

Closing the Gap *in* Aboriginal Educational Outcomes 2010 - 2014

A Tasmanian Strategy for Aboriginal Student Success
through School Improvement




Aboriginal Education is Everyone's Business

Closing the gap in Aboriginal students' educational outcomes is an essential part of ensuring that all Tasmanian students have the opportunity to achieve excellence at every stage of their education. Closing the gap is a challenge that has been placed at the centre of the Council of Australian Government's National Indigenous Reform Agreement, which involves Tasmania, along with all other states and territories, in a commitment to halving the gap in literacy and numeracy achievement within a decade.

The Department of Education will meet this challenge by ensuring that Aboriginal students are fully engaged in learning. In collaboration with parents and the Aboriginal community, schools will develop personalised learning plans for Aboriginal students to improve their educational outcomes. Schools and their communities will share a commitment to establishing high expectations of Aboriginal students.

This strategy defines a range of actions aimed at improving the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students. Research has shown that these actions are very effective ways of ensuring Aboriginal students' success. The result will be a Tasmanian education system in which Aboriginal students are achieving at least at the same level as all students, and where Aboriginal culture and identity are valued and respected through high quality, culturally inclusive teaching, leadership and curriculum.

I commend this strategy to you as a vital step towards closing the gap in the educational achievement of Tasmanian Aboriginal students.



Lin Thorp MLC
Minister for Education and Skills

Closing the Gap – a National Challenge

All state and territory governments are committed through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to targets established by the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA). These targets are reflected in National Partnership Agreements on Improving Teacher Quality, Low Socio-economic School Communities, Literacy and Numeracy, Indigenous Early Childhood Development, Early Childhood Education and Youth Attainment and Transitions.

The National Indigenous Reform Agreement aims to:

- increase the proportion of Indigenous children who are enrolled in and attending a preschool program in the year before formal schooling
- halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy for Indigenous students within a decade (by 2018)
- at least halve the gap for Indigenous students in year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020
- halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non Indigenous Australians within a decade (by 2018).

The National Indigenous Reform Agreement also includes targets for improving employment, housing, community safety, child mortality, hospitalisation rates and life expectancy. Outcomes in all these areas can be directly influenced by educational success. The Closing the Gap Strategy is therefore an essential element in improving outcomes for Aboriginal people throughout their lives.

Our Challenge

The Department of Education accepts the challenge to close the gap in Aboriginal students' educational outcomes. This challenge will be met by teachers, principals, support staff and Learning Services staff working together with community to ensure that each Aboriginal student is supported to achieve their highest potential through quality teaching and inclusive, engaging curriculum.

The Tasmanian Context

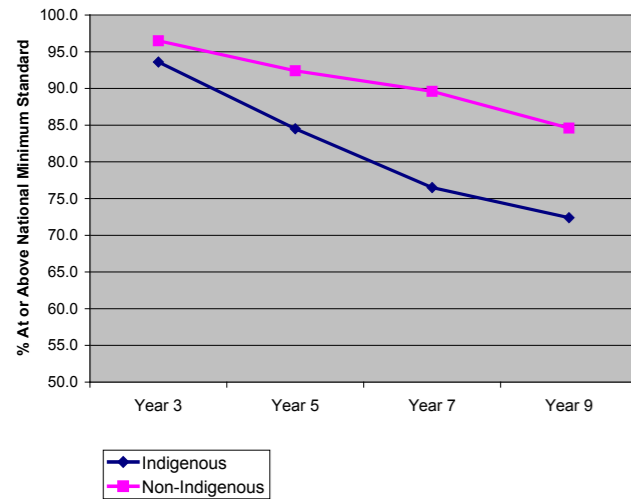
In Tasmania, Aboriginal students comprise 8.2% (2009 Department of Education Census) of the total school population. Many of these students achieve well and some schools have succeeded in significantly closing the gap in the educational outcomes of their Aboriginal students. In particular, compared to Aboriginal students in other jurisdictions, gaps in absenteeism and literacy and numeracy in the early years are relatively small.

However, the gap in achievement increases as students move through the education system. This trend is evident despite small sample sizes and data volatility. To meet the challenge of closing the gap, we will require a sustained effort across all years of schooling, beginning in the primary years.

