

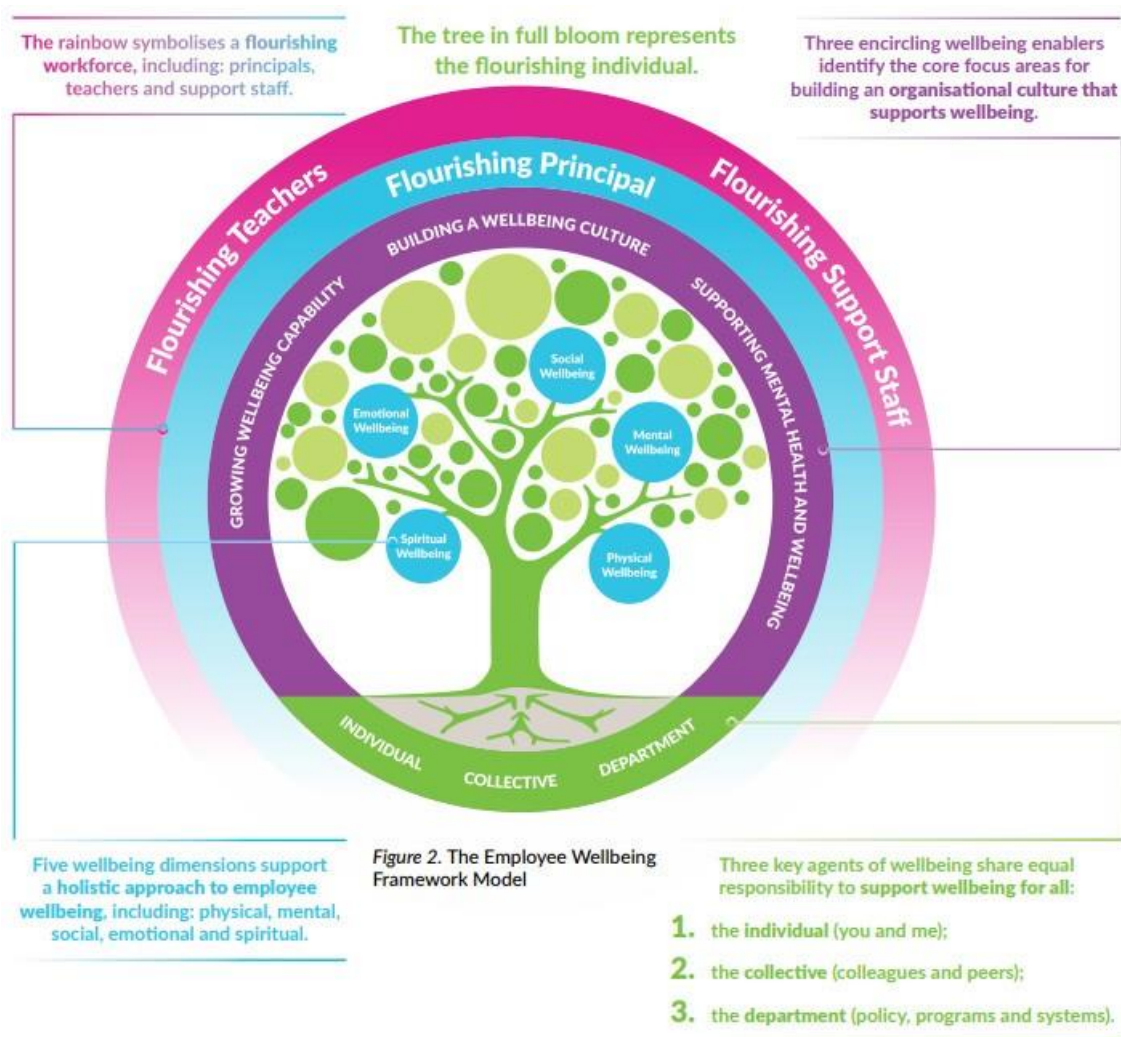
The Northern Territory Teacher Wellbeing Strategy

A case study
for the national
strategy to address
the abuse of
teachers, school
leaders and other
school staff.

Developed by the Northern Territory Department of Education (the Department), the Northern Territory Teacher Wellbeing Strategy 2019-22 (the NT Teacher Wellbeing Strategy) has the vision “to build an agency-wide culture of wellbeing that supports our school improvement agenda and our teachers” and sets the direction for the NT Government’s efforts to improve the wellbeing of teachers in schools across the Territory.

The NT Teacher Wellbeing Strategy is underpinned by the Department’s *Employee Wellbeing Framework*, shown below, which represents its commitment to, and vision for the wellbeing of all employees.

The Wellbeing Framework Model aims to build a culture of wellbeing that spans both schools and communities. Building a culture of wellbeing is a vital contributor towards the retention of quality teachers and school leaders. This includes supporting mental health and wellbeing in the present, as well as growing wellbeing capabilities for the future, and acknowledging that when teachers are at their best, students are at their best.



Employee wellbeing, characterised by a flourishing workforce, is seen as the key to the success of students in the Northern Territory, and underpins the commitment of the Department to a strong, equitable public school system that provides every child the opportunity to engage, grow and achieve.

