

Examining the Perceived Benefit of Education for Indigenous students in Western Australia: A PhD Study

Submission to the Inquiry in to Educational Opportunities
for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students:

Findings from a Western Australian Study

This study was conducted in 2014-2016 as part of a Doctor of Philosophy in Education at
Edith Cowan University

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Executive Summary

This submission describes key findings of the study *Examining the Perceived Benefit of Education for Indigenous and regional students in Western Australia*: a PhD study which looked at ways of improving education engagement, benefit, and post-secondary aspirations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Western Australia.

The full study was conducted during 2014 with 536 students, 249 of whom were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, from fourteen independent schools in Western Australia. The study consisted of an interview with the Indigenous Program Co-ordinator or Principal of each school, interviews with twenty-one students across eight schools, and an online 67-question student survey sat by the 536 student respondents.

The key findings and recommendations of the study, as pertinent to the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry, are described below:

The Provision of Boarding School Education and its Outcomes

1. Policies in boarding education should acknowledge the two-fold purpose which Indigenous families ascribe to boarding: improving post-secondary career opportunity, and provision of a safe and healthy social environment.
2. All boarding schools should explore ways to increase meaningful communication with parents who live remotely.
3. Schools and boarding environments which provide education or housing for Indigenous students should have policies and training in place to promote socioeconomic and cultural competence amongst staff.
4. Boarding environments should be able to provide a level of access to computer with Internet which is appropriate to the academic and career educational needs of students.

Access to, Participation in, and Benefits of Different School Models for Indigenous Students in Western Australia

5. Students ascribe the greatest levels of benefit to schools that provide meaningful and practical career education, and transition assistance.

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6. Schools can maximise student engagement with effective programs that address the five areas of *Pathway Development, Positive School Culture, Promotion of Indigenous Culture, Student-staff relationships, and Student Self Efficacy*.
7. Different Indigenous students will require different school models, appropriate to their background, aspirations and goals.
8. Schools and funding bodies need to provide greater levels of resourcing to programs aimed at improving social, physical and mental health of students.

Findings and Recommendations for the Engagement of Students in Remote Areas

9. Schools in remote areas need appropriate resourcing to provide for the needs of students experiencing severe social trauma.

Findings and Recommendations on Impacts on Families whose Children Experience Different Models of Educational Services

10. Indigenous families who send their children to boarding school experience social and cultural cost associated with this decision, yet remain key stakeholders in their child's education.
11. Schools can utilise cultural family obligations to increase students' educational engagement and aspirations, rather than allowing this to become a source of tension between families and schools.

Findings and Recommendations for Transition to Further Education and Employment Outcomes

12. Schools should focus on improving aspirations towards post-secondary training or tertiary education for Indigenous students.
13. Policies to improve Indigenous engagement in higher education and vocational training should address the specific barriers associated with geographic remoteness.

These findings and recommendations are discussed in more detail in the following report.

The Provision of Boarding School Education and its Outcomes

There is a clear distinction between the types of boarding schools which Indigenous students attend. The first are regional and remote schools, which generally cater for students from remote communities and stations. Some of these schools incorporate their own boarding house, whilst others service students from a residential college. The second type of boarding school which Indigenous respondents to this study attended, were fee-paying, urban private schools, which provided education and boarding to students who were generally under scholarship.

The particular aspects of boarding education covered in this study were:

- Why do Indigenous families choose to send their children to boarding?
- How does boarding affect communication between schools and families?
- How does boarding affect Indigenous students' aspirations?
- Does boarding improve students' access to a suitable homework environment?
- What level of socioeconomic and cultural competence do Indigenous students experience when attending boarding school?

Why do Indigenous families send their children to boarding?

