



The Needs of Indigenous Students and their Communities

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The Australian Education Union can take great pride in its history and traditions in championing the cause of Indigenous students and their communities.

It is quite clear that the state of Indigenous education and the needs of Indigenous students still require urgent attention. Fundamental issues of access and equity have yet to be addressed in many communities.

By any measure, we have a long way to go in order to achieve an equality of learning outcomes for Indigenous students. The plight of our Indigenous students and their communities remains the most pressing human rights issue which confronts us and must be confronted by us.

In accepting our responsibility to deal with the fundamental injustices still apparent among Indigenous students and their communities we must continue our campaigns aimed at achieving an increase in government effort, resources and the promotion of educational opportunities. While there are successful programs being implemented in some places, it must be acknowledged that these successes are usually isolated, short lived and do not have a wider positive impact on the overall system.

The following areas are recognized as key areas for action to improve the outcomes for Indigenous students and their communities.

Different Educational Structures and Models for the provision of public education to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

The AEU continues to acknowledge that the provision of education to Indigenous students cannot be “more of the same”.

Accordingly, the AEU reiterates the need to consider and develop different structures and models that take into account the needs of Indigenous students and their particular communities. Different communities may need different models. An isolated country community may require a different configuration of structures and approaches than a school in an urban environment.

Of course, the development of any such initiatives would require the prior consultation with and the agreement of local communities. The success of any such approach is reliant upon a shared sense of ownership.

The alternative structures / models may include the following characteristics.

- The establishment of programs operating from schools, involving appropriate government agencies, to support parents and their children aged 0 - 4. This would establish important links between school and community from an early stage.
- The establishment of education complexes delivering pre-school, school and post compulsory education (TAFE).
- The establishment of genuine inter-agency programs operating from schools with significant Indigenous populations, ensuring the school is the centre of community. These programs should be run by departments of Health, Sport and

Recreation and other relevant government departments complementing the work of education departments.

- Without compromising the entitlements of employees, the establishment of extended operational hours and days - up to forty eight (48) weeks per year.

Staffing Policies.

With respect to the issue of teacher supply and retention in difficult-to-staff schools, whilst acknowledging the contribution and positive influence of beginning teachers, it is also acknowledged that teacher experience, continuity and stability contribute significantly to improved student outcomes and school development initiatives.

Whilst there is much to be learnt from successful programs the AEU supports the further development and negotiation of new staffing policies aimed at increasing the number of experienced teachers in identified difficult-to-staff schools, increasing leadership density and correspondingly reducing the number of beginning teacher appointments.

Furthermore, new staffing policy should include initiatives that include the early appointment and in-servicing of new teachers including principals who will teach in schools with significant Indigenous enrolments. The appointment of new teachers including principals during the final term of the school year, prior to the new school year, will ensure continuity of programs for students.

Improvements in the recruitment and retention incentives available to classroom teachers, executive teachers and principals serving in geographically isolated, difficult-to-staff schools in Indigenous communities are also required.

Staffing policies must also promote the development and support of local Indigenous teachers and support staff. Apart from serving as positive role models for students which will assist in improving cultural understanding and the learning outcomes for students, such endeavours will serve to increase the capacity of community as a whole.

New industrial instruments / agreements

The AEU, together with its Branches and Associated Bodies in each state and territory, indicates its preparedness to negotiate changes aimed at improving the educational well being of Indigenous students. Variations to existing arrangements need to be negotiated and reflected in new/varied Awards/EBAs/Agreements as appropriate.