Submission from the Australian Curriculum Studies Association
to the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs

The Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) was established in 1983, providing a national forum for dialogue between those engaged in curriculum work. The purpose of the Association is to:

- provide curriculum leadership across the nation
- develop curriculum resources
- stimulate curriculum conversations
- encourage critical and reflective curriculum practices
- engage in curriculum research

This submission responds to the Indigenous Education Action Plan Draft 2010-2014 by drawing on ACSA’s Principles for Australian Curriculum (Attachment 1).

ACSA endorses the priorities of the Indigenous Education Action Plan Draft 2010-2014 listed below:

**Priority principle:** Programs and services contribute to closing the gap by meeting targets endorsed by COAG while being appropriate to local community needs.

- Indigenous engagement principle: Engagement with Indigenous parents, students and communities is central to the design and delivery of programs and services.
- Sustainability principle: Programs and services are directed and resourced over an adequate period of time to meet COAG targets.
- Access principle: Programs and services are physically and culturally accessible to Indigenous people recognising the diversity of urban, regional and remote needs.
- Integration principle: There will be better collaboration between and within governments at all levels and their agencies to effectively coordinate programs and services.
- Accountability principle: Programs and services will have regular and transparent performance monitoring, review and evaluation.

As an association which encourages critical and reflective curriculum practice, and engages in curriculum research, ACSA supports the exploration of new strategies for improving the educational outcomes for Indigenous students. However, we urge that while this research is undertaken, funding be provided to continue professional development with existing strategies which have proven results. For example, the What Works program, which ACSA has been involved in for over a decade.
Readiness for school

ACSA agrees that the promotion of early engagement with learning supports children in their transition to school.

We urge that any on-entry assessment program to assess students’ literacy and numeracy skills (Action 7, p8) include provision for identifying Indigenous students who require TESL strategies. Many of these students will not be identified by their families as being in need of such tuition as many Indigenous parents mistakenly think their children speak Standard Australian English at home when in fact they are speaking a creole or similar language variety. Failure to identify and provide Teaching English as Second Language (TESL) support to these students will mean they will be unable to achieve targeted literacy levels.

This is consistent with ACSA’s belief that curriculum should provide people with the necessary knowledge, understandings, values and skills to be active, informed and productive citizens in a democratic society.

Engagement and connections

ACSA endorses the notion that ‘a sense of cultural identity, and the active recognition of Indigenous cultures by schools, is critical to student wellbeing and success at school.’ This is consistent with the focus on developing community partnerships which is now central to the What Works program. ACSA also supports further consideration of education models for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages since ACSA believes that curriculum should be inclusive in recognising and representing the cultural, political and economic contribution of the range of groups in the community.

Attendance

While ACSA endorses the need to collect evidence that strategies are improving attendance, improved attendance will be a natural product of greater engagement with education by Indigenous students. In order to provide the skills that students need for life, the curriculum needs to be of current and enduring personal and social value to Indigenous students.

Literacy and numeracy

School level action in the areas of literacy and numeracy needs to go beyond the Focus school. There needs to be continued recognition and funding of successful current projects so that teachers in all schools throughout Australia have access to appropriate professional learning.

ACSA is supportive of piloting new approaches of teaching literacy and numeracy to Indigenous students in line with its belief that curriculum should develop deep disciplinary and interdisciplinary learning.

To achieve acceptable literacy and numeracy standards it is essential that appropriate assessment measures are put in place to identify all Indigenous students who require TESL teaching and for schools to be resourced with appropriately trained teachers.
Leadership, quality teaching and workforce development

In recognition of the high proportion of early career staff working with Indigenous students, ACSA strongly endorses completion of core components on ‘good practice in Indigenous education and the teaching of Indigenous students’ in pre-service teacher education courses as a condition of registration. ACSA also recognises the importance of requiring all teachers to have knowledge and understanding of the learning needs of Indigenous students in the National Teacher Professional Standards Framework.

The provision of appropriate professional learning is consistent with ACSA’s work with the What Works program for teacher educators, and ACSA’s belief that curriculum should be based on cooperation and success for all learners, involve critical reflection, and strive to expose and eliminate inequality experienced by individuals or groups.

Pathways to real post-school options

ACSA believes that curriculum should prepare people to be effective and life-long learners, and therefore endorses efforts to provide education for Indigenous students that will prepare them for employment and economic independence and a real role in determining their own futures. ACSA endorses provision of opportunities for flexible schooling options and support to encourage young people who have left school early to reconnect with education. This has particular relevance for pregnant and parenting students, where continued education will equip them to provide better health and education options for their own children.
ACSA principles for Australian curriculum

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Curriculum involves what is taught (knowledge, understandings, skills, values); how it is taught (pedagogy, teaching style); and how it is assessed (assessment, testing, reporting). Curriculum shapes and is shaped by social, political, economic and historical forces. It involves the selection, interpretation and implementation of culturally-based knowledge, skills, values and beliefs.

ACSA believes that curriculum should:

- be of current and enduring personal and social value
- be constructed from a balanced and explicit selection from key areas of human inquiry and endeavour
- develop deep disciplinary and interdisciplinary learning
- prepare people to be creative and effective life-long learners
- provide people with the necessary knowledge, understandings, values and skills to be active, informed and productive citizens in a democratic society
- encourage global perspectives and promote responsible, just and sustainable global citizenship
- be inclusive in recognising and representing the cultural, political and economic contribution of the range of groups in the community
- be based on cooperation and success for all learners
- be responsive to the experience of learners
- embody participatory, collective and empowering approaches to teaching and learning
- engage people in authentic tasks.

ACSA believes curriculum work should:

- be informed by political, social, economic and historical analysis
- involve explicit identification and evaluation of the values and beliefs on which it is based
- involve critical reflection
- acknowledge that individuals will experience the same learning activity in different ways
- strive to expose and eliminate inequality experienced by individuals or groups
- promote quality at the individual, school, community, system, national and global level
- be a collaborative experience, resourced to ensure active participation by teachers, other education professionals, students and parents.

This policy statement was adopted by ACSA in 2009.