- Students reported guardians having a two-fold rationale for the decision to attend boarding school: families hoped that boarding school would remove students from communities with high rates of violence, crime and unemployment, and could also lead to better education and employment outcomes for students.
- Many Indigenous residential students interviewed at low to middle fee paying private schools, spoke of coming from difficult social backgrounds where there was "trouble" (e.g. drinking, walking the streets, drugs, violence). Where these students attended schools that provided a positive social environment, they spoke of the critical difference this made in their lives and sense of identity.

“(School J) made me feel like a changed man, without (School J) I would be nothing. I want a good reputation and work experience.”

Yr 12 Indigenous male, School J

How does the experience of boarding affect communication between schools and families?

- When residential students were compared by ethnic status, Indigenous boarding students were significantly less likely than non-Indigenous boarding students to report regular communication between the school and their families. This may have been due to the particularly large distances often existing between Indigenous students’ schools and their family location, and inconsistent access to Internet or telephones in the family’s community impacting on the frequency and effectiveness of communication between the school and family.

How does boarding affect Indigenous students’ aspirations?

- Students from remote communities spoke explicitly about the benefits they had gained from attending larger boarding schools with access to a well-resourced career education programme. In particular, students from remote areas greatly appreciated the opportunity to work towards their drivers’ license and to receive work experience through the school.

Things they teach us here are better ‘cos they teach us about work and you get opportunity to go into town and work. This school they set you up for the future and they set you up with [drivers’] license.

Yr 12 Indigenous male, School J

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- For some students, the higher academic standards, and levels of resourcing and support at the larger urban private schools had improved their education aspirations. This was particularly true for Indigenous students from disadvantaged backgrounds, now introduced to older mentors who had succeeded academically through programmes such as AIME (Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience). One senior student explained that if he had remained in his hometown he would have '*dropped out already*', but that meeting successful Aboriginal mentors had caused him to aspire to university study:

[Because of] people I've met, who've gotten through universities, you know that you can do something after you finish school, that you're not gonna be a dropkick for the rest of your life.

Yr 12 Indigenous male, School A

A fellow student then chipped in to explain that such experiences enabled Indigenous students to build a positive academic self-concept, in opposition to the discourse they had previously experienced.

...as an indigenous person to graduate, well not many indigenous people get these opportunities.

Yr 12 Indigenous male, School A

- Where students had experienced schooling in both remote and urban environments, the juxtaposition of norms between well-resourced, urban schools and under-resourced remote or regional schools could create internal conflict. In particular, differences in economic and academic standards between schools at times caused them to question whether they were capable of achieving in the urban, often 'white', environment, and to experience a reduced regard for the capacity of their remote or regional community.

My standards of where I wanna be has lowered since I've been here (at boarding school) because of the workload and expectations. It hits you how hard it is to finish Year 12 so I can go to university. When I was in (my home town) and knew I was coming (to boarding school) I thought I could do it all.

Yr 10 Indigenous female, School B

Does boarding improve students' access to a suitable homework environment?

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who attended urban private schools, were significantly more likely to experience frequent access to homework assistance and a quiet place to work than were other Indigenous students.
- Family homes of Indigenous school students were much less likely to provide regular computer and Internet than the homes of non-Indigenous students in this study, although this is typically a necessity for academic success in secondary education.
- Amongst students attending boarding schools, Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students reported equal levels of access to computer with Internet.
- Across all students in the study (boarding and day students), Indigenous students were less likely to attend a school which provided regular computer and Internet access for homework.

What level of cultural competence do Indigenous students experience when attending boarding school?

- During interviews, a number of Indigenous boarding students spoke of facing overt racism, and cultural ignorance, from non-Indigenous students and staff.

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Some of the day boys try to joke around but they take it too far sometimes... they do all the stereotype stuff, walk up to you asking for drugs, do accents”.

Yr 12 Indigenous male, School A

I don't think (that the teachers respect Aboriginal culture) because they correct your English when you speak like where you're from instead of White English.

Yr 9 Indigenous female, School B

- Scholarship students also expressed frustration at having to defend their position:

Normally they're like “youse get everything, youse don't have to pay for everything, where we have to work hard” and that happens quite a bit.

