

Summary Report

NTCOGSO

COVID-19

Survey

7 April 2020

Introduction

In response to the large number of enquiries from concerned school communities regarding COVID-19, the Executive of NTCOGSO prepared a survey to gather and collate concerns experienced by NT school communities. Importantly, the Executive also sought feedback from school stakeholders as to how their issues or concerns could be addressed.

This summary report relates to responses received from 27 March to 2 April 2020. Included is an overview to the respondent participation and level of concern related to the school community and future delivery of learning (Q6), which was the survey question receiving the most detailed response.

Survey Participation

*Table 1 Role of respondent (Q1)**

Role	Combined Responses	
Parent/Carer	149	59%
SRB Member	54	22%
Teacher	78	31%
Principal	24	10%
Student	1	0%
Other	7	3%

Table 2 Region of school (Q2)

Region	Response	
Barkly	13	5%
Darwin	102	41%
East Arnhem	11	4%
Katherine	27	11%
Palmerston / Rural	66	26%
Southern	32	13%
Total	251	100%

Table 3 Source of school funding (Q3)

Funding	Response	
Public	208	83%
Independent	28	11%
Catholic	15	6%
Total	251	100%

Table 4 Remoteness of School (Q4)

Remoteness	Response	
Urban / Rural	202	80%
Remote	49	20%
Total	251	100%

*Table 5 Years of Education (Q5)**

Years of Education	Response	
Preschool / FAFT / CFC	133	53%
Primary	181	72%
Middle	94	37%
Secondary	79	31%

Note:

- Q1 - Role of respondent and Q5 - Years of education, allowed respondents to select all options that applied. Therefore, totals do not sum to 100%.*
- School Representative Body (SRB)
- Families as First Teachers (FAFT)
- Child and Family Centres (CFC)

Level of Concern

Table 6 Level of concern relating to school and the future delivery of learning (Q6)

Types		Sub-types		Description
Students	34%	ICT Access	32%	Hardware and/or connectivity
		Impact to Learning	17%	Impact on student's learning
		Resource Suitability	14%	With ref to diversity of subjects & students
		Student Engagement	10%	Engagement for remote learning
		Student Wellbeing	8%	Impact to student's wellbeing
		Social Connections	6%	Access community and social learning
		Teacher Access	6%	To support remote learning
		Differentiated Teaching	6%	Needs for the spectrum of learners
		Food Security	2%	Breakfast club/canteen-vulnerable students
Staff	20%	Staff Wellbeing	28%	Teacher mental health and wellbeing
		Staff Health	26%	Potential exposure to COVID-19
		Staff Workload	21%	To support 2 modes of learning at once
		Staff PD	11%	To support new modes of learning
		Staff Prep Time	10%	Time to prepare for Term 2
		Teacher Parents	5%	Teachers who are also parents
DoE/Decision makers	20%	Insufficient Measures	36%	With reference to current measures
		Lack of Clarity	35%	With reference to communication
		DoE Expectations	15%	Response or communication of expectations
		Support for ESWs	14%	Support for Essential Service Workers
Schools	9%	Hygiene/Distancing	55%	Hygiene & social distancing in schools
		Resource Production	17%	Ability to produce resources for Term 2.
		Budget Impact	9%	Impact to school budgets
		Engagement with SRB	9%	School engagement with SRB
		Community Safety	7%	With potential to impact on staff
		Staff Turnover	3%	Resulting from COVID-19 stressors
Families	13%	Vulnerable Families	35%	Vulnerable/at risk families
		Parental Capacity	29%	Capacity or skill of caregivers
		Parent Support	20%	Level of support to caregivers
		Parent Availability	9%	Availability of caregivers working from home
		ESL Resources	8%	Students/caregivers who are ESL/EALD.
Non-issue	3%	No Concerns	3%	No concerns

Percentages have been rounded and may not total to 100%.

Key themes

Lack of clarity: 'Lack of clarity' and 'insufficient measures' were dominant throughout the survey responses. A significant proportion of respondents called for further restrictions to contain

the spread of COVID-19, many simply saying 'close schools now'.

Ultimately, this decision will be made by state and territory governments in consultation with the Commonwealth and leading health experts.

Respondents were clearly aware that various measures are in discussion for the delivery of Term 2 and the lack of clarity or uncertainty has impacted the whole school community.