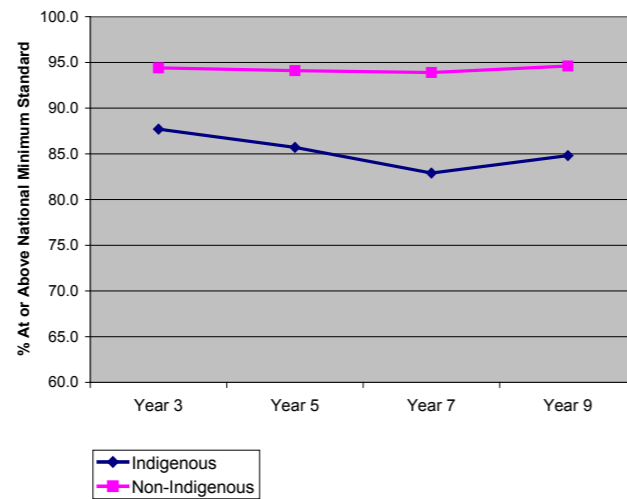
The Widening Gap

The gap between the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students can range from as little as 3% in early years of schooling, to as large as 30% in post year 10. In too many cases, the gap in performance of Aboriginal compared to non-Aboriginal students widens the longer they are at school. The following graphs illustrate this pattern.

