


# AUSTRALIAN DIRECTIONS IN INDIGENOUS EDUCATION 2005–2008



MINISTERIAL COUNCIL ON EDUCATION,  
EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING AND YOUTH AFFAIRS

AESOC SENIOR OFFICIALS WORKING PARTY ON INDIGENOUS EDUCATION



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Front cover painting:

'This painting represents pathways to greater learning.


The spiral is what life contributes, sometimes low, sometimes high.

The result of persistence is the bloom, growth through learning.

As a drop of water hits the surfaces the ripple effect is created, this is what is needed.'

Artist: Bronwyn Bancroft <http://www.bronwynbancroft.com/>

'I have always supported the education system at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, and firmly believe that education for Indigenous people is imperative to our development and confidence. It allows us to participate with equity in an often inequitable society.'



MCEETYA Australian Education Systems Officials Committee  
Senior Officials Working Party on Indigenous Education  
Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008

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# AESOC SENIOR OFFICIALS WORKING PARTY ON INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

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## Acknowledgements

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## Terms of reference

In May 2005, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) met to discuss a range of matters relating to Indigenous education and agreed that:

- (a) Improving outcomes for Indigenous students is the top priority issue for MCEETYA for the quadrennium 2005–2008.
- (b) An officials working party of the Australian Education Systems Officials Committee (AESOC) be established and chaired by Western Australia to develop mechanisms of closer collaboration, improved funding arrangements and effective programs to improve outcomes for Indigenous students.
- (c) In undertaking (b) the working party will need to:
  - (i) reduce to a manageable number the strategic priorities identified in the MCEETYA work plan for Indigenous education so that firm action can be taken during the quadrennium; and
  - (ii) consider early intervention programs, retention strategies, mentoring, teacher preparation strategies and local Indigenous community involvement.
- (d) The working party should ensure appropriate consultation and involvement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and complete its report and recommendations for consideration by ministers in December 2005.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The educational outcomes of Indigenous Australians have improved over recent decades. This is evident across a range of indicators on the enrolment, participation and achievement of Indigenous students in the early childhood education and school sectors. There has also been increased representation of Indigenous students in New Apprenticeships and strong growth of Indigenous enrolments in the vocational education and training (VET) and tertiary sectors.

Despite some gains, Indigenous Australians are yet to achieve equitable outcomes. Many Indigenous students continue to 'drop out' at or before Year 10 and far too few remain at school to complete Year 11 and Year 12, or its vocational equivalent. Of those who do complete Year 12, few obtain the scores needed to gain entry into university. Most Indigenous students, regardless of their completion year, leave school poorly prepared relative to their non-Indigenous counterparts. These outcomes limit the post-school options and life choices of Indigenous students, perpetuating intergenerational cycles of social and economic disadvantage.

The Indigenous population is young: 40 percent of Indigenous people are under 15-years-of-age compared with 20 percent of the non-Indigenous population. The Indigenous population is also growing at twice the annual rate projected for the rest of the population. Demographic forces, coupled with the raising of the school leaving age in some jurisdictions, mean that Indigenous students represent an increasing proportion of all students, particularly in government schools. There is therefore an urgent need to challenge the prevailing view that disparity in the educational outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students is 'normal' and that incremental gains are acceptable. Social polarisation arising from globalisation and unequal opportunities to join the 'knowledge economies' further underlines the critical importance of addressing the disparity in educational outcomes.

This paper provides recommendations to focus national effort over the 2005–2008 quadrennium. The recommendations seek to accelerate the pace of change by *engaging* Indigenous children and young people in learning. They are systemic as engagement will not occur, or be sustained, unless Indigenous education is 'built in' to become an integral part of core business.

The recommendations align with five domains in which engagement is critical: early childhood education; school and community educational partnerships; school leadership; quality teaching; and pathways to training, employment and higher education. They are informed by system knowledge of good practice and the extensive body of research on Indigenous education. They foster government to government collaboration and can be adapted by jurisdictions and schools to suit local contexts.

Implementation will provide systems and schools with the capacity to engage Indigenous children and young people in learning. It will also assist jurisdictions to meet proposed education and training outcomes of the national reform agenda (human capital stream) agreed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in February 2006 and address key indicators of Indigenous disadvantage endorsed by COAG in 2003.

## Early childhood education

- 1 Ministers agree to the principle that universal access to high quality early childhood education services for Indigenous children aged 0-5 is an essential precondition of 'school readiness' and successful participation in primary school education and recognise that enactment will require a national collaborative approach with cross-portfolio responses at the national, state and territory level.
- 2 To give effect to recommendation 1, ministers commit to make progress towards:
  - 2.1 providing all Indigenous children with access to two years of high quality early childhood education prior to participation in the first year of formal schooling; and
  - 2.2 developing, and fully implementing by 2012, educational programs for Indigenous children that respect and value Indigenous cultures, languages (including Aboriginal English) and contexts, explicitly teach standard Australian English and prepare children for schooling.
- 3 Ministers inform COAG of action being taken and that, as part of COAG's deliberations on early childhood development and growth, there is an urgent need to:
  - 3.1 provide Indigenous children aged 0-5 with universal access to high quality early childhood education services to improve 'school readiness' and successful participation in primary school education;
  - 3.2 revise accreditation standards and quality assurance processes to ensure that education components of early childhood services incorporate programs for Indigenous children that respect and value Indigenous cultures, languages (including Aboriginal English) and contexts, explicitly teach standard Australian English and prepare children for schooling; and
  - 3.3 provide opportunities for Indigenous parents and caregivers to develop skills to support their children's literacy acquisition and enhance their capacity to become active participants in their children's education.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## School and community educational partnerships

- 4 Ministers agree that formalised partnerships between schools and communities provide the opportunity to maximise the attendance, engagement and achievement of Indigenous students.
- 5 To give effect to recommendation 4, ministers commit:
  - 5.1 to phase in by 2010 agreements between schools with significant Indigenous student cohorts and local Indigenous communities, which:
    - a are expressed in plain language;
    - b enable broad community engagement in the selection of the school principal and teaching staff;
    - c enable community input into all school planning and decision-making processes;
    - d establish agreement on school goals and policies relating to matters such as attendance and academic achievement;
    - e provide greater flexibility in the development and adaptation of curricula, while maintaining high educational standards;
    - f provide flexibility in the operation of the school and use of resources;
    - g are referred to Indigenous education consultative bodies for information; and
    - h are sustainable over time, irrespective of change of principal, and re-negotiated to suit changing demands;
  - 5.2 develop by November 2006 an agreement template broad enough to be utilised in diverse jurisdictional and geographical contexts;
  - 5.3 inform COAG of the action they have taken and seek advice on how agreements between schools and communities might align with shared responsibility agreements;
  - 5.4 provide, in liaison with Indigenous education consultative bodies, appropriately structured leadership training for community members to enhance their capacity to assume educational leadership roles in their communities;
  - 5.5 ensure that schools, in partnership with parents/caregivers, deliver personalised learning to all Indigenous students that includes targets against key learning outcomes and incorporates family involvement strategies; and
  - 5.6 develop well-resourced information campaigns to promote the cross-cultural value of formal education in contemporary Australia to Indigenous parents/caregivers and families, encouraging them to hold high expectations of their children's academic performance and fostering their increased involvement in their children's education. Campaigns to be localised and based on market research.



