

NIYEC STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-2025



NIYEC
National Indigenous Youth
Education Coalition

CONTENTS

- 3** FOREWORD
- 5** OUR GROUNDING
- 6** OUR CONTEXT
- 9** OUR INTERGENERATIONAL VISION
- 10** OUR PURPOSE
- 11** OUR VALUES
- 12** OUR PRINCIPLES
- 13** GOALS FOR THIS GENERATION
- 14** OUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES





It is with great pride that we present to you the National Indigenous Youth Education Coalition (NIYEC) Strategic Plan 2020–2025. We know education has the power to support healthy lives, sustain communities, and promotes the values and aspirations of Nations. Our people have cared for this continent since time immemorial and have a right to be empowered through an education system that values them for who they are, what they know and what they do.

Our learning systems hold a mirror up to us as a society.

They shape our future generations to believe what's important, what's valuable, how we came to be, and what lessons we need to hold onto once we're gone. The question is, what does this current system say about how we value the knowledge, cultures, languages, and histories of the more than 250 Indigenous Nations on this continent?

NIYEC began as a diverse collective of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people both passionate about education and frustrated by the growing social segregation within education and assimilatory practices we experienced. Indigenous education, as we know it today, is shaped by hundreds of years of colonisation of which Our People have had to adapt to, resist and survive.

For too long Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People have been denied the opportunity to reap the full benefits of equitable, quality education, because the system was designed to assimilate us. When a learning system that operates on the lands that your ancestors walked for thousands of years does not recognise you, your language, your values and aspirations or the intelligence you have; it is disempowering.

NIYEC is committed to changing this.



PLANT THE SEED FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

To change the education system, my call to action would be to change the mindset of everyone. Blak kids don't have to act a certain way to fit in, they can be who they want to be, they can be them, while they're educating themselves. So make them feel comfortable walking in their skin. Embrace their way of learning in life.

- Neil Sabatino, Kulkalgal, Meriam, Maluligal

This strategy has been developed through listening to the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people from across the continent. Through NIYEC's 'Education of Our Own Design' workshop series, young people reimagined how our education system could be designed from a position of self-determination and power. We reimagined everything, from the purpose of education, what we value and measure, how we pass knowledge, to how we would construct physical learning spaces. This reimagination was not calling for anything 'new' but in fact, signalled a desire to reclaim what our people have passed on for thousands of generations; learning designed for us.

This is why our strategy is driven by an intergenerational vision; to build on the work of our Old People, and to plant the seed for future generations. We have set goals for ourselves and this generation to drive our strategic action in the day to day and year-to-year. Key to this work is collaboration, both at the ground level ensuring that learning is contextualised to the landscape, history, and aspirations of community, while pulling systemic and structural levers of change that tackle education inequity, across sectors, at regional, state and national levels.

As Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and members of a broad, diverse learning ecosystem, it's our collective responsibility to build better systems for the next generation of learners. Together, we can create a fairer, equitable foundation to ground all systems of learning, so that when the mirror is held up we see a just society, where the longest continuing knowledge system is not only surviving but shaping and informing our collective action to tackle the complex global issues that threaten our environment and humanity.

Hayley McQuire

Co-Founder and National Coordinator

OUR GROUNDING

We pay our respect to the Ngunnawal People for their custodianship over the lands of which we held our first meeting in Canberra. Many of our founders have lived on Ngunnawal Country and have been personally supported by the strong local community. Although we come from different nations, we recognise the importance of this moment which started our journey together, and the country which facilitated that connection.

We bring together young mob from across the continent to share our collective passion for education. We respect every young person that we work with and the multiple responsibilities they hold to their ancestors, elders, families, communities, Nation(s) and country. This is a strength that we value and is integral to grounding our way forward to truly respect each and every Nation and community to self-determine learning that aligns with their values and cultures.



OUR CONTEXT

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, Our People, are the custodians of the longest continuing knowledge systems in the world. Since time immemorial, our people have cared for and listened to Country; we have seen mountains form, rivers bend, reefs expand, seasons change, and studied the night sky. Our people, our land and waters have borne the complex intergenerational impacts of British colonialism, and yet have demonstrated the strength and resilience to continue to push for the survival of our ways of knowing, being and doing.

