

2004

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR
THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**REPORT ON PERFORMANCE IN
INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

SEVENTH REPORT TO 31 AUGUST 2003

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OVERVIEW

This report is the seventh report to the ACT Legislative Assembly on Indigenous education covering the period from March 2003 to August 2003 inclusive. This is an interim report as data on achievement in literacy and numeracy, and Year 10 and Year 12 certification, are not available during the period of the report. Information on these educational outcomes for 2003 will be provided in the September 2003 to February 2004 report.

Indigenous people continue to experience disadvantage and do not achieve educational outcomes equitably with the rest of the student population. Policies, strategic planning, and professional learning have served to raise awareness, address gaps in delivery and provide more effective services to Indigenous people. Strategies and outcomes addressed in this report include work related to the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services (DEYFS) Complaints Resolution Policy, *Within Reach of Us All* Plans, Services to Indigenous People Action Plan 2002-2004, Equity and Diversity Plan, Combating Racism in Schools and the Workplace Policy, and the ACT Indigenous Education Compact.

Indigenous families have largely welcomed the stronger emphasis on home/school liaison arising from the Enhanced Indigenous Support Program, a 2002/03 budget initiative. The program has strengthened community ties and ensured that student attendance and retention issues can be better addressed. It is pleasing to note the large number of Indigenous-related activities taking place in our government schools. There is little doubt that many schools have embraced the significance of inclusive, culturally rich educational environments.

However, while there have been gains in this six month period, there is further work yet to be done in improving outcomes for Indigenous children and young people. The Government is continuing to explore more effective strategies for improvement and to further underpin its commitment to Indigenous communities. The priorities of *Building Our Community - The Canberra Social Plan*, include respect, diversity, and excellence in education and training. These priorities are mirrored throughout the strategies discussed in this report.

SERVICES TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLE ACTION PLAN 2002 - 2004

The report is presented against the commitments and outcomes of the ACT Department of Education, Youth & Family Services' *Within Reach of Us All* Services to Indigenous People Action Plan 2002 – 2004. The Plan, outlines strategies and pathways for schools, the department and other agencies to work together to improve outcomes for Indigenous young people and their families.

Key initiatives in the plan address these commitments:

- Overcoming racism and valuing diversity.
- Forming genuine and on-going partnerships with Indigenous communities.
- Creating safe, supportive, welcoming and culturally inclusive educational and service environments.
- Indigenous children and young people achieving outcomes equitable to the total population.

COMMITMENTS

1. Overcoming racism and valuing diversity

Equity and Diversity Plan 2003 - 2005

The ACT Department of Education, Youth and Family Services launched the Equity and Diversity Plan 2003-05 in August 2003. The Plan recognises that integrating equity and diversity practices into core departmental activity contributes positively to the productivity of all staff.

One of the three key result areas of the Equity and Diversity Plan focuses on *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Employment*. The two main objectives of this key result area are:

- *Increase employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians.*
- *Develop the capacity of our workforce to understand and respond to the cultural, educational and social needs of Indigenous people.*

Increasing employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians

During the period of this report, an additional 12 Indigenous staff members joined the department, four teachers and eight administrative staff members. This brings the total number of Indigenous employees at the end of August 2003 to 35, including 9 teachers and an Indigenous trainee. This is an increase of 52% in the sixth month period.

While the number of Indigenous employees remains small, a range of strategies is in place to continue to increase employment opportunities for Indigenous people.

- Press advertisements include the wording "The ACT Department of Education, Youth and Family Services is an equal opportunity employer. Applications from Indigenous Australians are encouraged."
- Teacher recruitment advertisements are placed in Indigenous publications, such as the Koori Mail and the National Indigenous Times. When setting closing dates for these vacancies, consideration is given to the publication and distribution timeframes of newspaper deliveries to Indigenous community groups in rural and remote areas.
- Teacher recruitment applications call for EEO information (Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander) so data can be collated and acted upon as appropriate.
- A minimum of 3 Indigenous teachers are employed each year.