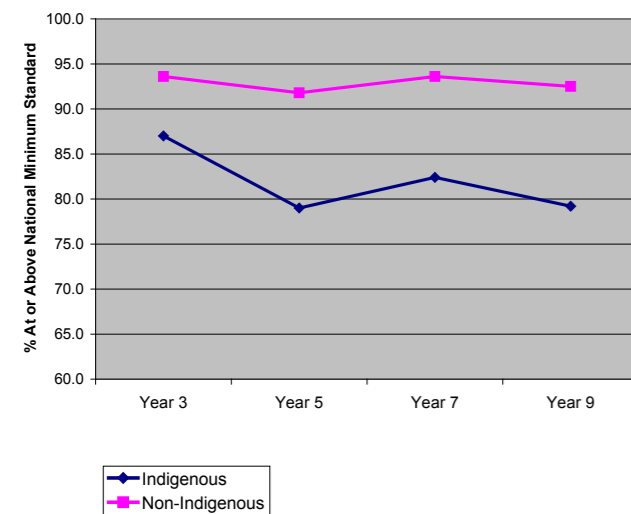
NAPLAN 2009 - Writing



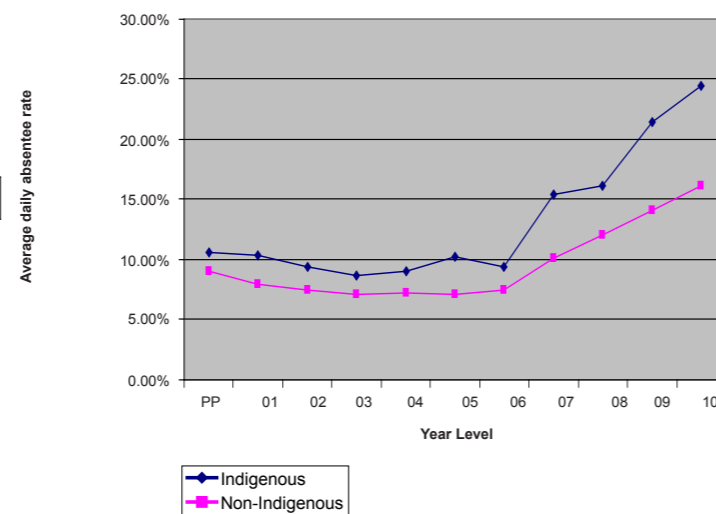
NAPLAN 2009 - Numeracy



NAPLAN 2009 - Reading



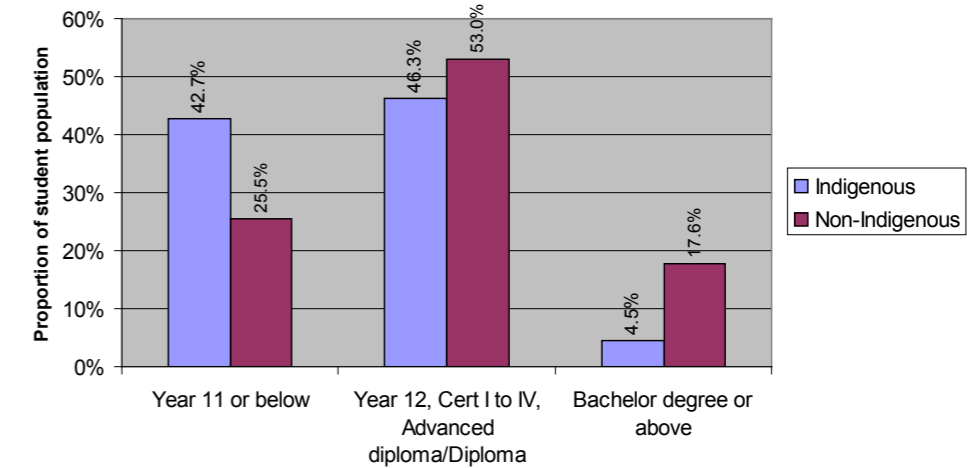
2009 average daily absentee rates by year level



Factors Influencing Aboriginal Educational Outcomes

There is no evidence that Aboriginal culture is the cause of educational disadvantage. Rather, it is a consequence of the social and economic history of Aboriginal people in Tasmania that a range of factors continue to impact on educational outcomes. A highly significant factor is parental education level. There are many others, including health, employment and housing.

Parental education levels for Kinder to Year 10 Government school students 2009



Source: Educational Performance Services August Census

Many of these factors are outside an individual student's control. This Closing the Gap strategy focuses on a range of school-based actions that address the factors identified by research as being most important for supporting Aboriginal student success. These include:

- parental participation in early learning
- Aboriginal community engagement with the school
- student attendance
- student well-being
- understanding each students' context
- culturally aware leadership and inclusive teaching practice
- culturally informed curriculum
- participation of Aboriginal staff in support and teaching
- clear and actively supported pathways to further education and training.

School Improvement Plans – meeting the challenge

Through their School Improvement Plans, schools identify their priorities and develop actions for improving all students' outcomes. They are supported to do this through their Learning Services and through the provision of resources in their school funding package.

While schools have the autonomy to set their own priorities, the Closing the Gap Strategy highlights the need for schools to be responsible and accountable for the outcomes of their Aboriginal students. Many of the actions of the Closing the Gap Strategy require schools to undertake specific measures through their School Improvement Plans, including their School Literacy and Numeracy Plans, to improve Aboriginal students' outcomes.

Focus Schools

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (NATSIEAP) will guide all states and territories in their commitment to closing the gap in education outcomes for Aboriginal students. The NATSIEAP establishes a methodology for identifying a key group of Focus Schools, enabling jurisdictions to target the greatest number of Aboriginal students with highest needs.

Tasmanian Focus Schools are identified annually. These will be schools that:

- have high Aboriginal student populations;
- have significant numbers of Aboriginal students below one or more of the national minimum standards; and
- are funded through both the Low SES School Communities and the Literacy and Numeracy National Partnerships.

The NATSIEAP aims to establish national collaboration across all jurisdictions to ensure that specialist Aboriginal Education staff and resources will be available to Focus Schools to support their particular requirements in student and community engagement, and to improve students' literacy and numeracy outcomes, attendance and retention.

Services and support through Learning Services

Aboriginal Education Services will be provided through all Learning Services. They will particularly support Focus Schools to meet the goals of their School Improvement Plans for Aboriginal students. Support and services will be provided to assist schools to:

- increase Aboriginal community involvement in student learning;
- source appropriate interventions to maintain and improve Aboriginal students' attendance, engagement, achievement and well-being;
- build the cultural competency of their teaching and leadership staff; and
- access appropriate cultural resources for inclusive curriculum development and delivery.

Learning Services will also support schools to meet the challenge of closing the gap in Aboriginal students' literacy and numeracy outcomes.

Other services and resources available for schools and post year 10 institutions

National Partnerships

Schools receiving funding through the Smarter Schools National Partnerships will implement strategies which, among other outcomes, will contribute to halving the gap in reading, writing and numeracy for Aboriginal students within a decade (by 2018). School level plans will describe how these outcomes will be achieved.