## School leadership

- 6 Ministers affirm that strong, proactive and informed leadership at the school level is fundamental to establishing and maintaining a culture of learning that is inclusive of Indigenous students and enables their engagement and successful participation.
- 7 To give effect to recommendation 6, ministers commit to:
  - 7.1 include learning outcomes for Indigenous students as a key part of the accountability framework for every principal, including public reporting of these outcomes, and urge non-government school systems to adopt the same approach;
  - 7.2 review and, where appropriate, improve incentives (financial and/or non-financial) that attract and retain high performing principals to schools with significant Indigenous student enrolments;
  - 7.3 implement strategies that recognise those principals and leaders whose schools achieve excellent outcomes for Indigenous students;
  - 7.4 provide by 2008 accredited school leadership programs that focus on developing in school leaders the knowledge and skills to improve the academic achievement of Indigenous students; and
  - 7.5 provide opportunities for Indigenous teachers to develop the skills to become successful school principals and to take up other leadership positions within schools.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Quality teaching

- 8 Ministers agree that quality teaching in primary and secondary schools is essential to improving outcomes for Indigenous students while fostering in them a strong sense of identity as successful learners and as Indigenous Australians.
- 9 To give effect to recommendation 8, ministers commit to:
  - 9.1 provide by 2010 pre-service and in-service professional learning accredited by teaching accreditation authorities to:
    - a ensure that school leaders and teachers have the cultural understandings to significantly improve outcomes for Indigenous students;
    - b enable teachers to explicitly teach literacy to Indigenous students, including those for whom standard Australian English is a second language or dialect; and
    - c enable teachers to adopt pedagogical approaches that result in high levels of academic expectation and achievement by Indigenous students across all learning areas;
  - 9.2 ensure that professional learning at recommendations 7.4 and 9.1(a) is a prerequisite for appointment or contract renewal as a principal and incorporated into performance agreements of existing principals; that professional learning at 9.1(a) is a prerequisite for appointment or contract renewal as a teacher; and that professional learning at 9.1(a), (b) and (c) is incorporated into performance agreements and/or duty statements of existing teachers;
  - 9.3 provide support to develop data and assessment literacy in school leaders and teachers to support evidence-based improvement planning; and
  - 9.4 develop strategies to attract and retain high quality teachers, especially in regional and remote communities with high Indigenous student enrolments.

## Pathways to training, employment and higher education

- 10 Ministers agree that supplementary measures supporting Indigenous students through pathways into training, employment and higher education are pivotal to improving post-school transitions and breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty and disadvantage.
- 11 To give effect to recommendation 10, ministers commit to:
  - 11.1 develop and implement mentoring, counselling and work readiness strategies by 2007 that provide culturally inclusive and intensive support to Indigenous students from the commencement of secondary schooling into post-school pathways. Strategies to be integrated with existing career transition services and include the development of individual pathway plans;
  - 11.2 improve vocational learning opportunities for Indigenous students from Year 10 onwards. Western Australian school-based traineeships provide an exemplar of good practice;
  - 11.3 expand in 2007 the provision of trade training infrastructure, particularly to publicly funded training providers, to ensure that Indigenous students have access to trade training in their own regions. Priority to be given to expansion in regions with industries that employ significant numbers of apprentices and tradespeople;
  - 11.4 develop strategies by 2007 to enable training and employment to be considered by negotiation partners in the development of Native Title, Indigenous land use and heritage agreements and mining leases;
  - 11.5 advise COAG of the need to develop transition initiatives from school to work to further study that:
    - a foster Indigenous student aspirations beyond CDEP;
    - b encourage existing CDEP participants to return to education and / or training; and
    - c engage students in remote school communities in individualised learning from Year 8 onwards that provides a range of relevant academic and vocational pathways, including traineeships and apprenticeships and opportunities for out-of-community work experience;
  - 11.6 expand partnerships between secondary schools, higher education institutions and Indigenous communities to develop strategies to attract, retain and successfully graduate Indigenous students across a broad spectrum of higher education courses; and
  - 11.7 seek advice from Indigenous education consultative bodies, the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council, the Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee and other strategic stakeholders on effective strategies and implementation arrangements to ensure that Indigenous communities and students are encouraged to engage successfully in higher education.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Enabling process

- 12 To give effect to recommendations 1 to 11, ministers commit to:
  - 12.1 request AESOC to map expenditure on Indigenous programs and, within this context, consider the financial implications of these recommendations and whether a re-focus is warranted;
  - 12.2 request AESOC to establish a working party to progress implementation and monitoring of these recommendations. The working party, to be chaired by Western Australia, will comprise senior officials from all education systems and a representative of Indigenous education consultative bodies. It will have strong Indigenous representation;
  - 12.3 request the MCEETYA Performance Measurement and Reporting Taskforce to review and refine indicative performance indicators and recommend reporting requirements;
  - 12.4 commission in 2006 a review and update of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy to include the engagement of students, their parents/caregivers and communities as a key objective and targets for the training and employment of Indigenous teachers;
  - 12.5 request the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision to report to COAG in 2012 on the implementation and outcome of these recommendations;
  - 12.6 recommend to the Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education that it consider making improved outcomes for Indigenous VET students a top priority for 2006–2008; and
  - 12.7 refer to AESOC additional issues in Indigenous education that the working party has identified in its concluding comments as requiring attention by existing taskforces to support the engagement of Indigenous students.

The educational outcomes of Indigenous Australians have improved over recent decades. This is evident across a range of indicators relating to the enrolment, participation and achievement of Indigenous students in both the early childhood education and school sectors. It is also evidenced by increased representation of Indigenous students in traineeships and apprenticeships and the strong growth of Indigenous enrolments in TAFE colleges, VET institutes and universities.

Despite gains, there is growing frustration amongst governments, educators and Indigenous leaders that progress has been slow and incremental. Many Indigenous students continue to 'drop out' at or before Year 10 and far too few remain at school to complete Year 11 and Year 12, or its vocational equivalent. Of those who do complete Year 12, few obtain the scores needed to gain entry into university. Most Indigenous students, regardless of their completion year, leave school poorly prepared relative to their non-Indigenous counterparts.