Unpacking the Strategy

To have a significant impact on teacher wellbeing, the NT Teacher Wellbeing Strategy identifies a broad range of priority areas and actions to be taken at the system level. It acknowledges that teacher wellbeing may be impacted and affected by a range of factors such as personal and professional challenges, workload, changing contexts and relationships, and critical incidents.

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There was a strong focus on creating conditions that allowed wellbeing to thrive, and an understanding that in order to create or enable positive wellbeing we needed to create the conditions within the agency that were needed. A culture shift needed to happen.

Stakeholder

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Developing the NT Teacher Wellbeing Strategy

In developing the NT Teacher Wellbeing Strategy the Department was committed to undertaking significant consultation with teachers and utilising available research in the development of the NT Teacher Wellbeing Strategy. The results of *The Northern Territory Teachers' Occupational Health and Wellbeing Survey* provided the foundation for the development of the NT Teacher Wellbeing Strategy and, alongside direct engagement with teachers, heavily influenced the development of the priority areas and actions.

The collaborative, co-design approach that the Department brought to the development of the NT Teacher Wellbeing Strategy ensured that teacher's voices were front and centre throughout the development of the strategy, which was pivotal in developing a deeper understanding of the enablers and inhibitors of teacher wellbeing.

The Northern Territory Teachers' Occupational Health and Wellbeing Survey – 2019

Following the launch of the Principal Wellbeing Framework in 2017, the Department broadened their focus to encompass teacher wellbeing. The Department surveyed their entire school-based teaching workforce to build a comprehensive understanding of the occupational health and wellbeing of teachers in schools. This survey, known as the Northern Territory Teachers' Occupational Health and Wellbeing Survey was conducted on behalf of the Department by the Australian Catholic University, and led by Associate Professor Phil Riley.

From the survey, the Department received a system-level, de-identified report which included recommendations to inform future actions, and enabled the Department to establish a more comprehensive picture of teacher wellbeing in schools across the Territory. Government school-based teachers who participated in the survey also received an individual confidential wellbeing report, which allowed them to understand and respond to their own wellbeing needs.

Teacher engagement

Following the administering of the survey, five externally facilitated "Online Teacher Wellbeing Engagement" sessions were offered to all government school-based teachers. The purpose of these sessions was to provide teachers with an opportunity to collectively contribute their ideas in an engaging, respectful and future focussed discussion about teacher wellbeing in the NT. Each session was recorded for later analysis, with all statements de-identified and viewed exclusively by a discrete project team so that themes could be accurately drawn from the sessions. Insights from this discussion were taken forward and used to guide the development of the NT Teacher Wellbeing Strategy.

Cross-agency commitment

Next, Department executives and educators were consulted to develop, refine and commit to the priority areas and actions of this strategy, based on evidence and themes from both the survey and the Teacher Wellbeing Engagement Sessions.

This consultation was essential for the strategy to be successful as it built commitment for implementation at the individual, collective and organisational levels. This whole of agency commitment to improving teacher wellbeing that has been built also ensures that areas of the Department do not work within silos, but rather that there is shared ownership and ongoing co-design of actions throughout the Department.

Co-design, cross-agency commitment and shared ownership of this work not only encourages commitment to implementation, but further ensures that the policy designed utilises the best available expertise and is fit for purpose and meaningful in practice.

Reflections and learnings – the importance of data

Data and evidence from research and consultation has been the most valuable component at each stage of the development of the Strategy. The *NT Teachers Occupational Health and Wellbeing Survey* has guided the development of this work, providing a single point of truth and a consistent, evidence-based picture of the prevalence of abuse and levels of teacher wellbeing within the Northern Territory.

As the NT Teacher Wellbeing Survey provides clear insight into what is occurring for teachers and what is happening at the school level across the Northern Territory, it has enabled the Department to target the needs of teachers and continually learn and adapt their approach to supporting school staff.

The Department will conduct a second survey at the end of 2022 to measure the wellbeing of teachers and to gather trend data needed to measure the impact of the strategy over time.

It is hoped that through focus on the use of data and the adoption of a co-design approach, the actions and learnings from the strategy will benefit not only school leaders, teachers and students, but also the teaching profession, and the broader school community. This includes highlighting the importance of student and community engagement and working to support parents and the community to better understand the role of the teacher.

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The evidence is the rigour of your strategy. With a strong evidence base to build upon there is no question of what the situation is or the necessity of the approach.

Stakeholder

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Future work

The Department will continue to work to understand challenges impacting teachers from a wellbeing perspective. This includes gaining further insights into challenges related to unbalanced teaching and learning time and a greater understanding of administrative burden and its impact on wellbeing in schools. This includes aligning with current best practice and leading this work at a system level as well as a willingness to collaborate nationally to address wellbeing challenges more broadly.

The Department has prioritised the development and introduction of a system wide *Code of conduct for parents and school visitors* backed by Department policy, with the aim to build a community culture underpinned by respectful behaviour. Ongoing consultation to enable the development of the code of conduct has been undertaken and this project is nearing completion. Significant progress has also been made regarding the priority action of providing wellbeing conversations for teachers, with the trial implementing during 2021 alongside an external evaluation of its impact.