Yr 12 Indigenous female, School B

- Indigenous scholarship students were often caught between two worlds, finding that when they returned home from boarding school during holidays, they had to defend their decision to attend an ‘elite’ urban school to others in their home community.
- For many students attending boarding school, cultural protocols and values were not perceived to be appreciated by school staff. During school photographs, one school refused to allow Aboriginal boarding students to have ‘family’ photographs with other Aboriginal boarding students who were not birth siblings, which left interviewees feeling discriminated against. Students reported that this incident alienated them from the school and furthered the negative social discourse that Aboriginal Australians do not have the right to proudly carry on their culture.

Recommendations for Boarding Education for Indigenous students

- 1. Policies in boarding education should acknowledge the two-fold purpose which Indigenous families ascribe to boarding: improving post-secondary career opportunity, and provision of a safe and healthy social environment.**
- 2. All boarding schools should explore ways to increase meaningful communication with parents who live remotely.**

This might include visits to home communities, and holding ‘yarning circles’ that allow parents to communicate with school staff in an informal manner.

- 3. Schools and boarding environments which provide education or housing for Indigenous students should have policies and training in place to promote socioeconomic and cultural competence amongst staff.**

Schools who take on boarding students would do well to consider the ‘social shock’ that residential students might feel when comparing their new school environment with their previous one. Staff working at boarding schools, need to be cognisant of holding high expectations of students whilst also supporting students to have a strong academic self-concept. Students who are experiencing cognitive dissonance in their new school environment may need the opportunity to discuss this openly in a safe environment, where they can be assisted to identify the cultural, geographic and socio-economic factors leading to differences between schools in a way that does not confirm a negative self-concept.

- 4. Boarding environments should be able to provide a level of access to computer with Internet which is appropriate to the academic and career educational needs of students.**

Participation in, and Benefits of Different School Models for Indigenous Students in Western Australia

Whilst this study did not examine access and participation to school models in detail, but found some key socioeconomic differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students', affecting access to educational opportunity.

Both the survey and interview stages of this study explored at length the benefit which Indigenous students, obtained from schooling. These benefits were not explored by school model, but as individual aspects of the school environment.

The school intervention strategies found to share significant correlation with student attitudes toward the benefit of school were *Career Education and Pathway Development Opportunities, Positive School Culture, Respect and Understanding of Indigenous Culture, Respectful Relationships between Students and Staff, and Student Self-Efficacy*. These strategies are explored under the headings in the dot points below.

The particular aspects of educational access, and school strategies that promote educational benefit for Indigenous students described in this submission are:

- Socioeconomic factors affecting Indigenous access to educational opportunity
- Career education and pathway development opportunities
- Social, physical and mental health
- Positive relationships between students and staff
- Impact of cultural activities on educational engagement

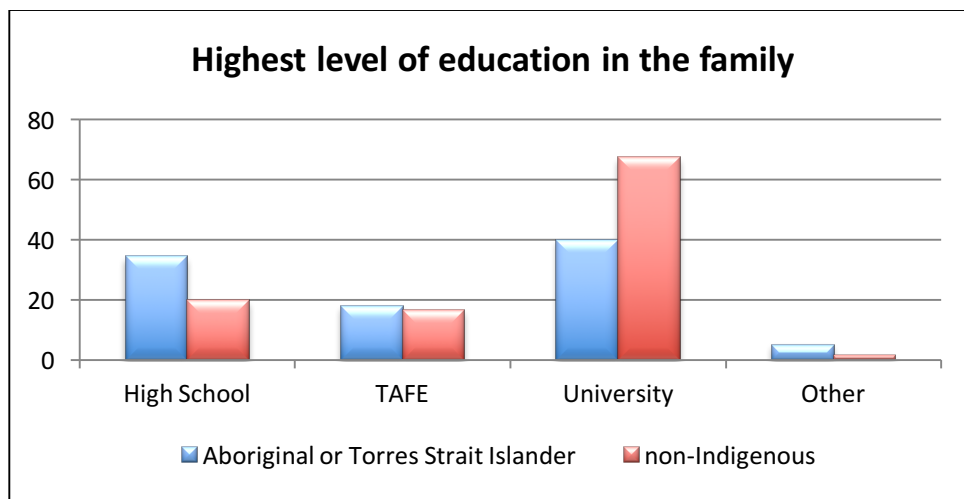
Socioeconomic factors affecting Indigenous access to educational opportunity