Developing the capacity of our workforce to understand and respond to the cultural, educational and social needs of Indigenous people

The department provides Indigenous cultural awareness training and multicultural awareness training to both teachers and administrative staff. In March 2003 seventeen senior executive officers and managers in the department attended two half days of Indigenous cultural awareness training and in July 2003 all departmental senior executive officers completed two half days of multicultural training.

The Orientation Program for teachers, conducted in March and May 2003, included Indigenous cultural awareness training and an introduction to the 2003 professional learning focus on inclusivity. More than 360 new probationary and contract teachers attended this program.

In addition, in March 2003, 54 new executive teachers attended a briefing on the Services to Indigenous People Action Plan 2002-2004.

In 2003 the department proposed an in-house Indigenous Study Assistance Scholarship to support Indigenous employees to complete a tertiary qualification in an identified area of workforce shortage. A working party has been set up to further develop the scholarship framework.

Overcoming Racism

The *Combating Racism in Schools and the Workplace* policy requires each school to appoint at least one Anti-Racism Contact Officer (ARCO) for students. These officers receive training in current legislation, current issues and tensions, and dealing with complaints including responding to, recording and resolving (with students) complaints. During first Semester 2003, twenty-four new contact officers from across all sectors of schooling attended training.

In 2002 the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services moved to central on-line collection of school data on complaints of harassment and/or discrimination including sexual harassment and racism, through the MAZE administration system. Schools were reminded during Semester 1, 2003 of their obligation to record the data. During this reporting period, eleven incidents of racism were recorded on the database. All of the reported incidents were recorded as being resolved. The department is continuing to work with schools to monitor incidents of racism and ensure all incidents are recorded on the central database.

The department's *Anti-Racism Handbook* and the *Combating Racism in Schools and the Workplace* policy are currently being updated to incorporate the new procedures for resolution of complaints.

Cross-cultural awareness

Following a cultural talk by Wiradjuri Elder, Stan Grant Snr, to a Miles Franklin Primary School class, students and the class teacher were invited to send letters of thanks. Sentiments expressed showed that the students value cross-cultural experiences.

Some comments from the letters included:

‘I really enjoyed your visit. You taught me so much and you were great fun to learn from ... this wonderful experience has benefited me in understanding your culture and not judging a person by their colour’. (boy)

‘If I told you how much I enjoyed your talk I could go on all day’. (girl)

‘I loved your performance. I went home and told my family everything’. (girl)

‘I just want to thank you for sharing your inspiring life. Your life is a good example of how to live our lives’. (boy)

2. Forming genuine and on-going partnerships with Indigenous communities

ACT Indigenous Education Compact

In June 2003, all preschools, schools and colleges received a copy of the *Indigenous Education Compact*, a signed agreement between the department and the Indigenous Education Consultative Body comprising parent and community members. In 2004 the IECB will be invited to comment on the effectiveness of the Compact over its first year of implementation.

Schools have been requested to have an Indigenous community member present the Compact to the school at an assembly, and the Compact is to be displayed in each school and workplace in the ACT Department of Education, Youth and Family Services. This process is a way of recognising the commitments within the ACT Indigenous Education Compact as core business in the education system.

Regular attendance at school is a significant feature of the Compact. The Indigenous home/school liaison officers and their team leaders request student attendance information from schools at each visit, to ascertain if problems exist, and to communicate with the families. Recognition also needs to be given to the efforts of schools and individual teachers in linking with Indigenous families. Many positive and more effective family/school relationships have sprung up through this work, facilitating easier access by families to communication with schools about all aspects of their child's education

ASSPA Committees

In 2003, eighty Aboriginal and Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) committees were being funded by the Australian Government to participate in ACT government school settings. Twenty of these committees represent clusters of schools. Committees are parent-based and include representation from school staff and students.