“I am just keen for a choice to be made for Term 2 about how school will be delivered as this will affect my employment. It would be just nice to know either way so we can make plans on how to ensure school and work commitments can be maintained in the foreseeable future.” - Caregiver -

ICT Access: The use of devices to support remote learning with concerns principally related to

- The unknown requirement for students to have devices
- The disadvantage posed to low-socioeconomic communities
- That appropriateness of simply providing devices to people living in highly disadvantaged and overcrowded households
- Lack of Wi-Fi coverage and the impact of high demand on available bandwidth

Hygiene and Social Distancing: The difficulty of implementing measures in schools given

- The movement of students through the school and crowding in classrooms
- Hygiene behaviours, particularly in young children
- An inability to secure necessary hygiene related products to maintain an appropriate level of cleanliness

Impact to Staff: A range of potential impacts to staff including

- Potential health consequences to teaching staff and close family members from the COVID-19

- Access to professional development to support remote learning
- The window of time available to prepare for Term 2
- Workload to deliver classroom and homebased learning simultaneously
- Mental health and wellbeing given the current extenuating circumstances and increased demands

ESL/EALD Communities: According to census data less than two thirds of Territorians speak only English at home and nearly one quarter live in a household where a non-English language is spoken in the home. The NT also has the lowest median age, therefore the number of ESL/EALD students is higher than census data suggests.

Several school staff took the opportunity to draw attention to the needs of the significant proportion of students who are ESL/EALD and particularly those whose caregivers are also ESL/EALD including

“How is information being provided to ESL families so that they can make informed decisions about sending their children to school?”

“EALD students who will not have parents or family members to help them complete the work.”

Remote Schools: A total of 18 principals, 17 teachers and 14 caregivers from remote schools that represent every region in the NT completed the survey. Their detailed responses give an insight to the regular challenges of delivering education in remote regions of the NT, now heightened with the added complexity of the COVID-19.

The respondents from remote schools demonstrated a deeper level of concern and higher need in relation to

- The need for clarity:

“We have received next to no answers being a school in a remote setting. We hear most information and updates via Facebook before we receive any information directly. Our communities want answers and so do we. We are remotely isolated and feel that absolutely no consideration has been taken towards addressing the complex needs of our situation.”

- Staff wellbeing:
“Staff are beyond stressed; some have already started to resign as a result ... It will be near impossible to recruit for next term.”
- Support to develop appropriate resources:
“Our students also have a lack of access to resources and spaces they might need to complete worksheet packs. The packs that have been created do not appear to take into consideration the needs of our ESL/EALD learners which is 100% of students at our school. The parents of our students are also EALD.”

While some urban schools indicated concerns relating to food security for their students, this concern was dominant among remote schools. As were other concerns related to the broader community’s basic needs in communities now cut off.

“If remote teachers are allowed to go into town, they should be able to access more than one or two items of each food source.... It has to be different for remote people if they have to head into Alice or make the food in community cheaper.”

The practical barriers to accessing food and basic supplies raised concerns of community members using backroads to avoid roadblocks and get into town.

“If there could be a delivery of basic supplies to the community and provided to stop the movement of people into town where they will be at risk of bring back infection to the vulnerable community. If the community could have food delivered by one provider so that only one person could drop off at a safe distance.”

The diversity of responses from remote schools indicates that each community is unique and a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach would be to the detriment of the individual school and broader community. This was consolidated by calls for local decision making, allowing strong SRB’s to be supported to implement a model of learning for Term 2 that best suits their community in consideration of the COVID-19 risk.

“We have a great plan around our local staff supporting education provision from home with support from our teaching staff who will remain in community. Our whole school community support this plan, we just need to know we will be supported logistically and financially from the dept.”

In addition to independent decision making, some remote schools called for incentives for remote staff and a flexible budget (based on enrolment, not attendance) to implement the most appropriate supports for their school community and student learning in response to COVID-19.

Lastly, survey respondents raised significant issues or concerns within their broader communities which require urgent prioritisation. These include more

coordinated and effective interagency support and improving community messaging where the risk of COVID-19 does not appear to have been fully realised.