Post Year 10 institutions will develop strategies, through the Low SES National Partnership and the Youth Attainment and Transitions National Partnership, to at least halve the gap for Aboriginal students in year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020.

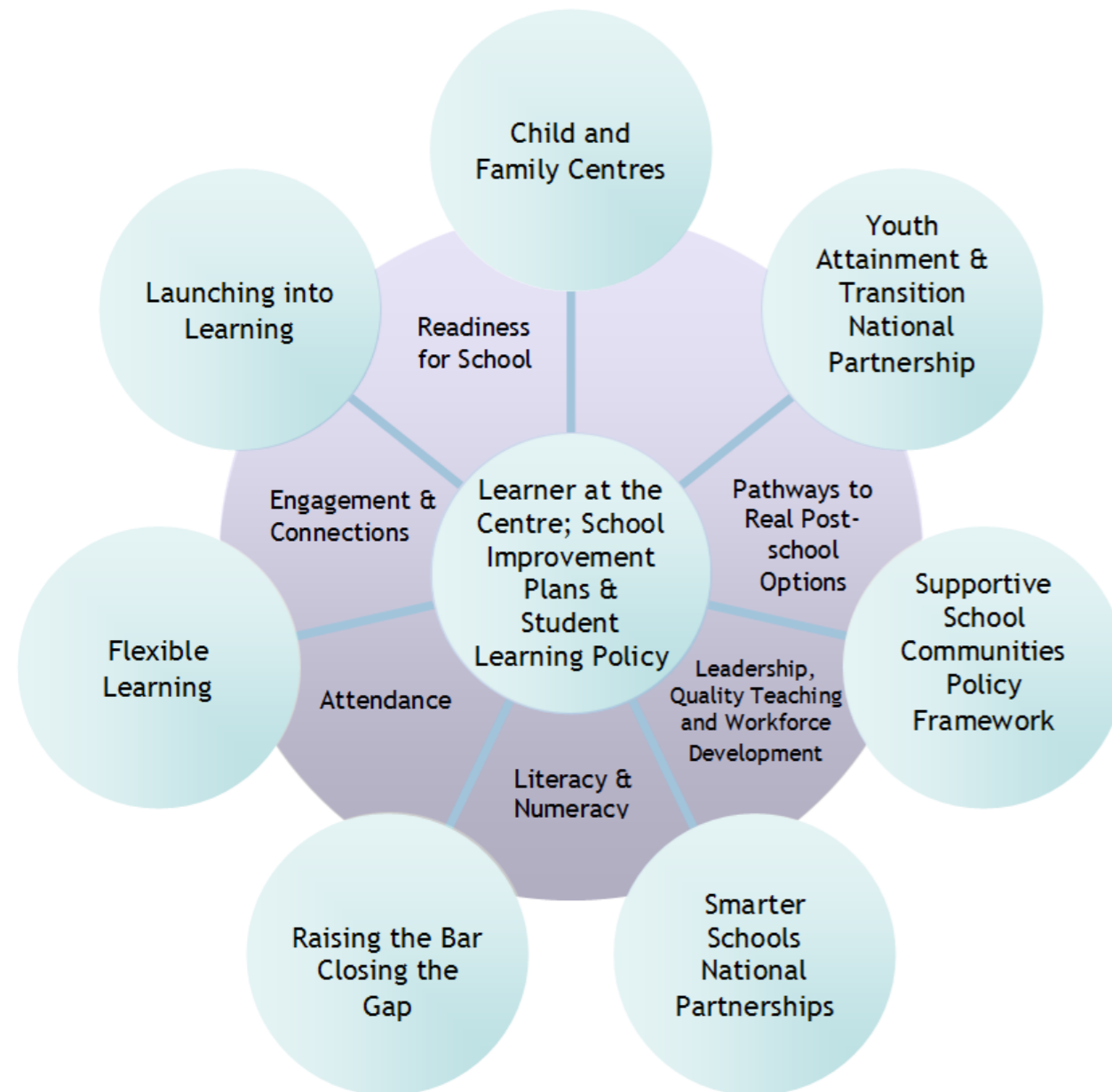
Dare to Lead

This is a joint project between Principals Australia, the Australian Government and the Department of Education. It provides a network of support for school leaders to generate sustainable change in educational outcomes for Aboriginal students.