- Indigenous students in this study were much more likely to come from geographic regions with higher unemployment rates, and lower mean levels of post-secondary education, than non-Indigenous students in this study.

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- Whilst family educational attainment and a suitable home study environment may affect educational success, this study showed that they were not significantly correlated with Indigenous student perception of the *benefit* of school.
- Indigenous students were twice as likely to report that they did not have any family members who had completed Year 12, and reported significantly lower levels of family education than did non-Indigenous respondents, as per the table below.

Graph 2: Highest level of education amongst family members, by Indigenous status.



Career education and pathway development opportunities

- Indigenous boarding students in this study made explicit that their decisions regarding choice of school were based on perceptions of the type of future employment benefit which the school could provide. Some schools were recognised by students for promoting better chances of academic success and tertiary education opportunities, whereas other schools had been chosen for their provision of access to traineeships and work experience.
- Some schools in this study worked primarily with students from remote communities or from backgrounds of socioeconomic disadvantage. Many of these

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- students had peer networks that were not attending school, without employment goals, and caught up in substance abuse. In these environments, school leaders had spent time developing curriculum and programs that developed students' capacity to create meaningful goals, and be work ready. Typically, such programs included driving license acquisition, literacy and numeracy, computer literacy and job readiness 'soft skills' e.g. punctuality, workplace discipline etc.
- One Principal at a rural senior secondary campus for disengaged students had created a program where all students had the opportunity to obtain a drivers' license, engage in paid work experience and obtain basic qualifications (Certificate I and II), with the dual purpose of developing students' self-confidence as well as their capacity to capitalise on work opportunities once they returned home. The school used government grants for scholarships and residential allowances, as well as Abstudy payments with permission of the parents, to create a pay-scale for students as they developed from on-site unskilled work through to off-site skilled work. The paid work experience program was intended to allow students to experience the economic value of work, and perceive the higher pay off which accompanies higher qualifications. Whilst there were graduates from this school who had failed to transition into successful post-secondary employment or education outcomes, the principal reported that an equal number had chosen to remain at the school beyond the legally required age. These students had previously been disengaged at other schools, but had chosen to remain at a school where they received qualifications that had meaning in the employment world, and earned an income from their hard work.
 - At most of the larger schools, senior secondary students reported having access to a significant level of practical career support, such as help finding apprenticeships, vocational training or work experience, providing job interview skills, holding career expos, subject counselling, visits to universities and TAFE campuses, guest speakers, and arranging opportunities for students to meet with prospective employers such as mining companies or the Australian Defence Force Academy.

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- Whilst sport programs have successfully been used to engage Indigenous students, both staff and students interviewed in this study identified that these programs could prevent students seeking career pathways that would lead to meaningful local employment, and reinforce a negative stereotype of Aboriginal students' ability to succeed in professional roles.
- Indigenous students from remote or rural areas expressed a desire that career education focus on options that would allow them to live near their family and 'country', whilst contributing meaningfully to the community.

Social, physical and mental health

- Both students and school leaders in this study felt that provision of a safe environment and relevant health education was a key benefit of schooling for Indigenous students. This was particularly a need for Indigenous students from remote and socioeconomically disadvantaged communities.
- The sense that many students were in need of clear instruction in healthy 'normative' behaviour regarding relationships, nutrition, sexual health and mental health was accompanied by an articulated desire for access to resources that could assist students in developing these goals. Many school leaders had a deliberate focus on health matters in their curriculum, and expressed frustration at having insufficient finances or access to agencies to deal with the high needs of the clientele that they worked with.