Recommendations

Respondents were asked for ideas that could alleviate or address their concerns. The most noteworthy of these are summarised below. This list has been constructed on the basis of the suggestions provided and without prior knowledge of existing activities underway within schools or the Department of Education.

Agency supports

1. Provide clarity around the delivery of Term 2 as soon as possible to alleviate concern and confusion amongst families and staff.
2. Develop a school COVID-19 emergency response plan, like the disaster plans in place for cyclones.
3. Recognise community elders and local decision making for operation of remote schools during COVID-19.
4. Create a specialist team to reach out regularly to at risk or vulnerable families including facilitation of appropriate referrals to support services.
5. Consider extending school holidays to allow staff more time to prepare for Term 2.
6. Reduce expectations about the time spent on remote learning (compared with a normal classroom day).
7. Support teachers using specialist teams from the Department of Education to assure quality and consistency of learning materials and delivery.

8. Create a centralised phone line / hotline available for families to support general enquiries.
9. Consider software cited in the full list of recommendations including Yammer, Emodo, Facebook groups by school for parents to access support from each other.

School based supports

10. Survey families to identify who has access to requisite ICT resources and who does not.
11. Provide schools with a flexible cash budget based on enrolment (not attendance), that is reviewed regularly and administered through the GSB. Budget should be for the purpose of allowing schools to respond to the individual needs of their school community (i.e. ICT resources, practical resources for students, short term funding for additional staff, broadband vouchers for families, emergency relief / food supplies).

Remote supports

12. Support remote schools to implement arrangements that best suit their community, including decision making in conjunction with the School Representative Body (where applicable). This may include continuing school-based delivery while there is no local community transmission of COVID-19 and strong border controls to prevent the disease coming into community.
13. Where the decision has been made for classroom-based learning to cease, support remote schools for the provision of practical resources (e.g. coloured pencils, scrap books, readers, learning games), ongoing support for nutrition programs to vulnerable students (with regard to safe practice), support for local adaptation of

standardised resources to suit their student cohort.

14. Provide additional support and remuneration for remote teachers in consideration to their unique challenges.

ESL supports

15. Provide language translations of the DoE information that is being supplied across social media and through schools to families.
16. Provide additional supports for ESL families by the school or a centralised team in the Department for the provision of non-classroom-based learning.

Interagency support

17. Maintain a regular line of communication and coordination with health and social support services in remote communities to respond to emergent issues, i.e. support to alleviate restrictions to food supply, changes to restrictions on food items purchased in town for people travelling to remote community, support for food deliveries to communities, clarity about definition of “essential services”, provision of hygiene supplies.
18. Support all schools to assure the supply of school hygiene products in schools and provide guidance to schools regarding reasonable practice and expectations.
19. Establish forums for collaboration between schools and teachers.
20. Investigating the potential requirement for school boarding houses in town to remain open to accommodate students that come in from communities.

21. Seek advice from remote school principals about the effectiveness of COVID-19 community messaging to the broader community and flag areas requiring additional support or different measures with the appropriate agency to increase the effectiveness of community messaging.
22. Seeking advice from remote principals re potential emergency relief needs in the lead up to winter so that a response can be coordinated with another agency.
23. Coordinate between the Department of Health and Department of Education to provide webinar sessions/resources for caregivers of children with additional needs who may require additional therapeutic supports.
24. Provide advice to police or defence operating roadblocks to prevent unauthorised movement between communities by back roads.
25. Seek to ensure school bus operations are maintaining appropriate hygiene and can accommodate appropriate social distancing of passengers.

Staff supports

26. Support the mental health and wellbeing of all staff, including non-teaching staff through the provision of extended wellbeing supports and counselling services.
27. Have reasonable expectations for staff regarding workload particularly in light of a global health crisis causing widespread community anxiety.
28. Allow staff to self-identify and support those who have heightened concerns about classroom teaching because they are older, have a pre-existing health condition or live with someone who does.

Family supports

29. Teachers to email caregivers dates for assessments so they can support student learning.
30. Consideration to regional staging of online learning for different year levels given the potential for delays and interruptions due to high demand.
31. Support for families by establishing online or telephone support networks (e.g. Facebook Community Groups).
32. Consider establishing a peer mentoring model by inviting families who are confident in the new arrangements to mentor and provide support to those families that are less confident or vulnerable.