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)

DEEWR will be providing targeted funds to states and territories to support the implementation of the NATSIEAP. This funding will be used to supplement state and school based initiatives to improve Aboriginal students' outcomes.

Closing the Gap in Aboriginal Education Outcomes: Linkages to COAG and Departmental Initiatives



Community and Culture

Ensuring the best educational outcomes for Aboriginal students is a responsibility that is shared by schools, parents, Learning Services, post Year 10 organisations, the wider community and the Aboriginal community. Research shows that Aboriginal students do best in schools where their parents and their community are engaged, where their culture and identity is understood, valued and affirmed, and where learning activities are underpinned by quality teaching and curriculum that draws on the knowledge and experience of the Aboriginal community.

An emphasis on Aboriginal culture in professional learning and curriculum will contribute positively to all students' understanding and valuing of Tasmanian history and society, and will make an important contribution to social inclusion in Tasmania.

Operational Plan

An Operational Plan will be developed by Aboriginal Education Services and Learning Services to support schools and Learning Services in achieving the actions contained in this strategy.

Personalised Learning Plans and Attendance Strategies

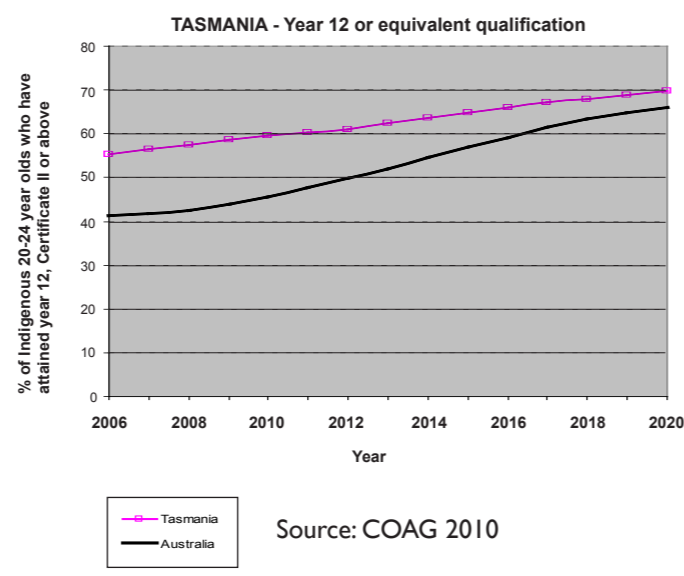
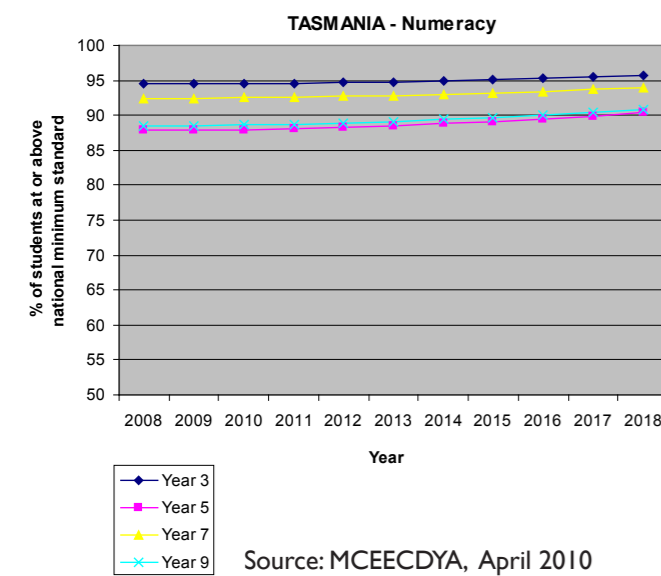
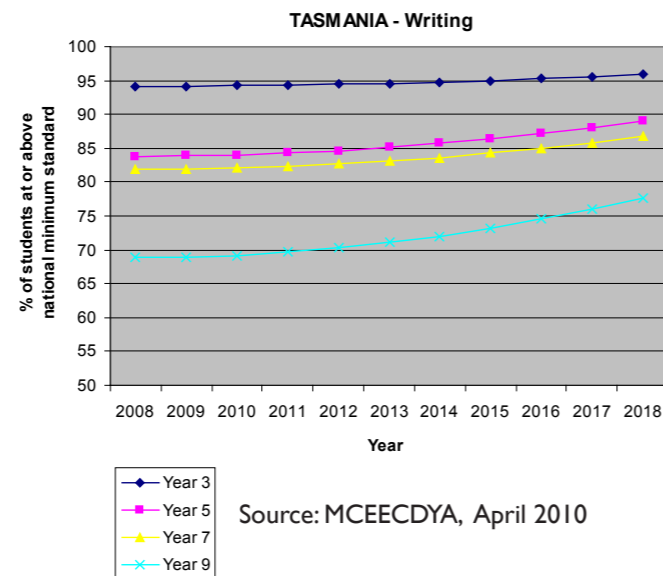
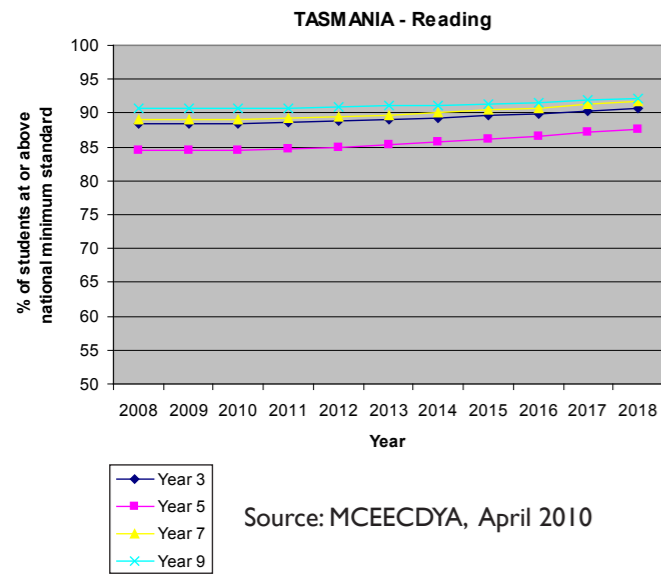
Personalised Learning Plans are individual plans designed to maximise a student's engagement and outcomes. Strategies to improve attendance, health and wellbeing as well as literacy, numeracy and career pathway planning can all be included in these plans. Ensuring parents and community are involved in developing personalised learning plans for Aboriginal students is an important way to acknowledge the influence of a student's cultural heritage and to build high expectations of what each student can achieve. Evidence shows that schools with strong connections to the Aboriginal community contribute positively to Aboriginal students' educational outcomes.