The response by education systems to the disparity in educational outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students has been to develop Indigenous specific intervention programs. While some of these programs have been highly successful, only a small proportion of the total population of Indigenous students is able to access them and the impact on overall outcomes has been limited.

The Indigenous population is young: almost half of the population is approaching school age or in the compulsory and post-compulsory school age cohort. The Indigenous population is also growing at twice the annual rate projected for the rest of the population. Demographic forces, coupled with the raising of the school leaving age in some jurisdictions, mean that Indigenous students represent an increasing proportion of all students, particularly in government schools. There is thus an urgent need to challenge the prevailing view that disparity in the educational outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students is 'normal' and that incremental gains are acceptable. The rapidly widening polarisation in society due to globalisation and unequal opportunities to join the 'knowledge economies' further underlines the critical importance of addressing the disparity in educational outcomes.

This paper provides recommendations to focus national effort over the 2005–2008 quadrennium. The recommendations seek to accelerate the pace of change by *engaging* Indigenous children and young people in learning. They are systemic as engagement will not occur, or be sustained, unless Indigenous education is 'built in' to core business.

The recommendations align with five domains in which engagement is critical: early childhood education; school and community educational partnerships; school leadership; quality teaching; and pathways to training, employment and higher education. They are informed by system knowledge of good practice and the extensive body of research on Indigenous education.

## INTRODUCTION

The recommendations foster government-to-government collaboration and can be adapted by education systems and schools to suit local contexts. They will provide systems and schools with the capacity to translate the MCEETYA *National statement of principles and standards for more inclusive schooling in the 21st century* and *A model of more culturally inclusive and educationally effective schools* into action. They will also play a key role in assisting jurisdictions to meet proposed education and training outcomes of the national reform agenda (human capital stream) agreed by COAG in February 2006, and address key indicators of Indigenous disadvantage endorsed by COAG in 2003. Education plays a key role in addressing Indigenous disadvantage. The 'joining-up' of education services with those of health, housing, child safety, justice and transport are being addressed through other forums.

The paper and its recommendation were informed through consultation with Indigenous Australians. These include members of the working party; the Senior Officials National Network on Indigenous Education; chairs of state and territory Indigenous education consultative bodies; the National Indigenous Council and the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council.

### Outcomes in Indigenous education

Indigenous students are widely dispersed across schools in remote, rural, regional and urban Australia. While Indigenous students represent a high percentage of enrolments in remote and community-based schools, the majority attend regional and urban schools where most of their peers are non-Indigenous. Some Indigenous students start school speaking standard Australian English, however, the majority will speak Aboriginal English (a non-standard dialect of English), a creole, one or more Indigenous languages or any combination of these as their first language.<sup>1</sup> Indigenous students are not homogeneous: they reflect the cultural, social and economic diversity of the communities in which they live. Schools are also diverse in terms of size, resources, staffing levels and the quality and retention of principals and teachers.

The *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training, 2004* (forthcoming), and reports of previous years highlight improvements in Indigenous education, while detailing the significant disparities that remain between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes. While national aggregated data presented in these reports masks the impact of Indigenous diversity on Indigenous educational outcomes, it provides a useful overall picture and indicator of the need for systemic change:

- There has been a significant rise in the Indigenous proportion of preschool enrolments in recent years. Nevertheless, approximately half of eligible 4-year-old Indigenous children do not enrol in preschool, although some will be in childcare arrangements where a preschool program is provided. The absence of equitable access means that Indigenous children are less 'school ready' and start formal education at a disadvantage.
- Disproportionate numbers of Indigenous students do not meet national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy at Years 3, 5 and 7—results are generally about 20 percent below the national average. Of grave concern is the fact that the proportion of Indigenous students who meet these benchmarks drops significantly from Year 3 to Year 7. Research attributes this drop to the difference between the acquisition of basic interpersonal communication skills in a new language (which takes about two years) and academic language proficiency (which takes around seven years). From preschool to Year 3, most learning is based on acquiring interpersonal communication skills. At Year 4, the focus changes to the acquisition of academic language proficiency. Without second language or dialect instruction at this point, students fall behind at increasing rates. Lack of academic achievement and loss of confidence in these early years mean that most Indigenous students never catch up.
- Indigenous students attend school less than their non-Indigenous peers, particularly in secondary school. 'Attending school matters. While it may be argued that the quality of the school experience is the key factor to educational participation, there is an inevitable point where the lack of attendance at school becomes the critical factor.'<sup>2</sup>
- Three out of ten Indigenous students leave school between Year 10 and Year 11, compared to one out of ten non-Indigenous students. This significantly reduces the number of Indigenous students who can successfully progress to post-compulsory education.

## WHY A NEW APPROACH IS NEEDED

- 39.5 percent of Indigenous students progressed to Year 12 in 2004 in comparison with 76.8 percent of other students. This is the best retention rate yet for Indigenous students. In general, however, Indigenous students who complete Year 12 are less likely than other students to achieve a Year 12 certificate or meet requirements for tertiary entrance. Additionally, Indigenous students are more likely to be enrolled in VET programs.
- In 2004, Indigenous students represented 2.5 percent of participants in New Apprenticeships and 3.3 percent of commencements. While this represents a considerable improvement on earlier years, Indigenous students were enrolled in lower level Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) qualifications: 30.8 percent at Certificate I and II, compared to 13.1 percent of non-Indigenous students; and 69.2 percent at Certificate III and above, compared to 86.9 percent of non-Indigenous students. Completion rates for Indigenous students in AQF Certificate III and above rose from 48.6 percent in 2003 to 54.7 percent in 2004. This compares to the non-Indigenous rate of 79.5 percent.

These outcomes continue to limit the post-school options and life choices of Indigenous students and perpetuate intergenerational cycles of social and economic disadvantage.



### Demographic imperative

The 2001 *Census of Housing and Population* shows that Indigenous Australians represent an estimated 2.4 percent of the total Australian population. Torres Strait Islanders comprise 11 percent of the Indigenous population.

The Indigenous population is widely dispersed across Australia: 30 percent of Indigenous people live in major cities; 20 percent in inner regional areas; 23 percent in outer regional areas; 9 percent in remote areas; and 18 percent in very remote areas.

Early family formation, high birth rates and low life expectancy mean that the Indigenous population has a much younger age structure than the non-Indigenous population, with twice the proportion of children aged 0–4 years and twice the proportion of people aged 15 years and under. Children under 15-years-of-age comprise 40 percent of the total Indigenous population (compared with 20 percent of the non-Indigenous population); people aged 15–24 comprise 18 percent (compared with 14 percent); and people 65-years-of-age and over represent 3 percent (compared with 13 percent).