We know the case for why education is important. It is widely researched and accepted around the world that quality education is fundamental in improving our lives whether it be through improving health outcomes, community development, job opportunities or ongoing lifelong learning. For young people, we see that social segregation in education has been widening since 2006, with OECD (2015) placing Australia as one of the most socially segregated schools systems. Simply, our education system, for all children, is an unlevel playing field.

This disproportionately impacts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children considering education systems have been concerned with the assimilating and disappearing of our People since the 1700s.

In this time, different eras of Indigenous education have shaped both our relationship with the system itself and with colonisers.

- **Frontier era (1788–1920s)** education was often denied to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, however, when it was accessible it was primarily the responsibility of religious organisations/missions, predominantly residential and focused on preparing children to serve colonists.
- **The protected states and assimilation (1850’s–the 1970s)** saw education as the key tool to assimilate Indigenous children, which included the removal of children from their families.
- **The current Integration era (1960s–current)** following the 1967 Referendum is focused on tackling education disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Hogarth, 2018).



They say there’s a problem here, but they’re just symptoms of the problem that’s going on, and that is that the schools that we see now are based on colonial systems of education, and that’s where we need to start, we need to start from the core of that.

- Krystal Hurst, Worimi

The aspirations of the Close the Gap campaign is important, however we believe that there are different ways to achieving those goals that include tackling structural, historical and social causal factors. Too often contemporary policies have focused more on the roles and responsibilities of schools and parents, including ‘carrot and stick’ approaches like the School Enrolment and Attendance Measure, which tied welfare payments to school attendance (Forgarty, 2012).

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy’s (2015) vision is for “all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people achieve their full learning potential, are empowered to shape their futures, and are supported to embrace their culture and identity”. The strategy aligns with the Close the Gap framework by placing priorities on transition pathways, school and child readiness, literacy and numeracy and attendance.

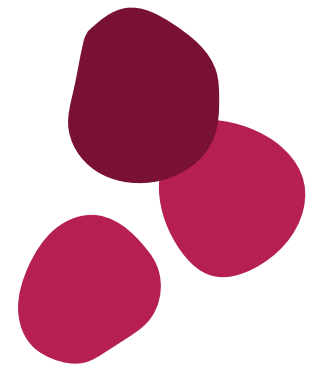
Yet, in its 10 years of operation, the Commonwealth’ Closing the Gap framework failed to meet its targets to end education disparity (Commonwealth Government, 2020). Rather than tackling the structural, historical and social causal factors to educational attainment, contemporary policies have focused more on the roles and responsibilities of schools and parents, including ‘carrot and stick’ approaches like the School Enrolment and Attendance Measure, which tied welfare

payments to school attendance (Forgarty, 2012). Even if this framework didn’t fail, would these targets represent what matters at the core for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or what they view as the purpose of education?

THE EDUCATIONAL STRUGGLES OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ARE FUNDAMENTALLY AND UNEQUIVOCALLY CONCERNED WITH THE RIGHT OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES TO BE INDIGENOUS.

- The Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous Rights in Education, 1993

The Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous Rights in Education, 1993 represents a collective voice of Indigenous peoples globally and was a precursor to the United Nations Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous People. This Statement speaks to the essence and foundation of what the National Indigenous Youth Education Coalition seeks to achieve, which is for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have an education that is grounded in our ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin, 2003).



YOUTH AND THE YOUNG
HAVE A SPECIAL PLACE AND
RESPONSIBILITY IN THE
STRUGGLE TO NURTURE AND
PROTECT INDIGENOUS CULTURES.
IT IS TO THEM THAT TRUTH
AND WISDOM IS BEQUEATHED.
WHEN INDIGENOUS YOUTH AND
THE YOUNG ARE SEPARATED
FROM THEIR CULTURAL BASE
AND COMMUNITIES, INDIGENOUS
CULTURES AND PEOPLES ARE
THREATENED WITH CULTURAL
EXTINCTION.

**- The Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous
Rights in Education, 1993**

We know that education is complicated and multifaceted, however, the cost of stagnation or complacency is too great. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people represent more than half of the total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. They are tasked with passing on the longest continuing knowledge systems and cultures, overcoming/navigating structural and systemic barriers including racism, health disparity, geographic isolation, over-incarceration; while inheriting complex global issues like climate change, globalisation, and increasing technology.

