



Australian Education Union

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AEU Reconciliation Week Statement

The AEU joins with other organisations and individuals across Australia in celebrating National Reconciliation Week held from 27 May to 3 June 2009, the theme of which is ‘*See the person, not the stereotype*’.

The AEU believes that education is the foundation of genuine understanding and respect between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. In particular, we believe that public schools, ECE centres and TAFE Institutes, as places of learning and a foundation of our society, deliver inspiration and opportunity for all Australian students, breaking down stereotypes and challenging racism.

However, the AEU does not resile from the shameful facts that continue to show many Indigenous students are disadvantaged by the education system. These include:

- lack of access to quality education, across all sectors;
- lack of access to high quality infrastructure, including buildings and technology;
- implementation of Government policies which undermine the rights of our First Nations peoples (including the abolition of bi-lingual programmes);
- evidence which highlights the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, in education, employment and life outcomes.

In accepting our responsibility to deal with the fundamental injustices still apparent among Indigenous students and their communities, the AEU will continue to campaign along-side our Indigenous members, now over 1,000 in number; Indigenous parents and students; and members of the Indigenous community; to achieve an increase in government effort and resources and promote educational opportunities. While there are successful programs being implemented in some places, it must be acknowledged that these successes are usually isolated and short lived, reducing the capacity to have a wider positive impact on the overall system.

The AEU has this week announced its intention to work with Indigenous people and all Governments, through COAG, to create a 25 year action plan for Indigenous education. Such a plan should and must ensure stability and continuity in the delivery of public education for Indigenous students.

In this important week, appropriately themed, ‘Look at the person, not at the stereotype’ we reiterate the need for this plan to be broad enough to consider the development of different structures and models that take into account the needs of Indigenous students and their particular communities. We hold central the notion of negotiation, consultation with and agreement of, local communities and we recognise that the success of any such approach is reliant upon a shared sense of ownership. We believe that the journey of Reconciliation is about shaping the future together.

We congratulate the efforts of Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators, parents and students in the public education system for their contribution to the process of Reconciliation.