategy 5: Innovative and dynamic school staffing models in complex social and cultural contexts:* Increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers could help foster student engagement and improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

References

Walter, M. & Anderson, C. 2013. Indigenous Statistics: A Quantitative Research Methodology. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.

See http://strongersmarter.com.au/reading-reviews/ for further reading reviews.