The Indigenous population is expected to increase at an annual growth rate of at least 2 percent, which is twice the rate of growth projected for the rest of the population.

In 2003, Indigenous students represented almost 4 percent of total school enrolments across Australia. The overwhelming majority of these students (87 percent) were enrolled in government schools and were widely dispersed across these schools.

Demographic forces, coupled with the raising of the school leaving age in some jurisdictions, mean that Indigenous representation is increasing in all schools, particularly government schools. At the same time, the aging of the non-Indigenous population, and existing and predicted skills shortages, are opening up opportunities and demand for skilled Indigenous Australians to participate more fully in the labour market.

## WHY A NEW APPROACH IS NEEDED

### Indigenous education: 'built in' or 'bolted on'?

Gains in educational outcomes achieved by Indigenous students over recent decades are largely attributed to Indigenous specific intervention programs (including strategies, pilot projects and trials) that supplement mainstream effort to meet the specific learning needs of students. While some of these programs have been highly successful, only a small proportion of the total population of Indigenous students is able to access them.

Although invaluable, these programs have had unintended consequences. Indigenous education has come to be seen as peripheral rather than integral to core business. In addition, the funding of Indigenous education through special programs has led to dependence on short-term solutions. In other words, Indigenous education has been 'bolted on' rather than 'built in' to mainstream effort, becoming the province of specialists and committed individuals instead of systems as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

Historically, the policies and practices of Australian governments were predicated on the supposed 'inferiority' of Indigenous Australians. This has contributed to a tendency for systems and schools to devalue the educational potential of Indigenous students and to overlook the cultural, linguistic and social capital they bring to the classroom. While this 'deficit' view is now contested, the perception that Indigenous students are to blame for their poor educational outcomes lingers on. Disparity in educational outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students has come to be viewed as 'normal' and incremental change seen as acceptable.

The recommendations in this paper are systemic to ensure that Indigenous education and the lessons learnt from strategic intervention programs are 'built in' to core business to become everyone's business: departmental staff, principals, teachers, school staff, Indigenous students, parents/caregivers, families and communities.

This is a paradigm shift in how education systems and schools respond to the learning needs of Indigenous students. It moves away from explanations of educational failure that focus on the characteristics of individual children, their families and communities (the 'deficit' view) towards developing systems and schools that have the capacity to *engage* all students in learning, including Indigenous students:

*As we consider the plight of those students usually assumed to be 'at risk', we might well begin by recognizing that what put many of them in jeopardy are not just circumstances of birth or environment, but the school itself. They are at risk of failing not because they can't learn but because the school has not adequately engaged them ... when we make needed improvements in the way we educate all students, we won't need special programs for some students.<sup>4</sup>*

# ENGAGING INDIGENOUS CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN LEARNING

## Overview

Engagement in learning is critical to academic achievement and providing students with the understandings, knowledge, skills and confidence to move on into training, employment and higher education.

Engagement is a construct involving three dimensions: behavioural (involvement); affective (personal attachment to others, such as teachers and classmates); and cognitive (application to learning).<sup>5</sup> Engagement is critical because it makes a difference to academic achievement and fosters in students a sense of belonging and self-worth. In addition, 'engaged learners are doers and decision-makers who develop skills in learning, participation and communication that will accompany them throughout adulthood.'<sup>6</sup>

Engagement presupposes that teachers and students (and schools and communities) understand each other and that there is effective two-way communication. Most Indigenous students are not native speakers of standard Australian English. Their home language is usually Aboriginal English, a creole, one or more Indigenous languages or any combination of these. The home language, whether an Indigenous language or a contact language like Aboriginal English, not only carries the culture of Indigenous students but also encapsulates their identity. For schools to put standard Australian English in an oppositional relationship to the home language, for example, by making it the only recognised vehicle of oral communication in schools, will be to invite resistance, whether active or passive, on the part of Indigenous students. It follows that teachers need to develop an informed understanding of, at least, Aboriginal English to enable them to understand and communicate effectively with Indigenous students and to assist them in teaching literacy to students for whom standard Australian English is a second language or dialect.

Research and good practice identify five domains as critical to engaging Indigenous children and young people in learning: early childhood education; school and community educational partnerships; school leadership; quality teaching; and pathways to training, employment and further education. These domains are discussed below. The recommendations are systemic and can be adapted by jurisdictions and schools to suit local contexts.

# ENGAGING INDIGENOUS CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN LEARNING

## Domain 1: Early childhood education

*Around half of eligible Indigenous 4-year-old children are not enrolled in preschool, although some will be in childcare arrangements where a preschool program is provided. Indigenous children are thus less 'school ready' than their non-Indigenous peers and start formal education at a disadvantage.*

Early childhood is acknowledged as a period of critical physical, emotional, intellectual and social growth. Recent evidence from the neurological sciences suggests that 75 percent of brain development occurs during the first five years of life, much during the first three years.

Governments around the world are recognising the value of investing in early childhood education and the benefits that accrue for the child, the family and the community. High quality education programs in the early years have been shown to have a profound effect on children's development, influencing their ability to learn, their acquisition of pre-literacy and numeracy skills and their capacity to regulate emotions. They ease the transition to primary school and have a direct and positive impact on future educational, employment and health outcomes. They have also been shown to be cost-effective, reducing the need for remedial education and grade repetition. In the longer term, substantial cost savings arise from improved health and productivity and reduced expenditure on social services.

MCEETYA has long acknowledged the need for Indigenous children to have equitable access to preschool education and to achieve appropriate educational outcomes. While there has been a significant rise in the Indigenous proportion of preschool enrolments in recent years, it is estimated that approximately half of eligible Indigenous 4-year-old children do not enrol. Of equal concern is the fact that many Indigenous children who are enrolled in preschool do not acquire the same levels of literacy and numeracy skills as non-Indigenous children and consequently a much smaller percentage is assessed as ready for entry to school. Data suggests that this disparity is widening.

Culturally appropriate provision encourages preschool attendance and contributes to literacy and numeracy acquisition. Independent preschools, for example, including Indigenous controlled preschools which are major providers of preschool for Indigenous children, employ Indigenous staff and teachers, engage the community in decisions regarding the running of the school, recognise and build upon the children's social, linguistic and cultural capital and engage parents/caregivers in their children's learning.<sup>7</sup> Some encourage attendance by providing transport and breakfast clubs. In addition, children often enrol at the age of 3 years, thus benefiting from two years of preschool before entering school.

