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New paper: Investment key to lifting school attendance and education outcomes for Indigenous children

A new paper, commissioned by the Australian Education Union, on the relationship between welfare payments and school attendance in Northern Territory Indigenous communities, raises serious concerns about the viability of policy based on punitive measures.

Professor Larissa Behrendt's paper, *Welfare Payments and School Attendance: An analysis of experimental policy in Indigenous education*, finds adequate Government investment will determine the success of education outcomes in Indigenous communities.

The paper recommends initiatives such as investment in Indigenous education as the key to improving education outcomes. These initiatives are more likely to lift school attendance rates of Indigenous students in the NT.

Other issues raised in the paper include:

- 7000 Indigenous children are missing school, due in part to lack of basic infrastructure.
- Health – not truancy – is more often the reason for low school attendance
- A Government evaluation of trials in school attendance in Indigenous communities determined that attendance increased in schools with high quality teachers.

"To date, Education Minister, Julia Gillard has announced 19 of the 200 teachers promised over five years, and the NT Government an extra 10. This falls far short of the investment needed if the 2000 students currently not enrolled in schools in the NT do start attending," said AEU Federal President Angelo Gavrielatos.

"Lack of investment is the biggest barrier to school attendance. As discussed in Professor Behrendt's paper, the Combined Aboriginal Organisations of the NT found that 94% of Indigenous communities in NT have no preschool and 27% have a local primary school that is more than 50 kilometres away.

"To improve education in targeted NT communities, AEU research calculated \$1.7 billion additional funding over 5 years is required to provide 1360 extra teachers, as well as 585 additional school staff, including bilingual Indigenous assistant teachers and facilities, equipment and maintenance.

"The Rudd Government must provide long-term significant investment to fulfil their pledge to close the education gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Investment in education is crucial, as it strongly influences long-term health and financial outcomes.

"Increasing school attendance is one part of the solution. The other is ensuring Indigenous children who do attend school are ensured quality education, which is a right - not a privilege - of all Australian children," said Mr Gavrielatos.

Professor Behrendt's paper can be found at:

www.aeufederal.org.au/Publications/2008/LBehrendtpaper.pdf

For further information please contact:

Angelo Gavrielatos
Federal President
0488 012 045

Elisha Johnson
Media
0432 828 004