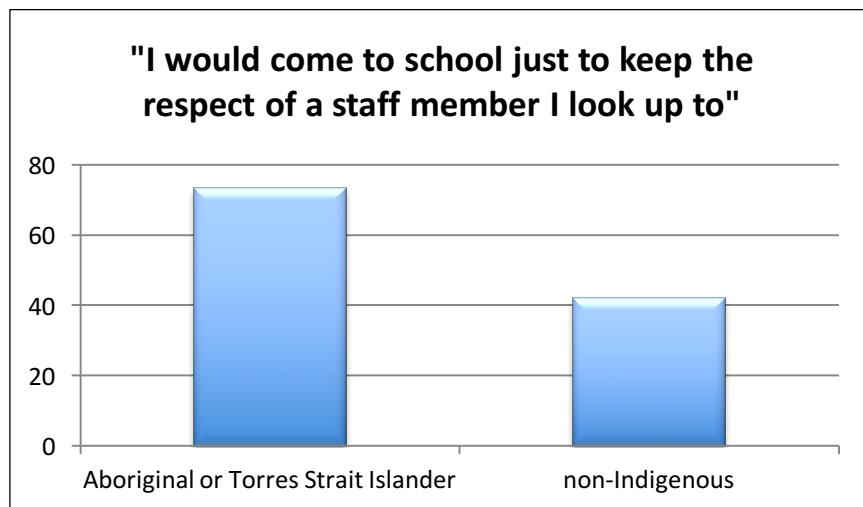
Positive relationships between students and staff

- At some schools, the influence of staff created student disengagement, particularly where school or boarding staff were not knowledgeable about the various socioeconomic, cultural and geographic issues facing students.

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- Student engagement was more likely when staff demonstrated awareness of the importance of building perceptions of respect, cultural inclusion, celebrating student success, and maintaining high expectations.
- Whilst Indigenous students in this study were not any more or less likely to form respectful bonds with school staff, this bond was almost twice as likely to impact on attendance choices of Indigenous students, than for non-Indigenous students.

Graph 3: Effect of respectful relationships on student attendance



Impact of cultural activities on educational engagement

- There is a statistically significant correlation for Indigenous students between the perception that schools use a culturally appropriate approach, and the perception that school is a positive place to be.
- Across every school in this study, Indigenous students reported that their teachers demonstrated only superficial or infrequent understanding of Aboriginal culture. Students did not interpret this as intentional racism, but did find it frustrating and at times disengaging.

- Indigenous students who attended remote schools where they were in the ethnic majority, and had greater access to Indigenous staff and connection to country, reported a more positive cultural experience at school. Hence, students who leave remote schools for urban or boarding schools with large non-Indigenous populations, are likely to perceive a reduced level of cultural understanding and respect in their new environment.
- Where schools had populations of urban Indigenous students, Indigenous Program Coordinators often focused on activities that increased students' cultural knowledge and connection to country, as a way of improving student engagement with school, sense of identity, and self-esteem. At one urban school, the Indigenous Program Coordinator hoped to obtain funding to take students out on country so that she could help students identify with the land, what it means to be an Aboriginal person, and to understand the impact of industry on traditional Indigenous lands and ways of living.
- Where students did have a strong connection to Indigenous culture, they sometimes perceived school cultural activities such as NAIDOC events as superficial and tokenistic. These students felt that schools could exhibit a greater level of cultural proficiency by demonstrating respect and understanding of Indigenous ways of being such as connection to country, cultural protocols, learning styles, and responsibilities to family.

Findings and Recommendations for Identifying Benefits of Different School Models for Indigenous students

5. Students ascribe the greatest levels of benefit to schools that provide meaningful and practical career education, and transition assistance.

