

IEAP Consultation

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The Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies (IECBs) commends the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in securing a National Indigenous Reform Agreement.

The Ministerial Council of Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) decision to establish an Indigenous Education Plan 2010-2014 (NIEAP) is welcomed and we are committed to working with MCEECDYA on the development and implementation of the NIEAP.

The NIEAP has the capacity to continue and build on the commitment made by Ministers in 1989 when announcing the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP) which came into effect on 1 January 1990. The AEP set out twenty-one long term goals with the objective of achieving educational equality by the year 2000. Unfortunately this ambitious objective still eludes educational jurisdictions and Indigenous individuals, their families and communities today. So there is still much to achieve in the way Governments, and their bureaucracies work with Indigenous Australia to close the gap.

The IECBs appreciate that the NIEAP is an opportunity to refocus on the sound principles that established the AEP, being the four themes; involvement of Indigenous people in educational decision-making; achievement of equality of access to educational services; achievement of equality of educational participation; and achievement of equitable and appropriate educational outcomes.

Our submission acknowledges the principles that auspice the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples being the right to free, informed and prior consent before decisions are made by government in shaping our destiny.

The National Close the Gap campaign with its six ambitious targets again allows us the opportunity to accelerate change in this important area of endeavor, so we seek a strong commitment from MCEECDYA to work closely with IECBs.

Yours sincerely

Ms Cindy Berwick

President NSW AECG - On behalf of IECBs

28th February 2010

DRAFT Indigenous Education Action Plan (IEAP)

At a recent meeting of the Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies in Sydney on the 18th/19th February 2010, the following concerns/comments on the draft IEAP were raised and is being forwarded to the MCEECDYA Secretariat for consideration.

From the outset, we wish to strongly express that Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are acknowledged and respected internationally as the oldest living culture of humanity as well as the First Nations people of Australia. This needs to be acknowledged at the domestic level. Consequently, we would like this reflected in the document including the preferred use of terminology, i.e. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, not Indigenous Peoples, when referring to our people.

Consultation

The response will consist of two key areas; the processes involved in the creation and implementation of the DRAFT Indigenous Education Action Plan (IEAP) and the initiatives that have been identified by the plan.

Of all the processes that are crucial to the development of policy, strategy or an action plan, CONSULTATION is always the highest priority. It is well documented in key research¹ that this is often the 'make or break' factor in the success or otherwise of a plan. Therefore we are concerned that the consultation period is extremely short (2-3 months) and held over the Christmas period when most people are less available for comment resulting in frustration with their ability to make an impact.

However, following on from this is the role of the Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies (IECB's) in the formulation and ongoing implementation and monitoring of the plan needs to be more explicated and not relegated, to involvement at the evaluation stage. MCEECDYA needs to involve ALL IECB's better in ALL aspects of the planning process including the collaborative actions. The Australian Curriculum (as identified on page 16, point 28) is a case in point as IECB's have struggled to be included in this significant change to education policy and only after legislation had been passed. Our involvement came about only when we became a part of a campaign through an open letter sent to the Australian, Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and media from education unions, academics etc that our issues and concerns began to gain some traction with ACARA.

Further, the role of IECB's needs to be up front and centre in relation to School and Community Partnership Agreements through the Parent and Community Engagement (PACE) program administered by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). We strongly ascertain that PACE should be administered by IECBs at State and Territory level. Without this, there is a lack of

¹ Buckskin, P., Hughes, P., Teasdale, B., Gregory, J., Clarke, C., Morgan, D., & StClair, J. (2008) *"Connecting Cultures." Review of Victoria's Indigenous Education Strategies: Supporting Indigenous Students through School*. David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences, City West Campus, North Terrace Adelaide S.A., Mellor, S., & Corrigan, M. (2004). *The Case for Change. A review of contemporary research on Indigenous education outcomes*. Australian Education Review Australian Council for Educational Research. ACER Press, Camberwell, Victoria. New South Wales Department of Education and Training & New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated (2004) *The Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education Yanigurra Muya: Ganggurrinyrna Yaami guurulaw Yirringin.gurray - Freeing the Spirit: Dreaming an Equal Future* Darlinghurst, Sydney, NSW

acknowledgement of the IECB's as a unique asset that can provide support to schools, communities and the government.

In terms of processes, there is also a lack of coordination between Commonwealth and States/Territories of a range of programs that are not necessarily aligned to the IEAP. For example, the National Partnerships with low SES schools includes Aboriginal Education but it is not explicit or aligned to this plan, therefore raising concerns that it could be overlooked or given surface treatment. School and Community Partnership Agreements need to be linked with Parent and Community Engagement so as not to duplicate services. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce Strategy is also not aligned to the IEAP and there is no discussion about the value of employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There are a range of current programs such as 'Dare to Lead', 'What Works', 'Strong Smarter Schools' and now IEAP focus schools but there is no articulated connection between these and little indication of their value in terms of outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It also raises concerns for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are not in these focus schools in terms of access to resources and opportunities. Also relevant is a lack of coordination of resources which are already in schools and concerns of how they actually fit into the IEAP since schools have already started their national partnership plans while this plan is still in draft, effectively putting the cart before horse.

Cultural Identity

Closing the Gap has the danger of being described a policy of assimilation if it does not explicitly articulate building on the cultural identity/capital of the learner and parents/care givers as the first educators. We appreciate the need for the plan to focus on improving on the low levels of literacy, numeracy and attendance. This of course is desperately needed but what it fails to recognize is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students need cultural affirmation if they are to succeed in schooling.