The Indigenous home/school liaison officers at times work with ASSPA committees to promote activities or provide advice. This communication and liaison engenders close networking and support for Indigenous parents and families. Each year, schools apply to the Australian Government for ASSPA funds based on the number of Indigenous students in the school. The funds support various school programs such as literacy in the home, cultural events, Indigenous art works and other resources and targeted funding assistance for more needy families.

Indigenous Students' Reconciliation Celebration

The ASSPA committee for the Lanyon cluster of schools worked with other committees and the Indigenous community to hold an Indigenous Students' Reconciliation Celebration day, in May 2003 at Boomanulla Oval. It was a very comprehensive, well-attended event with many cultural and other activities and guest speakers. Some of these were: dancing by the Echoes; appearances by Mal Meninga and Nova Peris; art and craft workshops; a touch football competition; presentations by Indigenous artists Jimmy Little, Dale Huddleston and Johnny Huckle; stalls and a monster barbecue. A group of students from Jervis Bay School travelled to Canberra to attend the celebration. All funds raised went back into schools to support other Indigenous-related activities.

Birrigai Consultation

During 2003, the Indigenous community was significantly involved in the department's redevelopment of its Birrigai educational facility at Tidbinbilla. A member of the Indigenous Education Consultative Body was on the Reference Group for the redevelopment and consultations were held with the United Ngunnawal Elders Council. This resulted in agreed outcomes for Indigenous young people forming part of the redevelopment plan. These include:

- Indigenous children and young people having access to culturally appropriate preventive and support programs and services;
- continuing consultation with the Indigenous community about appropriate programs;
- an ongoing working relationship with the Indigenous Education Consultative Body;
- on-site placements for Indigenous apprentices through the school-based new apprenticeships program; and
- use of Birrigai campus for residential programs to train Indigenous students as mentors.

Indigenous Family Support - Jumby Mulla

The Billabong Aboriginal Corporation's Jumby Mulla program receives funding from the ACT Department of Education, Youth and Family Services' Family Support Program to promote the well being of the Indigenous community by encouraging participation, consultation and involvement in community life. The program involves

working in partnership with the Indigenous community in the Belconnen region to identify and implement locally-based community initiatives.

Jumby Mulla offers a range of programs including Motor Mechanics, Introduction to Computers and the Internet, and a cultural program. Social events, such as regular barbeques and an Indigenous women's group, help build community connections. Attendance by Indigenous youth ranges from around 8 to 30 in a day. Some school students attend Jumby Mulla on a part-time basis to work through issues that may be impeding their participation at school.

3. Creating safe, supportive, welcoming and culturally inclusive educational and service environments

NAIDOC Week and associated celebratory activities in schools

In 2003 the theme for NAIDOC (National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee) Week was '**Our Children, Our Future**'. Whilst NAIDOC Week is identified as the second week in July, schools can elect to celebrate at any suitable time. Several schools linked Reconciliation Day and NAIDOC Week activities.

During the reporting period, activities in schools included:

- Indigenous speakers and performances by Indigenous peoples;
- Indigenous students leading assemblies;
- involving students in traditional dance, Aboriginal singing, didgeridoo playing, boomerang throwing, body painting, mural painting, ochre painting, reading Aboriginal stories;
- Reconciliation Concert;
- Yellow, Red and Black Day;
- Indigenous students talking about what NAIDOC Week means to them;
- ASSPA parent members speaking about their visions for educational outcomes for Indigenous students;
- presentation of the Indigenous Education Compact at school assemblies and to School Boards;
- explanation of artefacts and Indigenous flags by Indigenous students;
- creation of garden containing Aboriginal food plants;
- student workshops on Indigenous issues at the National Museum of Australia;
- excursions to Indigenous sites at Yankee Hat in Namadgi National Park; and
- workshop with Indigenous person at Tidbinbilla on dance choreographed to tell the story of the land after the bush fires.

This sample list of activities reflects a growing commitment to the inclusion of Indigenous studies in the curriculum.