Career pathway development opportunities should be tailored towards the needs of the student body, should provide real links to industry and further education institutions, and focus on increasing student self-efficacy.

6. Schools can maximise student engagement with effective programs that address all five areas of *Pathway Development, Positive School Culture, Promotion of Indigenous Culture, Student-staff relationships, and Student Self Efficacy.*

Schools which focus on building a positive school culture, greater student self-efficacy and improved family attitudes towards education are likely to witness an improvement in student perceptions on the benefit of education beyond what could be attained by each strategy uniquely.

7. Different Indigenous students will require different school models, appropriate to their background, aspirations and goals.

There is a diversity amongst experiences and perceptions of Indigenous students at different schools, hence, a one-size-fits-all approach for Indigenous policy across all schools would not be appropriate.

8. Schools and funding bodies need to provide greater levels of resourcing to programs aimed at improving social, physical and mental health of students.

Many schools were aware of the high needs of Indigenous students who have experienced violence, social dysfunction and substance abuse in remote communities. Such experiences significantly impact student health and school engagement. Schools need to be appropriately supported to address these needs through health programs, career education, cultural pride experiences and strategies that focus on student resilience and self-efficacy.

The Engagement of Students in Remote Areas

Four of the fourteen schools in this study were situated in remote areas. During interviews, students and school leaders spoke of the particularly challenging social environments in some remote communities.

Student engagement at remote schools is impacted by social challenges

- School leaders at remote schools, and at urban schools servicing boarding students from remote areas, discussed at length the effect of social trauma such as Indigenous suicide, domestic violence, and community unemployment, on the student body. Highly traumatised students often presented with severely challenging behaviour that required highly specialised counselling and resources which were not often available at remote schools. One school Principal estimated that to provide a stable and safe environment he would need a staffing ratio of one adult per ten students, which the school could not afford.
- Even in dry communities, remote schools faced problems caused by sly grogging, family violence and alcoholism, and criminal activity in the community.
- At one remote school where students had burned down a community building, the Principal had to house the students in his family home overnight to protect them from retribution from community members. This school leader demonstrated an extreme commitment to the care of his students, but there was an associated impact on the Principal's own mental health and desire for longevity in the role.

Findings and Recommendations for the Engagement of Students in Remote Areas

9. Schools in remote areas need appropriate resourcing to provide for the needs of students experiencing severe social trauma.

Such resourcing might include health packages, training for staff in dealing with trauma and mental health issues, improved staff-to-student ratios, and access to additional counselling and respite for remote school teachers.

Impacts on Families whose Children Experience Different Models of Educational Services

In relation to this Term of Reference, respondents to this study were asked to explain the level of support that they received from family for educational decisions. In addition, Indigenous boarding students spoke of the occasional tension between cultural obligation and educational engagement.

Boarding students reported high levels of family support for education

- The decision to send children to boarding school for long periods of time, and with an associated loss of cultural education opportunities, comes at significant social cost to the family, and is not made lightly. Families of Indigenous students choose to utilise boarding schools in order to access career opportunities, and safe social environments, for their children.
- Amongst all students interviewed, family members played a key role in promoting school engagement in the face of homesickness or other school difficulties, and in role modelling aspirations toward education.

Dad's been hard on me, would have made sure I graduated. He went to Year 11 and has been employed since then.

Yr 11 Indigenous male, School A

- At all schools, students reported similarly high levels of family support for education and employment aspirations, irrespective of the school socioeconomic and geographic environment, and actual family education levels.
- It was not uncommon for interviewees to state that either they, or a sibling or cousin, would be the first member of their family to complete Year 12. This fact was

often a source of pride for students, who felt a sense of accomplishment at having overcome barriers to education.