# ENGAGING INDIGENOUS CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN LEARNING

The positive link between quality early childhood education and later learning is irrefutable and widely acknowledged in recent work, including evidence-based research:

- The *2003 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)*, in which 43 countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) participated, showed that children who attend preschool for more than a year achieve much greater academic success in school than those with less preschool attendance.
- The *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Indicator Framework 2003*, endorsed by COAG, identifies the critical role of education, including early childhood education, in reducing disadvantage.
- The *Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey: Improving the Educational Experiences of Aboriginal Children and Young People* predicts that unless Indigenous children have access to appropriate and high quality early childhood education the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous educational outcomes will remain and continue to widen as Indigenous children progress through primary school. It also attests to the critical importance of explicitly teaching standard Australian English to Indigenous children who are learning English as a second language or dialect. Both groups have equally poor educational outcomes relative to students who speak standard Australian English as their first language.
- The provision of a minimum of one year of early childhood education prior to school entry, particularly for disadvantaged children, is supported in the *National Agenda for Early Childhood: A Draft Framework*.
- The recent national inquiry into the teaching of reading highlights the pivotal role of childcare and preschool in providing exposure to literacy and the development of pre-literacy skills. It also emphasises the need to improve teaching standards and engage parents and caregivers in the development of their children's literacy skills through the provision of programs, guides and workshops 'that acknowledge and build on the language and literacy that children learn in their homes and communities'.<sup>8</sup>

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## Recommendations

- 1 Ministers agree to the principle that universal access to high quality early childhood education services for Indigenous children 0-5-years-of-age is an essential precondition of 'school readiness' and successful participation in primary school education and recognise that enactment will require a national collaborative approach with cross-portfolio responses at the national, state and territory level.
- 2 To give effect to recommendation 1, ministers commit to make progress towards:
  - 2.1 providing all Indigenous children with access to two years of high quality early childhood education prior to participation in the first year of formal schooling; and
  - 2.2 developing and fully implementing by 2012 educational programs for Indigenous children that respect and value Indigenous cultures, languages (including Aboriginal English) and contexts, explicitly teach standard Australian English and prepare children for schooling.
- 3 Ministers inform COAG of action being taken and that, as part of COAG's deliberations on early childhood development and growth, there is an urgent need to:
  - 3.1 provide Indigenous children 0-5-years-of-age with universal access to high quality early childhood education services to improve 'school readiness' and successful participation in primary school education;
  - 3.2 revise accreditation standards and quality assurance processes to ensure that education components of early childhood services incorporate programs for Indigenous children that respect and value Indigenous cultures, languages (including Aboriginal English) and contexts, explicitly teach standard Australian English and prepare children for schooling; and
  - 3.3 provide opportunities for Indigenous parents and caregivers to develop skills to support their children's literacy acquisition and enhance their capacity to become active participants in their children's education.

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## Domain 2: School and community educational partnerships

*Engaging the local community in the future of Indigenous education is vital if there is to be a significant shift towards equality of educational outcomes.*

The development of genuine partnership, based on the principles of cross-cultural respect between the school and the Indigenous community, remains the primary platform to productive, stimulating and responsive highly effective schools servicing Indigenous students. Recent and past policy and program development at both national and state and territory levels has consistently and vigorously established and maintained this assertion. National and international research strongly supports the inherent benefits of schools and education systems working closely with Indigenous communities.

Indigenous communities can be found across Australia. Some Indigenous people live in discrete communities in remote areas, others form part of the larger general population within regional towns and centres, while others live in, and are dispersed throughout, metropolitan areas. Like all other communities, Indigenous communities are complex and diverse. Determining the educational provision that will maximise educational outcomes for Indigenous students of each community or sub-community group of Indigenous people requires careful consideration. This can only be achieved through teachers, schools and education systems working in an environment of trust, respect and equality with these Indigenous community and family groups.

Past practices of community consultation have had very limited success and a more formalised partnership is required between schools and their local Indigenous communities. Subject to the consent of the parties, a formal agreement should be negotiated between the local school and the local community that clearly articulates, for example, arrangements relating to community participation in school governance, expectations of student attendance and performance, and curriculum focus. In negotiating these agreements, decisions will be made on how to incorporate local knowledge, languages, aspirations and job opportunities into the curriculum; how to improve explicit linkages from school to VET, higher education and employment; and what strategies are needed to engage parents/caregivers and family members.

Community engagement in schooling also rests on the cultural exchange of knowledge. Most non-Indigenous educators have limited understanding of, and qualifications in, Indigenous education. Similarly, as recently highlighted by respected Indigenous educator, Dr. Paul Hughes, many in the Indigenous community have limited understanding of western educational systems of schooling and restricted views of their own Indigenous educational process and the linguistic code-switching required to move successfully between the two educational genres. Deeper understanding of both cultures requires specialised exposure to informal and structured articulated and accredited training. Adequate sharing of such deep understanding between professional educators and the Indigenous community is fundamental to enable exchange and resolution of complex and often mutually incompatible assumptions about education.

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## Recommendations

- 4 Ministers agree that formalised partnerships between schools and communities provide the opportunity to maximise the attendance, engagement and achievement of Indigenous students.
- 5 To give effect to recommendation 4, ministers commit:
  - 5.1 to phase in by 2010 agreements between schools with significant Indigenous students cohorts and local Indigenous communities, which:
    - a are expressed in plain language;
    - b enable broad community engagement in the selection of the school principal and teaching staff;
    - c enable community input into all school planning and decision-making processes;
    - d establish agreement on school goals and policies relating to matters such as attendance and academic achievement;
    - e provide greater flexibility in the development and adaptation of curricula, while maintaining high educational standards;
    - f provide flexibility in the operation of the school and use of resources;
    - g are referred to Indigenous education consultative bodies for information; and
    - h are sustainable over time, irrespective of change of principal, and re-negotiated to suit changing demands;
  - 5.2 develop by November 2006 an agreement template broad enough to be utilised in diverse jurisdictional and geographical contexts;
  - 5.3 inform COAG of the action they have taken and seek advice on how agreements between schools and communities might align with shared responsibility agreements;
  - 5.4 provide, in liaison with Indigenous education consultative bodies, appropriately structured leadership training for community members to enhance their capacity to assume educational leadership roles in their communities;
  - 5.5 ensure that schools, in partnership with parents/caregivers, deliver personalised learning to all Indigenous students that includes targets against key learning outcomes and incorporates family involvement strategies; and
  - 5.6 develop well-resourced information campaigns to promote the cross-cultural value of formal education in contemporary Australia to Indigenous parents/caregivers and families, encouraging them to hold high expectations of their children's academic performance and fostering their increased involvement in their children's education. Campaigns to be localised and based on market research.