A growing body of research on Indigenous education (including Reviews in both NSW and Victoria into Aboriginal Education)² and education for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) students, highlights the crucial role of cultural identity programs, bilingualism and valuing the culture and heritage of students, their families and communities in schools. Without this as an underpinning and driving force behind tangible improvements in academic skills and attendance, it is unlikely that these programs will improve outcomes in any real and sustainable way. In fact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages receive little attention and this, along with bilingualism, needs to be embedded into school systems and into plans such as this in explicit and accountable ways. Issues such as underachievement in mid-range performance bands, leadership, capacity building and mentoring also need attention if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are to reach their full potential. While mainstream education provides opportunities and promotes its

² Buckskin, P., Hughes, P., Teasdale, B., Gregory, J., Clarke, C., Morgan, D., & StClair, J. (2008) "*Connecting Cultures.*" *Review of Victoria's Indigenous Education Strategies: Supporting Indigenous Students through School.* David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences, City West Campus, North Terrace Adelaide S.A., New South Wales Department of Education and Training & New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated (2004) *The Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education Yanigurra Muya: Ganggurrinyma Yaami guurulaw Yirringin.gurray - Freeing the Spirit: Dreaming an Equal Future* Darlinghurst, Sydney, NSW

brightest students, Aboriginal education focuses almost exclusively on its struggling students, indicating a deficit mindset underpinning the plan.

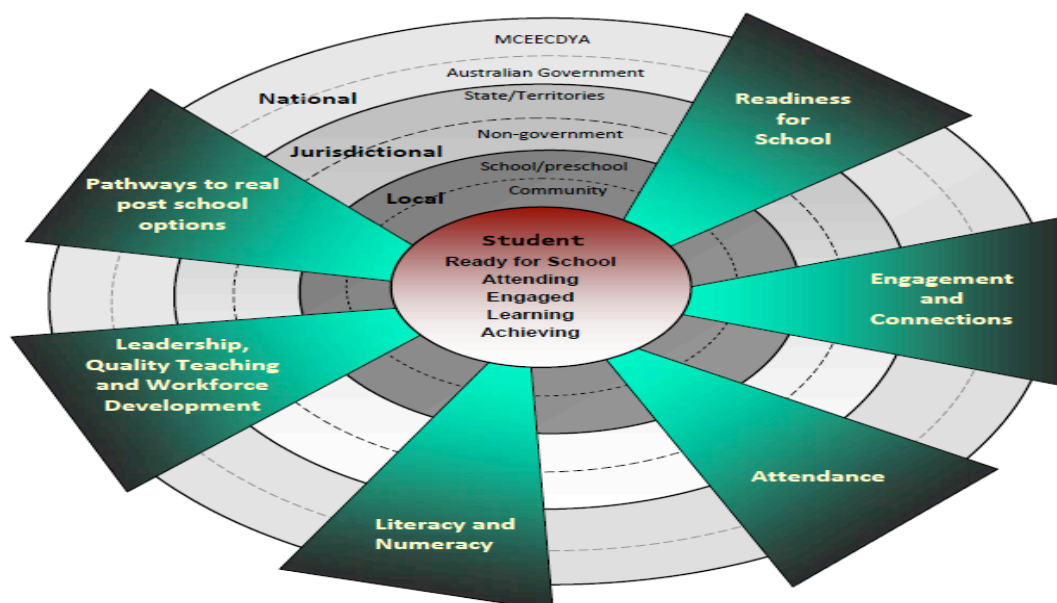
It also implies that this deficit belongs to the families and communities these children come from as the onus is on them to change rather than on the schools and their systems to interrogate their own processes and products. Cultural safety for instance has not been made explicit and there is no responsibility placed on schools to be 'Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander – ready', rather the focus is on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to be 'school ready'. This is highlighted by the fact that Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders are the only specific group to sign School Community Partnership Agreements, and while these have positive aspects to them, it is in effect, signing an agreement to get an education that is open to everyone.

Workforce Issues

Also important to improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is quality teaching and it is felt that the plan needs to be more explicit around requirements for quality teaching and learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students including the implementation of cultural competency standards as a more explicit skill set than cultural awareness. While teacher accreditation systems now operate in all states and territories, there is minimal attention to specific knowledges, understandings and skills to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and implement relevant policies in schools. This is reflected in Preservice teacher training as universities are by enlarge in the early stages of implementing mandatory courses in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and embedding cultural diversity programs throughout their courses. There is however, no explicit reference in the plan as to how this might be accounted for.

Finally, with reference to Figure 1 Conceptual overview of Indigenous Education Action Plan (page 3), the following is suggested:

1. Another spoke (domain) in the wheel labeled Cultural Identity and that IECB's be present in each of the three areas of National, Jurisdictional and Local as we have crucial roles to play in all of these areas. Again, it is important to reiterate the significant role that we can play in the success or otherwise of this plan.



An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander viewpoint of Figure 1: Conceptual overview of Indigenous Education Action Plan for inclusion in the plan is also attached as Appendix 1 for consideration.

Conclusion

Despite our concern on the short timeline to comment on this significant document we are pleased to have had the opportunity to read the draft NIEAP.

We note the areas of national collaboration around the six priority domains and reiterate our request for a sixth domain around cultural identity/knowledge.

The 150,000 plus Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Australian schools require us all to respectfully work together if we are to meet the complex challenges ahead as outlined in the National Indigenous Reform Agreement. The IECBs stand ready to work closely with Ministers and their jurisdictions to realize the goals of the AEP agreed in 1989 and embedded in the informing documents that assisted in the development of the NIEAP.