School attendance can prevent students from fulfilling obligations to family

- Indigenous teachers can have obligations to family such as care of children, the sick or elderly, funeral attendance (sorry business) and cultural business. The conflict between family obligation and school attendance requirements can create tension between schools, families and students which can force Indigenous students to choose between reduced educational outcomes, or loss of cultural identity. This is often more of a concern for students who attend boarding school, or consider post-secondary education in a capital city.
- Families that require teenagers to fulfil cultural and domestic obligations often still perceive formal schooling to be important. Rather than placing blame on Aboriginal families for occasional prioritisation of domestic responsibilities, schools might do well to utilise cultural attitudes towards family in order to increase education participation. When asked how schools could best gain a family's commitment to keeping a teenager in school even when there were needs at home, one student responded:

Maybe tell them that if your child finishes school they can do a nursing course and be able to give more help when you're sick than what they can now.

Yr 12 Indigenous female, School J

Findings and Recommendations on Impacts on Families whose Children Experience Different Models of Educational Services

10. Indigenous families who send their children to boarding school experience social and cultural cost associated with this decision, yet remain key stakeholders in their child's education.

11. Schools can utilise cultural family obligations to increase students' educational engagement and aspirations, rather than allowing this to become a source of tension between families and schools.

Such an approach requires a degree of flexibility from the school, and an ability to somewhat individualise learning for a student who may miss assessments and learning opportunities whilst away. Yet, schools can engage in constructive conversations with families about how to ensure that Indigenous teenagers can experience successful education outcomes whilst also fulfilling cultural and familial obligations.

Comparisons of School Models in the Transition to Further Education and Employment Outcomes

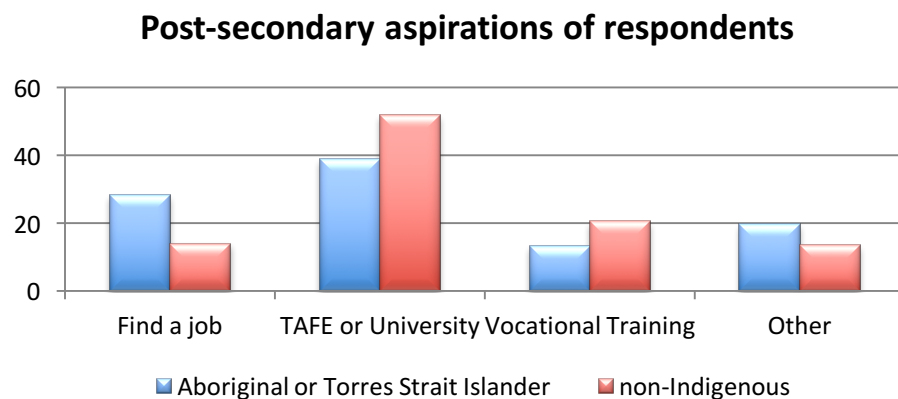
This study examined two factors affecting Indigenous students' transitions to post-secondary education or employment: Student aspirations, and the impact of geographic remoteness on transitions.

The study revealed that:

- Indigenous students' post-secondary education aspirations remained lower than those of non-Indigenous students throughout secondary school
- Students from remote and regional areas faced significant barriers to post-secondary transitions.

Indigenous students' post-secondary education aspirations remained lower than those of non-Indigenous students throughout secondary school

- Indigenous students being twice as likely to report that they wanted to get a job after secondary school without pursuing further training or studies.
- Only 52% of Indigenous students aspired to post-secondary education or training, compared with 72% of non-Indigenous students.



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- Even amongst students who aspired to complete Year 12, Indigenous students were much less likely than non-Indigenous students to aspire to further education. This may mean that Indigenous students do not believe post-secondary education or training will carry sufficient income benefit to justify spending further years out of the workforce, or further years living and studying away from home. Furthermore, Indigenous students may believe themselves less capable of succeeding in post-secondary training and education due to lack of family role models, lower expectations from school staff, or lower academic achievement in school.