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## Domain 3: School leadership

*'Leadership effects are second only to teacher effects in terms of their impact on student outcomes.'*<sup>9</sup>

The need for strong, proactive and informed leadership at the school level is fundamental to establishing and maintaining a culture of learning that is inclusive of Indigenous students and enables their engagement and successful participation. This culture will not emerge unless there is a shared commitment by all staff, engendered by school level leadership. School leaders play a crucial role in encouraging their colleagues to examine their practice and bring about cultural change within schools. Leaders are not there just to affirm good practice when they see it, but also to examine entrenched practices and attitudes that may be contributing to disparity in educational outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

It is useful at the outset to articulate the distinction between *leadership in Indigenous education* and *Indigenous leadership in education*.

*Leadership in Indigenous education* is the readiness to challenge educators and Indigenous students and communities about the pursuit of better outcomes for Indigenous children in schools. Ultimately, this is simply 'educational' leadership that should reasonably be expected from all educators who want to get the best out of every child regardless of their social and cultural context. *Indigenous leadership in education* is about Indigenous people in schools leading to ensure not only the pursuit of improved outcomes for Indigenous children but also that Indigenous identity is acknowledged and affirmed in schools through Indigenous studies programs and culturally responsive learning pedagogy.

In an ideal world, there should be no need for Indigenous people to lead in the pursuit of comparable student outcomes, because all educators should be concerned about it. However, this is not the case. Some educators find it easier to blame the social, linguistic and cultural context of learners, rather than shape and respond to those contexts in a meaningful way.

Recent research shows that positive change occurs when a school generates a culture and philosophy that will acknowledge and affirm Indigenous identity of students in the school and permeate this through instructional and learning programs that are designed to challenge, develop and embrace this positive sense of Indigenous identity. Strong, proactive and informed *leadership in Indigenous education* is required to generate such a culture and philosophy. Tenacious commitment and a deep understanding of a select number of issues are critical to leading schools to improved performance. These issues are:

- understanding how to:
  - challenge Indigenous identity  
(where it is seen as inconsistent with strong school performance);
  - develop Indigenous identity;
  - embrace Indigenous identity;
- creating a school and community culture of high expectations;
- developing and embracing Indigenous leadership in schools;

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- meaningfully engaging with Indigenous parents/caregivers and community agencies for educational change;
- developing a teaching workforce that can shape and respond professionally to the social and cultural context of Indigenous learners, rather than blaming it; and
- establishing and pursuing a sense of accountability for comparable outcomes for Indigenous students.

These issues should be at the centre of a dedicated leadership program, which, for the sake of credibility and authenticity, must be based on strong and current research and have academic acceptance.

## Recommendations

- 6 Ministers affirm that strong, proactive and informed leadership at the school level is fundamental to establishing and maintaining a culture of learning that is inclusive of Indigenous students and enables their engagement and successful participation.
- 7 To give effect to recommendation 6, ministers commit to:
  - 7.1 include learning outcomes for Indigenous students as a key part of the accountability framework for every principal, including public reporting of these outcomes, and urge non-government school systems to adopt the same approach;
  - 7.2 review and, where appropriate, improve incentives (financial and/or non-financial) that attract and retain high performing principals to schools with significant Indigenous student enrolments;
  - 7.3 implement strategies that recognise those principals and leaders whose schools achieve excellent outcomes for Indigenous students;
  - 7.4 provide by 2008 accredited school leadership programs that focus on developing in school leaders the knowledge and skills to improve the academic achievement of Indigenous students; and
  - 7.5 provide opportunities for Indigenous teachers to develop the skills to become successful school principals and to take up other leadership positions within schools.

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## Domain 4: Quality teaching

*'...the key message to be gained from educational effectiveness research is that quality teachers and their professional learning do make a difference in the classroom. It is not so much what students bring with them that really matters, but what they experience on a day-to-day basis in interaction with teachers and other students in classrooms that does.'*<sup>10</sup>

Quality teaching is recognised as a hallmark of success. The primary role of quality teaching is to enhance the learning environment of classrooms with pedagogical practice that fundamentally engages students in learning. Quality teaching is particularly responsive to Indigenous students' needs.

Many researchers working in Indigenous education have continually highlighted the importance of the quality of engagement between the teacher and the student as having the most profound effect on success. If we are to improve the educational outcomes of Indigenous students we must ensure the school is in a position to positively engage with them.

Australian research into quality teaching is derived from work conducted in the United States. Of particular note amongst these overseas studies was the success of students with intellectual disabilities exposed to high levels of intellectual quality and, of most importance to Indigenous students, the potential highlighted by researchers who found that:

*'Taken together, these results indicate that a diverse array of students benefit from participation in a classroom with high quality intellectual assignments (tasks). Both students with high and low prior achievement levels learn more over the course of an academic year than comparable students in classrooms with low quality assignments. In short, authentic intellectual assignments enrich instruction not only for able students, but for all students.'*<sup>11</sup>

Work in Australia has extended the dimension of 'intellectual quality' into 'problematic knowledge' and 'metalanguage', while the dimensions of quality teaching have been further developed to cover the important dimensions of the 'quality learning environment'. These include explicit quality criteria; engagement; social support; high expectations; student self-regulation; and student self-direction.

Of particular importance to the engagement of Indigenous students is the dimension of significance. It is this dimension that opens the gate to inclusive teaching practice. Significance refers to pedagogy that helps to make learning more meaningful and important to students. Such pedagogy draws clear connections with students' prior knowledge and identities, with contexts outside the classroom, and with multiple ways of knowing or cultural perspectives. Making education significant provides fundamental pathways into intellectual engagement and high order thinking opportunities for Indigenous students.

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All states and territories are now actively encouraged through the Australian Quality Teaching Program to move towards improvements in pedagogical practice that will lead to substantially enhanced outcomes for students across Australia. This national drive, and programs at the state and territory level, must specifically encourage the engagement of Indigenous students in learning. This includes facilitating their mastery of foundation skills such as literacy and numeracy.