Measuring success

Quality data is essential for measuring success. It also provides a powerful tool to assist schools and post year 10 institutions to identify Aboriginal student need.

Accountability for Aboriginal student success will continue to be addressed as part of School Improvement Reporting. Tasmania's progress in meeting national Closing the Gap targets will be measured through student performance in NAPLAN and Performance Indicators for Primary Schools (PIPS), as well as by parental engagement and student attendance. Progress against trajectories for improvement in reading, writing, numeracy and Year 12 attainment will be reported annually to COAG.

Tasmania - Trajectories of Improvement



Priority Area: Readiness for School

Performance Indicators	School Actions	Systemic actions
I. Proportion of Aboriginal children participating in quality early childhood education and development and child care services		Initiatives are implemented to achieve universal access to early childhood education
2. Proportion of Aboriginal students assessed as ready for the first year of full-time schooling	PIPS data analysed to ensure schools focus attention on Aboriginal early learners	On-entry assessment to identify at-risk students and to implement early intervention strategies is implemented
	Schools use AEDI data when appropriate to assist in identifying community based priorities	Networks are developed to connect to community, health and welfare services
	Focus Schools with support from Aboriginal Early Years Liaison Officers identify and implement readiness for school strategies	Early years programs and Child and Family Centres are designed to be inclusive of Aboriginal children and families
Where possible, schools liaise with child and family centres to establish close links with Aboriginal families and children		

Useful links:

- <http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/Initiatives/Pages/closingthegap.aspx>
- <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Indigenous/Schooling/Pages/default.aspx>
- http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/general/Documents/closing_the_gap/foreward.htm
- http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/national_partnership_agreements/education/smarter_schools/TAS_Smarter_Schools.pdf
- <http://www.education.tas.gov.au/dept/strategies/national-partnerships/smarter/schools>

