

MEDIA RELEASE

Indigenous student attendance not a challenge for schools alone

17 March 2016: Boosting school attendance for Indigenous students is a broad social policy challenge, not merely a challenge within education policy circles, according to a new report by the Australian Council for Educational Research released today on National Close the Gap Day.

ACER Principal Research Fellow Mr Tony Dreise, lead author of the report, said a ‘one-size-fits-all’ response may be too blunt an instrument to effect positive change, and that a highly focused policy design, targeted programs and coordinated efforts at local levels are needed.

School attendance has improved in some parts of Australia, but there is still some way to go, as revealed in the *Closing the Gap Prime Minister’s Report 2016*. Of non-Indigenous students, 79.3 per cent attended 90 per cent or more of the time, compared to only 49.2 per cent of Indigenous students.

“School attendance is influenced by social and economic disadvantage,” Mr Dreise said. “It is critical to implement programs that respond to the holistic needs of disadvantaged children, not only academically, but emotionally, physically, culturally and in terms of their identity development.

“School attendance expectations for schools, students and parents and carers should be both ‘really high’ and ‘highly real’ if they are to address the social and economic factors that stymie educational success.

“We need to resource and empower schools and communities, and develop strategies at the local level that are context sensitive, culturally appropriate and collaborative.”

The report, *Indigenous School Attendance: Creating expectations that are ‘really high’ and ‘highly real’*, proposes ‘guideposts’ for policy-makers and Indigenous communities to improve school attendance, including:

- Set expectations and establish patterns early in early childhood education.
- Build connections between homes and schools in Indigenous communities.
- Integrate children’s academic development with their health, wellbeing and safety by supporting schools and the Indigenous non-government community sector simultaneously.
- Refine the collection of attendance data to better understand *why* children and young people miss school.
- Create reward and recognition systems for regular school attendees.
- Recruit Indigenous students into initial teacher education.

Read the full report, *Indigenous School Attendance: Creating expectations that are ‘really high’ and ‘highly real’*, Policy Insights 4, by Tony Dreise, Gina Milgate, Bill Perrett and Troy Meston and published by ACER. <http://research.acer.edu.au/policyinsights/4>

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