Acknowledgement of Country

At 25th birthday assembly of Wanniasa Hills Primary School, an Indigenous student welcomed people with the following words.

Hi, my name is..... I am in year 5 and I am the third oldest Indigenous student in the school. My ancestry on my grandfather's side is Bidjara from the central western part of Queensland and my ancestry on my grandmother's side is Kabi-Kabi. I would like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people, the traditional owners and custodians of this land where we are meeting today. They are one of the many Aboriginal language groups in Australia.

Local Resources

Progress has been made on the production of additional local Indigenous resources for schools. Five story books for the 5 to 8 years age group are under production through the collaborative efforts of local Indigenous families with a contracted writer and historian. The project, which is sponsored by the ACT Government, will not only provide Indigenous resources for our schools, but also provide skills training for the local people involved.

4. Indigenous children and young people achieving outcomes equitable to the total population

Entry to School Assessment

All Kindergarten students are assessed on entry to school in the areas of early reading, early maths and phonological awareness, using the PIPS (Performance in Primary Schools) assessment. The results of the assessment are used by teachers to plan individual learning programs for students and also by the department to determine the level of extra resourcing provided to schools for students in need of support in literacy and numeracy in the early years.

Information provided in this report relates to the PIPS assessment completed in February 2003. The data shows the achievement of subsets of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Kindergarten students, according to whether or not they attended a preschool.

Entry to School Assessment February 2003

Pre School	Group	Total No of Students	No of students in top 80% in Maths	Percentage of students in top 80% in Maths	No of students in top 80% in Reading	Percentage of students in top 80% in Reading	No of students in top 80% in Phonics	Percentage of students in top 80% in Phonics
attended	Indigenous	57	35	61.4%	27	47.4%	34	59.6%
	non-Indigenous	1839	1514	82.3%	1464	79.6%	1433	77.9%
did not attend	Indigenous	15	7	46.7%	5	33.3%	8	53.3%
	non-Indigenous	743	595	80.1%	602	81.0%	584	78.6%

It is of concern that the performance of Indigenous students at initial school entry continues to be below that of non-Indigenous students in each of the three areas. However, Indigenous students who had attended preschool performed significantly better than Indigenous students who had not attended preschool.

The government preschool program is working at increasing Indigenous enrolments to ensure that young children get the best possible start to their schooling and arrive in Kindergarten with literacy and numeracy skills at the level of the rest of the population.

Through local Indigenous networks, the work of the Koori Preschool program and the preschool Indigenous home/school liaison officer, communication with families has improved and enrolments in preschools have increased. From February 2003 to August 2003, the preschool enrolment census figures show an increase from 71 to 80 Indigenous students. Nine Indigenous families applied for and gained early entry to mainstream preschool for semester 2, 2003. Consideration is being given to expanding the Koori Preschool program and the home/school liaison officer is focusing on identifying all Indigenous students of preschool age.

There is currently no way of directly comparing the results from the ACT Early Assessment Program to similar programs in other States, due to differences in the assessments used and timing of assessments. The National Report to Parliament on *Indigenous Education and Training, 2002* indicates that across Australia, approximately 57% of Indigenous students attending preschools were ready for entry to school in numeracy. The ACT figure of 61.4% of Indigenous students in the top 80% in Maths on the PIPS entry to school assessment, compares favourably with this. Work is continuing, however, in the area of early intervention in literacy and numeracy to reduce the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and support all students in early readiness for learning.

Early Intervention

Early Literacy Officers are based in primary schools for several weeks at a time to provide professional learning in effective literacy teaching strategies for teachers of young children. The Indigenous Literacy and Numeracy Consultant provides additional assistance to teachers of Indigenous students. Through this program, sixty-three Indigenous students identified at risk in literacy and numeracy, and their teachers, were supported with appropriate teaching strategies and materials. Individual learning plans covering current reading level and skills, areas of concern, and strategies to reach stated objectives were developed for each of these students.