Quality teaching is integral to overall school improvement: teacher development and school development must be closely linked. Schools need to measure how well they are engaging Indigenous students in classrooms and parents/caregivers in the life of the school. School leaders and teachers need to develop their skills in collecting, analysing, interpreting and using student performance information (data and assessment literacy) in support of evidence-based approaches to improvement. Teachers need to see assessment data as saying something about them, what they are doing and what they need to do: 'Our eventual success depends on our ferreting out student responses and adjusting our performance, not just theirs, in light of results.'<sup>12</sup>

## Recommendations

- 8 Ministers agree that quality teaching in primary and secondary schools is essential to improving outcomes for Indigenous students while fostering in them a strong sense of identity as successful learners and as Indigenous Australians.
- 9 To give effect to recommendation 8, ministers commit to:
  - 9.1 provide by 2010 pre-service and in-service professional learning accredited by teaching accreditation authorities to:
    - a ensure that school leaders and teachers have the cultural understandings to significantly improve outcomes for Indigenous students;
    - b enable teachers to explicitly teach literacy to Indigenous students, including those for whom standard Australian English is a second language or dialect; and
    - c enable teachers to adopt pedagogical approaches that result in high levels of academic expectation and achievement by Indigenous students across all learning areas;
  - 9.2 ensure that professional learning at recommendations 7.4 and 9.1(a) is a prerequisite for appointment or contract renewal as a principal and incorporated into performance agreements of existing principals; that professional learning at 9.1(a) is a prerequisite for appointment or contract renewal as a teacher; and that professional learning at 9.1(a), (b) and (c) is incorporated into performance agreements and/or duty statements of existing teachers;
  - 9.3 provide support to develop data and assessment literacy in school leaders and teachers to support evidence-based improvement planning; and
  - 9.4 develop strategies to attract and retain high quality teachers, especially in regional and remote communities with high Indigenous student enrolments.

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## Domain 5: Pathways to training, employment and higher education

*In 2004, 39.5 percent of Indigenous students progressed to Year 12 compared with 76.8 percent of other students. While this is a significant gain, Indigenous students who complete Year 12 are less likely than other students to achieve a Year 12 certificate or meet requirements for tertiary entrance. Additionally, Indigenous students are more likely to be enrolled in VET programs. Indigenous students, while well represented in New Apprenticeships, are over-represented in lower level courses and experience higher attrition rates than other students.*

Assisting young people to make successful transitions is a high priority for governments across Australia. There are a complex range of activities and measures to support youth through pathways from compulsory to post-compulsory secondary education, school to work, school to further or higher education, unemployment to further education and work, and from within the juvenile justice system. Recent measures include the establishment of the new Australian Network of Industry Career Advisers as well as parallel efforts at the state and territory level. It is critical that the opportunity is taken to ensure that there is a strong focus on Indigenous students within these developments.

The success factors that underpin good transition are being increasingly well researched and documented. The Career and Transition Services Framework developed by MCEETYA outlines a range of elements such as:

- an intensive individualised approach, including the development of individual pathways plans, skills portfolio documents and exit plans;
- transition support processes from students' first year of secondary schooling;
- support and information from professionally trained counsellors, mentors and brokers;
- a systematic and comprehensive approach to provision of assistance;
- a process of follow-up as students move through school and post-school destinations; and
- the need for effective local partnerships at a number of levels including schools, key agencies, business, communities and community organisations and their involvement in local support networks.

Most education systems have special support measures in place for Indigenous students (such as Indigenous education officers), but generally not in ways that provide specialised career advice. Initiatives addressing factors identified in the Framework need to be implemented to prevent Indigenous students falling through the cracks in mainstream pathways strategies. The vital importance of providing high quality, culturally appropriate intervention strategies that address academic self concept, motivation and career advice for Indigenous students is strongly underlined by recent research. The over-representation, compared to the general population, of Indigenous youth in rural and remote regions where employment opportunities are limited, and the breadth of existing mainstream pathways initiatives, make it imperative that strategies be developed that aim specifically to improve transitions for Indigenous students.

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The recent review of Aboriginal education in New South Wales recommends the creation of regional specialist career counsellors (not just career advisors) dedicated to assisting Indigenous students from the time they commence secondary school. Positions such as these could provide a solid basis for coordination and implementation of support strategies, partly by accessing resources and programs available through mainstream but also through the use of mentors. These counsellors would need to be fully aware of options, including Indigenous specific employment, further education and training opportunities, and able to build strong partnerships with all relevant stakeholders.

Focus on the capacities and potential of Indigenous students is required to avoid them being inappropriately channelled into the most convenient or lowest entry options, such as Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) or preparatory VET courses. Many Indigenous students would benefit from higher-level VET courses or tertiary education but do not feel capable enough or the possibility has not entered their horizons. There is a role for universities to collaborate more closely with schools and TAFE colleges to raise Indigenous students' confidence and perceptions of the relevance and attainability of higher education.

Ongoing tracking, monitoring and supporting of Indigenous students through post-school apprenticeships, traineeships and TAFE courses and university is essential to improving retention rates in post-schooling studies and employment, which are significantly lower than those for non-Indigenous students.

The value of mentors as a means of providing leadership, support and advice has been a recurring theme of reviews. Inclusion of mentors to assist counsellors is recommended. Counsellors would train and manage a cluster of mentors assigned to individual students at the school level, and beyond, as these students progress. Counsellors must be well resourced and the positions not marginalised but integrated to complement existing transition systems and structures.

There is also a wide range of existing strategies in education systems and schools across the country to improve work readiness of students. Successful participation of Indigenous students is often not fully supported across the many linkages involved, from schools to external studies to employer placements, not all of which are culturally inclusive. There are examples where VET in schools programs have been adapted to suit the needs of Indigenous students. For instance, the Aboriginal school-based traineeship program in Western Australia mirrors the traineeship system but commences from year 10 building in additional funding and support to assist students to progress to higher-level VET industry specific qualifications in Years 11 and 12. There would be great value in a national program based on this and other similar initiatives.

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## Recommendations

- 10 Ministers agree that supplementary measures supporting Indigenous students through pathways into training, employment and higher education are pivotal to improving post-school transitions and breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty and disadvantage.
- 11 To give effect to recommendation 10, ministers commit to:
  - 11.1 develop and implement mentoring, counselling and work readiness strategies by 2007 that provide culturally inclusive and intensive support to Indigenous students from the commencement of secondary schooling into post-school pathways. Strategies to be integrated with existing career transition services and include the development of individual pathway plans;
  - 11.2 improve vocational learning opportunities for Indigenous students from Year 10 onwards. Western Australian school-based traineeships provide an exemplar of good practice;
  - 11.3 expand in 2007 the provision of trade training infrastructure, particularly to publicly funded training providers, to ensure that Indigenous students have access to trade training in their own regions. Priority to be given to expansion in regions with industries that employ significant numbers of apprentices and tradespeople;
  - 11.4 develop strategies by 2007 to enable training and employment to be considered by negotiation partners in the development of Native Title, Indigenous land use and heritage agreements and mining leases;
  - 11.5 advise COAG of the need to develop transition initiatives from school to work to further study that:
    - a foster Indigenous student aspirations beyond CDEP;
    - b encourage existing CDEP participants to return to education and/or training; and
    - c engage students in remote school communities in individualised learning from Year 8 onwards that provides a range of relevant academic and vocational pathways, including traineeships and apprenticeships and opportunities for out-of-community work experience;
  - 11.6 expand partnerships between secondary schools, higher education institutions and Indigenous communities to develop strategies to attract, retain and successfully graduate Indigenous students across a broad spectrum of higher education courses; and
  - 11.7 seek advice from Indigenous education consultative bodies, the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council, the Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee and other strategic stakeholders on effective strategies and implementation arrangements to ensure that Indigenous communities and students are encouraged to engage successfully in higher education.