Students from remote and regional areas faced significant barriers to post-secondary transitions

- Schools in remote and regional areas could sometimes not deliver vocational qualifications to students because staff were not trained to do so. High staff turnover in some of these locations meant that programs requiring skilled staff may not be sustainable.
- Staff at boarding schools reported that achieving successful post-secondary transitions for students who lived thousands of kilometres away could be very difficult.
- Large distances were also highlighted as an impediment to effective post-secondary transitions. One principal reported that the fear of the unknown in having to move to Perth dissuaded some students from going to university.
- For some boarding students, the prospect of further education meant a longer time period away from family and country. Some students reported that this was a very difficult decision to make.

Findings and Recommendations for Transition to Further Education and Employment Outcomes

12. Schools should focus on improving aspirations towards post-secondary training or tertiary education for Indigenous students.

Such a strategy acknowledges that long-term employment and income benefits are associated with higher levels of training or education. This study suggests that these programs need to be tailored towards employment opportunities that allow students from remote and rural areas to develop a skillset appropriate to the opportunities available in their home region. Programs should aim to address the lower proportions of Indigenous Australians achieving post-secondary qualifications and ensure that schoolteachers demonstrate consistent and high expectations of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students' academic capabilities.

13. Policies to improve Indigenous engagement in higher education and vocational training should address the specific barriers associated with geographic remoteness.

Demographics of study participants

Respondents to the survey attended schools in the Catholic (n =278) and Independent (n =258) sectors. In the study, 207 students reported that they lived in a boarding house, 293 students reported that they were day students, and 36 students did not report their residential status.

The geographic home regions from which the largest numbers of respondents came were, in order of size, the Midwest (n = 147), the Kimberley (n = 124), Perth (n = 53), and the Wheatbelt (n = 42).

*Table number: Percentage of respondents from geographic home region **

Kimberley		MidWest		Perth		Other	
Indigenous	Non-Indig.	Indigenous	Non-Indig.	Indigenous	Non-Indig.	Indigenous	Non-Indig.
16.8	6.6	3.0	24.8	4.3	5.7	7.0	10.6

*This question was added after the pilot stage hence 17.6% of respondents did not respond

The proportion of respondents by age, gender and Indigenous status, is reported in the table below, for the 93.6% of respondents who provided full demographic information. A small percentage chose not to report age, gender or Indigenous status.

Table number: Percentage of respondents (n = 536) by demographic status

	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous		Total
	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Year 8	5.1	3.4	0.1	0	8.6
Year 9	8.5	2.5	6.4	8.7	26.1
Year 10	7.2	3.8	7.6	4.9	23.5
Year 11	6.4	3.4	6.8	6.2	22.8
Year 12	2.6	2.6	4.9	2.5	12.6
Total	29.8	15.7	25.8	22.3	93.6

Limitations of study

The findings reported here represent a summary of results across both the questionnaire and interview stages of the study. While statistical analysis can identify correlations and means across the whole sample, this does not infer that reported effects will be the same for individual schools or students included in the study.

Conclusion

This study has revealed key factors affecting the opportunities and benefits of education available to Indigenous students in Western Australia.

Indigenous students and schools are significantly impacted by high levels of social trauma affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Access to health education and a safe environment is a key benefit available through schooling, and provides an opportunity for government intervention to the crisis of suicide, substance abuse and incarceration affecting Australia's Indigenous communities.

Where schools provide career education and pathway development opportunities that are meaningful to the students' situation and goals, and clearly linked to future employment options, Indigenous students ascribe high value to education. At this point in time, it does not appear that schools are effectively increasing Indigenous students' aspirations towards higher education, even though Indigenous Year 12 completion rates have improved.

Families of Indigenous students, particularly boarding students, are supportive of educational aspirations as a means of increasing their child's opportunity for success in life.

Students are more likely to value schooling, and aspire to Year 12 completion, when they experience positive and respectful relationships with staff, appropriately targeted career education opportunities, have a firm belief in their own capability, and experience respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

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End of Submission