Enhanced Indigenous Support Program

The government funded Enhanced Indigenous Support Program, upgraded the positions of Indigenous education support staff, and increased the number of Indigenous home/school liaison officers from two to eleven. Two teams of officers covering schools and colleges have been created, one team on the northside, the other on the southside, each supervised by a team leader. Recruitment for these positions has occurred during this reporting period.

Home/school liaison officers work with schools to address issues of attendance, behaviour and achievement. During the period of this report, a total of 134 visits have been made with multiple issues discussed in all cases except one. While records of visits are confidential, the following table lists purposes for visits during this period.

Reason for visit/meeting	Frequency of issue discussed
Attendance/Absenteeism	51
Behaviour	51
Grades/Academic progress/Individual Learning Plans	36
Developing alternate programs	15
Personal/Family matters/Substance misuse/Medical	15
Home-school communication issues	15
Juvenile Justice Issues	12
No specific reason given for visit/ meeting	8
Racism issues	6

The program also provides for training for liaison officers with a flexible learning program leading to a Certificate IV in Community Services to commence in 2004.

Attendance

The following table summarises the attendance data of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students for the period covered by this report.

Attendance Data Terms 1 and 2, 2003

Kinder to Year 6	Average Days Absent	Number of students missing more than 20% of days in the term	Percentage missing more than 20% of days in the term		Percentage Attendance
			T1	T2	

Term	T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2
Non-Indigenous	2.2	3.0	675	1112	3	6	96	94
Indigenous	4	5.1	54	87	10	16	92	90

Year 7 to Year 10 (There are fewer than 250 Indigenous students in high schools)	Average Days Absent	Number of students missing more than 20% of days in the term	Percentage missing more than 20% of days in the term		Percentage Attendance
			T1	T2	

Term	T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2
Non-Indigenous	3.9	4.9	951	1464	9	14	92	94
Indigenous	8.3	9	61	69	27	31	83	82

Notes

The attendance data include all absences (including those for illness and other explained reasons) in line with national reporting practices regarding attendance.

The 2003 data on attendance for Indigenous students is similar to that for the same period in 2002, with a slight decrease in attendance in the secondary sector. However, given the small number of Indigenous students in high schools, this change is not statistically significant.

Illness is likely to be a contributing factor to the higher rate of absence for both groups in Term 2 compared with Term 1, as the data includes all absences in line with national reporting practices.

The proportion of Indigenous students who miss more than 20% of days in the term continues to be a concern, although the figures for primary schools are much better than those for high schools. There are a variety of reasons for this high level of absenteeism by some students, including caring for family members, a significant family disturbance, and return to homeland for a period of time. Each of these

students is followed up by the home/school liaison officers and Individual Learning Plans are developed for Indigenous students receiving support. A number of additional strategies are being considered to address these high absence rates, including a mentoring program, and improved communication and home/school liaison.

While the lower rates of attendance for Indigenous students continue to be a focus of ongoing efforts to address the issue, the detail of the attendance data shows a number of Indigenous students being away for significant periods of time, rather than an overall pattern of lower attendance for Indigenous students. If the data for the students who miss more than 20% in the term is removed, the average days absent in Term 1 for Indigenous primary students reduces from 4 to 2.8 and for Indigenous high school students it reduces from 8.3 to 3.7.

The Enhanced Indigenous Support Program will come fully into effect in September 2003. This improved model with home/school liaison officers working more closely in partnership with schools and families will provide stronger support to students and families to work to improve attendance rates.

Pilot Mentor Program

The Australian Government funded pilot Indigenous mentoring program, which involved twenty five Indigenous students at two ACT Government high schools, finished in June. The program clearly highlighted the benefits of this type of community involvement in raising the self-esteem and confidence of Indigenous young people needing support. The pilot program experienced problems with maintaining the same mentors for up to a year and their voluntary versus paid status. However, student and community expectations are that mentoring of some form should continue. Improved models of delivery and possible avenues for further funding are being examined, for example, negotiations are occurring with the Birrigai Outdoor School for a future camp for Indigenous mentors and selected students.