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## Indicative performance indicators

The following measures are indicative only. They will be referred to the MCEETYA Performance Measurement and Reporting Taskforce for further development and refinement to ensure alignment with existing and proposed indicators and reporting requirements of MCEETYA and COAG (refer to Recommendation 12.3 below).

1. Percentage of Indigenous children assessed as ready for formal schooling in literacy and numeracy.
2. Proportion of Indigenous students achieving national benchmarks and proficiency standards in English literacy and numeracy.
3. Apparent retention rates of Indigenous students from Years 7–8 to Years 9, 10, 11 and 12.
4. Percentage of Year 12 Indigenous students achieving a Year 12 Certificate (as a proportion of the number of Indigenous students who commenced Year 11 as full-time students in the previous year).

## Enabling process

Education systems are individually responsible for implementing the majority of recommendations outlined in this paper. To reduce duplication of effort, a national working party will be established to progress implementation of those recommendations that would benefit from a national collaborative approach. Outcomes will be reviewed by the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, which reports to COAG on progress by all governments in addressing the indicators of Indigenous disadvantage. The review and update of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy will ensure that engagement is 'built in' as a key objective and that targets are set for the training and employment of Indigenous teachers.



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## Recommendations

12 To give effect to recommendations 1 to 11, ministers commit to:

- 12.1 request AESOC to map expenditure on Indigenous programs and, within this context, consider the financial implications of these recommendations and whether a re-focus is warranted;
- 12.2 request AESOC to establish a working party to progress implementation and monitoring of these recommendations. The working party, to be chaired by Western Australia, will comprise senior officials from all education systems and a representative of Indigenous education consultative bodies. It will have strong Indigenous representation;
- 12.3 request the MCEETYA Performance Measurement and Reporting Taskforce to review and refine performance indicators and recommend reporting requirements;
- 12.4 commission in 2006 a review and update of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy to include the engagement of students, their parents/caregivers and communities as a key objective and targets for the training and employment of Indigenous teachers;
- 12.5 request the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision to report to COAG in 2012 on the implementation and outcome of these recommendations;
- 12.6 recommend to the Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education that it consider making improved outcomes for Indigenous VET students a top priority for 2006–2008; and
- 12.7 refer to AESOC additional issues in Indigenous education that the working party has identified in its concluding comments as requiring attention by existing taskforces to support the engagement of Indigenous students.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This paper provides recommendations to focus national effort over the 2005–2008 quadrennium. The recommendations seek to accelerate the pace of change by engaging Indigenous children and young people in learning. They are systemic as engagement will not occur, or be sustained, unless Indigenous education is 'built in' to core business.

The recommendations align with five domains in which engagement is critical: early childhood education; school and community educational partnerships; school leadership; quality teaching; and pathways to training, employment and higher education. They were developed in consultation with Indigenous Australians and are informed by system knowledge of good practice and the extensive body of research on Indigenous education.

In the course of its deliberations, the working party identified a number of additional issues that require attention by other MCEETYA and AESOC taskforces to support the engagement of Indigenous students. These include the need to:

- increase the number of Indigenous teachers. This might include the setting of targets at the jurisdictional level; the development of career paths, innovative training programs and support for existing Indigenous staff, particularly in regional and remote communities, to move into teaching positions; strategies to attract mature age CDEP participants into teaching; and the development of clear structured pathways into teaching for students at Year 10;
- review English as a Second Language funding mechanisms;
- review opportunities for Indigenous students under programs for gifted and talented students; and
- review services for Indigenous students with a disability.

Implementation of the recommendations outlined in this paper will significantly improve the educational outcomes of Indigenous students, broadening their range of post-school options and life choices and allowing them to contribute their skills and talents to their own communities and the Australian community as a whole.

## Endnotes

- 1 This statement is supported by the academic literature. In the 2001 Census, about one in eight Indigenous Australians (12 percent) reported that they spoke an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language at home. The majority (about 80 percent) reported that they spoke English. However, the Census does not differentiate between standard Australian English and Aboriginal English. Kaldor and Malcolm ('The language of school and the language of the Western Australian Aboriginal schoolchild – Implications for education', *Aborigines of the West: Their Past and Their Present*, p. 411) suggest that 'Aboriginal children's speech today is probably best seen as a post-creole continuum,' and Harkins ('Structure and Meaning in Australian Aboriginal English', *Asian Englishes: an international journal of the sociolinguistics of English in Asia/Pacific*, 2000, 3 (2): 60. asserts that 'Australian Aboriginal English ... is now the primary language of internal and wider communication for the majority of Australian Aboriginal people.' The literature also reveals that standard Australian English spoken by Indigenous students frequently shows evidence of conceptual features that are not shared with non-Indigenous speakers. Aboriginal English shows itself at the level of conceptualization, even when it is not so apparent at the level of linguistic form. See, for example, the extensive body of work by Ian G. Malcolm, as well as recent work by F. Sharifian, 'Cultural conceptualisations in English words: A study of Aboriginal children in Perth'.
- 2 Zubrick S. et al, *The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey: Improving the Educational Experiences of Aboriginal Children and Young People*, p. 165.
- 3 'Built in' and 'bolted on' are terms used in *The Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education, Yanigurra Muya: Ganggurrinyma Yaari Guurulaw Yirringin. Gurray, Freeing the Spirit: Dreaming an Equal Future*, New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc., and New South Wales Department of Education and Training, p. 185. The term is attributed to R. Bean in 'Built in or bolted on: Managing equity and diversity in vocational education and training delivery', Bowman, K. (ed.), *Equity in vocational education and training: Research readings*.
- 4 Lounsbury, cited in S. Murray et al, *Student disengagement from primary schooling: A review of research and practice*, p. 10.
- 5 *ibid*, p. 4.
- 6 *ibid*, p. 7.
- 7 Australian Government, *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training, 2003*, Chapter 2.
- 8 Australian Government, *Teaching Reading, Report and Recommendations, National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy*, p. 18.
- 9 *ibid*, p. 41.
- 10 *ibid*, p. 58.
- 11 Newmann, F.M. et al, *Authentic intellectual work and standardized tests: Conflict or coexistence*, p. 27.
- 12 Wiggins, G. *Educative assessment: Designing Assessments to Inform and Improve Student Performance*, p. 290.

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