



FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION YOUTH ADVISORY GROUP COMMUNIQUE

The First Nations Education Youth Advisory Group (the Advisory Group) have worked with the Department of Education and the National Indigenous Australians Agency during 2024 to provide input and advice into priority areas related to school engagement.

Who we are

We, the First Nations Education Youth Advisory Members, are a group of well-diverse, knowledge-holders who have come together to share our lived experience of struggle, success and resilience within our own personal education journeys. The Advisory Group comprises of members from across regional, remote and metropolitan communities. Our purpose was, and continues to be, to represent young people's voices by providing input and advice into education priority areas, to influence policymakers and policy discussions to empower young people for the betterment of the next generations. The key themes from discussions and advice from our Youth Advisory Group are outlined below.

Schools must address and recognise the impact of racism on First Nation students and families

It is essential that schools are culturally safe places in order to support the social and emotional wellbeing and engagement of First Nations students. Schools and policymakers must actively address and recognise the impact of racism on First Nations students and their families. Educators should complete ongoing, non-tokenistic cultural responsiveness training as guided by local communities, to effectively combat all forms of racism that First Nations students face at school.

Our Group calls for just accountability from both teachers, leaders and the education system as a whole in addressing these issues with true transparency. There is an urgent need to examine and eliminate racism in learning materials. Schools must address racism by developing a place-based anti-racism framework with specific actions that must be followed by educators and school leaders. Addressing instances of racism creates the foundation for culturally safe and respectful schools.

Embedding First Nations Cultures and perspectives in schools

The Group highlights the importance of actively encouraging, valuing, respecting and celebrating First Nations Cultures within educational systems and school communities. It is important for school leadership to value the holistic nature of First Nations Cultures and perspectives, to support teachers and students in their cultural learning journeys. Cultural responsiveness should be prioritised as a compulsory core skill within teacher training and educational practice frameworks, just like other compulsory teaching capabilities. School leaders and educators must continue to engage in cultural responsiveness training and learning opportunities to inform their ongoing teaching practice. Educators who are trained to better understand truths and histories from the perspective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are in the best position to create culturally safe environments where all children can thrive. Our group highlights the strength and value of schools working closely with family members, carers and local communities to learn, understand and respect our Cultures.

Schools must offer flexible learning opportunities that meet the needs of students

Education systems and schools should ensure that flexible learning and personal development opportunities are openly offered to meet the diverse needs of First Nations students. Schools must genuinely listen to the experiences, stories and hardships of First Nations students to ensure they are embracing student-directed learning. Access to personalised learning pathways can empower students to take ownership of their education.

Schools should create platforms for First Nations excellence

Educators must create supportive and strengths-based environments where students are encouraged to take charge of their autonomy by identifying and developing their educational and personal interests and strengths. Creating an environment that encourages self-belief, and personal pride empowers students to develop their own goals and definitions of success and can support students to reach their full potential.

It is important that educators celebrate and acknowledge student achievements - sharing these successes with families and carers - to strengthen the connection between home and school and further support student growth and confidence.

Access to First Nations teachers and support staff

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators play a critical role in supporting First Nations students and families. It is important that First Nations students have access to First Nations teachers, support staff and mentors. Where there are no First Nations educators in a school, non-First Nations educators - who value the importance of Culture in students' learning journeys - can create inclusive and supportive environments for students and their families.

Schools build and value connections with families, communities and organisations

It is crucial for schools to create strong, meaningful connections with First Nations families, communities and organisations. Developing these strong relationships is important so that schools, families and carers can work together to support the student through challenges when they arise. Schools should offer culturally supportive, regular and inclusive opportunities for

families and carers to be involved with the school. We highlight the positive impact of having family or carers in the school environment to support learning and provide social and emotional support, which significantly enhances student engagement. Teachers must maintain open communication with families and carers, offering valuable information and creating opportunities for discussions about students' learning and wellbeing. It is important that students and families are provided with clear and accessible information about post school options for careers and further studies.

First Nations students have opportunities to connect with each other

Schools play a vital role in supporting and creating opportunities for First Nations students to connect. This might include within school districts, across year levels or through supporting access to cultural activities. These opportunities offer supportive connections to Culture, family and community which are essential for creating a sense of belonging and enhancing students' wellbeing. We have found opportunities to connect with other First Nations students outside our schools particularly valuable – especially for schools with low numbers of First Nations students.

First Nations teachers must be supported during their training and teaching journey

First Nations teachers must be supported at every stage of their training and teaching journey through flexible and differentiated pathways into the profession. Universities must provide holistic support to First Nations students, offering tailored resources and guidance throughout their studies. We highlight the need to address the colonial and cultural load experienced by First Nations educators, ensuring they are not burdened with additional responsibilities that impact their ability to thrive in the classroom and their professional development. First Nations educators should be paid in accordance with their multiple knowledge systems and supported with any additional expectations that are asked of them including around leadership, family and community responsibilities.

The skills and knowledges of First Nations educators need to be recognised and properly valued, especially when appointing leaders in First Nations education.

AI technologies, First Nations Intellectual Property and protection of Culture

We see the potential value AI technologies can bring to support teachers with some aspects of their workload. However, AI technologies must be used with careful consideration of First Nations intellectual property and the protection of Culture. Teachers should be aware of the limitations and biases inherent in AI generative software when relying on it as a credible information source. We think there are risks of Generative AI being used to produce fake art, design and stories without any attention to protecting culture, or proper authority or consent. This can be very damaging for communities and Culture.

Our group acknowledges the importance of digital connectivity in regional and remote places and that not having a digital connection can present challenges for students in using Generative AI. It is important that educators and support staff continually reflect on their own cultural learning journey to ensure they can recognise and challenge any biases AI technology presents.

Rhea

Ait Koedal Clan, Saibai Island

Shanaya

Arrente and Pitjantjatjara

Noah

Gomeri

Georgie

Ngaanyatjarra and Pitjantjatjara

Victory

Dharug and Kamiliroi

Jonathon

Noongar and Yamatji

Sienna

Kuku Yalanji and Waanyi

Dakota

Euahlayi

Tremane

Ngarinyin-Walmajarri

Tulara

Butchulla and Wathaurong