Charles Perkins Scholarship for Undergraduate Indigenous Students

In 2003 the Department of Education, Youth & Family Services initiated a partnership with the University of Canberra – Ngunnawal Centre, which resulted in the award of two Charles Perkins Scholarships, to the value of \$2,000 each, to undergraduate Indigenous students.

The scholarships are to assist Indigenous students with costs associated with their studies, and to support and encourage Indigenous people in the undertaking of tertiary study. The department is committed to supporting young Indigenous people having equitable access to educational opportunities, including tertiary education.

Vocational Education & Training

The government's *Partners in a Learning Culture - ACT Indigenous Action Plan 2003-2005*, was launched in February 2003 to address the vocational education and training needs of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT.

The Indigenous People in Vocational Education and Training sub-committee has met three times since the release of the plan. It is establishing contacts with a wide range of stakeholders who have an interest in Indigenous participation in vocational education and training, and researching the ways to increase participation in the Recognition of Current Competencies process for Indigenous people. A business plan is being developed by the sub-committee to access national funding for information and communications technology support for Indigenous people in the ACT.

The new Vocational Education and Training Act 2003 has provision for an Indigenous member on the decision-making body. Mr Keith Brandy will formally take his place on the VETA Board when the Act is passed.

Indigenous college students continue to be encouraged to participate in vocational courses. The following table shows the number of students and type of courses being undertaken in 2003.

Enrolment of Year 11/12 Indigenous Students in Vocational Courses, 2003

Course Title	Male	Female	Total
AUTOMOTIVE TECHNOLOGY	5	1	6
BUILDING CONSTRUCTION	1		1
BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION	3	2	5
COMMUNITY SERVICES		7	7
COMPUTER OPERATIONS	2	1	3
FASHION DESIGN	1		1
FURNITURE CONSTRUCTION	1		1
HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY STUDIES		1	1
HOSPITALITY STUDIES	1	9	10
HOSPITALITY STUDIES A		3	3
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	11	10	21
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY STUDIES		1	1
LABORATORY SKILLS B	2		2
METALS FABRICATION	1		1
MULTIMEDIA	3		3
MULTIMEDIA A		1	1
MUSIC INDUSTRY		1	1
RETAIL	1		1
SPORT & REC'N INDUSTRY STUDIES	1		1
TOURISM STUDIES		5	5
WOODCRAFT	4		4
Total	37	42	79

The range of courses and number of enrolments are similar to 2002, however, the number of enrolments in Information Technology has increased significantly, with an equal number of boys and girls involved. The corresponding decline has been in male enrolments in Hospitality.

Hindmarsh Education Centre

Each day Indigenous detainees in *Quamby Youth Detention Centre* can participate in one unit of a vocational learning program at the Hindmarsh Education Centre. A range of programs is on offer including: horticulture; permaculture; wood/metal technology; animal/poultry husbandry. During this reporting period there were nine Indigenous residents through the Centre. They took part in electronic woodwork programs, metal technology and horticulture.

Conclusion

This report discusses many positive strategies and pathways for the improvement of Indigenous education outcomes. Highlights relate to the increase in communication with Indigenous families through home/school liaison and the impact this has on developing stronger links with the community. Schools are reflecting a greater awareness of Indigenous cultural issues and are working well in providing rich experiences and opportunities within the school environment. Particular issues such as student attendance and early intervention are being addressed more comprehensively.

The Government's commitment to the improvement of Indigenous outcomes is reflected in this report through the many and varied programs and initiatives already in place. It should be recognised that the March to August report is an interim report, with the September to February report providing quite comprehensive data on the previous year's outcomes including the academic achievement of Indigenous students. Reporting to the Legislative Assembly on a six-monthly basis allows only a short period in which to show improvement. However, the Government is confident that benefits and results will be evident over time.