Priority Area: Engagement and Connections

Performance Indicators	School Actions	Systemic actions
3. Proportion of schools with a school-community partnership agreement in place	Focus Schools negotiate partnership between school, parents/carers and community as part of their School Improvement Plans	Services to support schools to engage with Aboriginal communities are provided
	Schools strengthen their accountability and reporting to families and community on Aboriginal education outcomes	
	Schools establish Aboriginal family forums to inform the work of schools	Services to support students who are parents or pregnant are developed and implemented
	Outreach programs established to connect with childhood, health, family, youth and community services	
4. Proportion of Aboriginal students with personalised learning plans	Schools involve Aboriginal families and Aboriginal Education Workers to develop personalised learning plans for Aboriginal students from Prep to Year 10.	Role of Aboriginal Education Workers is reviewed to maximise their ability to work in partnership with students, parents and teachers

Priority Area: Attendance

Performance Indicators	School Actions
5. Attendance rates of Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students in schools	School-based Aboriginal Student Attendance Strategies are developed in all Focus Schools, in consultation with parents and community and published in 2011 Schools monitor and evaluate the success of attendance strategies, and results reported annually to school communities
6. Enrolment to population ratio of Aboriginal people compared to other Australians	
7. Retention rates for Aboriginal students	
8. Grade progression ratios for Aboriginal students	

Priority Area: Literacy and Numeracy

Performance Indicators	School Actions	Systemic actions
9. Participation rates of Aboriginal students in NAPLAN testing	Schools ensure Aboriginal students participate in NAPLAN at levels at least the same as for non-Aboriginal students	
10. Proportion of Aboriginal students at or above the national minimum standard in reading, writing and numeracy in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 in NAPLAN testing.	Schools support Aboriginal students to higher levels of achievement against national minimum standards	The Australian Curriculum is progressively implemented and utilised to engage Aboriginal students in successful learning
	Schools use data to monitor individual performance and drive whole of school improvement	
	Teachers and Aboriginal Education Workers participate in professional learning to support whole of school approaches to literacy and numeracy	

Priority Area: Leadership, Quality Teaching & Workforce Development

Performance Indicators	School Actions	Systemic actions
11. Number of professional development hours on Aboriginal education and cultural competence training undertaken by principals and teachers	Focus School principals participate in leadership programs to lead improvement in Aboriginal student learning outcomes	Services to support schools to build leadership in improving Aboriginal learning outcomes are provided
12. Average length of service of principals and teachers in Focus Schools with high proportions of Aboriginal students		Learning Services set targets for the percentage of teaching staff participating in professional learning aimed at improving cultural competency
		Services to support schools with professional learning aimed at improving cultural competencies to inform best teaching strategies for Aboriginal Students
13. Number of Aboriginal principals, teachers and education workers		Professional pathways are built for Aboriginal staff to pursue a teaching career or leadership position
		A recruitment strategy for Aboriginal people across the Department's workforce is developed

Priority Area: Pathways to Real Post-school Options

Performance Indicators	School Actions	Systemic actions
14. Proportion of Aboriginal people aged 20 to 24 with Year 12 or equivalent, or AQF Certificate II or above.	Secondary schools and post Year 10 institutions, supported by Aboriginal Education Officers, provide innovative and personalised learning opportunities, mentoring and targeted case management strategies to increase the retention of Aboriginal students to Year 12.	Innovative use of interactive technologies with Aboriginal students
	Secondary schools and post Year 10 institutions provide pathways and improved access to school-based accredited training, including traineeships and apprenticeships, for Aboriginal students in years 10-12	Monitoring and reporting of participation of Aboriginal students post Year 10 is improved
	Secondary schools and post Year 10 institutions provide access to career services for Aboriginal students and their families to support informed career and study choices	Opportunities for Aboriginal young people through Youth Connections are maximised
	Secondary schools and post Year 10 institutions maximise opportunities for Aboriginal students under School Business Community Partnership Brokers program and Youth Connections program to extend learning beyond the classroom, increase student engagement, deepen learning experiences and improve educational outcomes	
Partnerships between schools, post Year 10 providers, universities and Aboriginal communities strengthened and developed to broaden the horizons and post-school options of Aboriginal students		