**Rethinking and reimagining
Indigenous education for
us is actually about how we
want to organise ourselves
as an Indigenous public,
how we want to empower our
communities from the ground
up, how we want to go about
sharing knowledge with one
and other, knowledge of any
kind, and that's at the centre
of our communities. So if we
can change the architecture
of that, we can design it in a
way that matches who we are
and what our aspirations as a
community are, that's going to
have massive impacts.**

- Alison Whitaker, Gomeroi

This is why NIYEC is committed to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to learn about our past, to understand our rights, and move towards an era of reclaiming education. Through collective action, we can create a society that deeply understands this land, where all children and young people are valued for who they are, and where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People are ultimately free.

OUR PURPOSE

NIYEC brings together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, of different passions and experiences, to reclaim our Indigenous rights and drive a new generation of learning for the future of our Nations.



OUR ARTWORK STORY

We are a diverse group of young people, from different Countries, of many rivers, embarking on a journey to come together for our right to equitable education.

Our Old People laid the foundation for us to continue the stepping stones to freedom and empowerment for future generations.

As we come together with our minds and hearts, with our hands together as one, we are the powerful force to create change for a better education system that is culturally safe for our mob to thrive throughout our entire life.

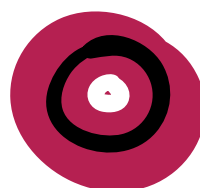
Designed by Krystal Hurst (Worimi) and Kimiah Alberts (Gungalu, Koinjmal, Yiman and South Sea Islander)

OUR VALUES



CULTURES

The diversity of Indigenous Nations, their history, cultures and spirit is a strength and integral to our learning ecosystem.



COMMUNITY

Our communities and Nations access their Indigenous right to education and are essential in designing a fairer, equitable learning ecosystem.



COUNTRY

Our knowledge and learning systems respect, draw knowledge from and care for Country.



AGENCY

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are free and have agency over their own lives.



OUR PRINCIPLES

COLLABORATION

Collaboration is integral to how we work and how we will achieve our vision in the long term. We are committed to working with our communities, across the education ecosystem and across sectors (health, justice, employment, government) to bring collective and holistic change.

INTEGRITY

We work with integrity knowing that we have multiple levels of accountability; to family, our mob(s), to Country, to our future generations.

DEEP LISTENING

We listen deeply to learn. We are always learning about the history that has shaped our education, the experience of those who already have pushed for change, and the education reality of young people today.

TRUTH

We believe and back the voices and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Through centring these voices, we aim to reclaim our vision of Indigenous education to one of self-determination, empowerment and nation-(re)building.

GOALS FOR THIS GENERATION



EDUCATION OF OUR DESIGN

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People access education where they can see themselves, speak their language, practice their culture and are equipped to tackle the complex challenges present in an ever-increasing globalised, hyperconnected world.

GROUNDING ON EQUITY

Australia's learning ecosystem is equitable for all, serves the democratic right of Aboriginal and Torres children, values our families and communities, learns our history and where our ways of knowing, being and doing inform practice.

SUCCESS AS FIRST NATIONS

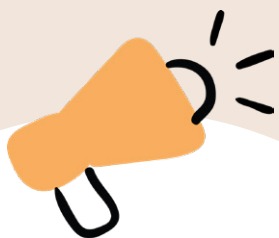
Our measures of success are based on the history, values and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and communities, and which supports their future pathways in learning and life.

INTERGENERATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people connect with the work of our Old People and senior leaders in fighting for our rights and are supported with the tools, resources and space needed to transform systems for our future generations.

OUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

In the next 5 years, we will take a holistic and integrated approach to contribute to our intergenerational vision and deliver on our goals.

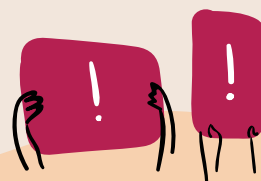


YOUTH VOICE AND AGENCY

Grow and support a nation-wide network of young mob through connection, knowledge sharing and skill building to exercise agency within education;

Set a national declaration for the future of education;

Drive campaigns that challenge the practices, policies and standards, across sectors, that produce education inequity.

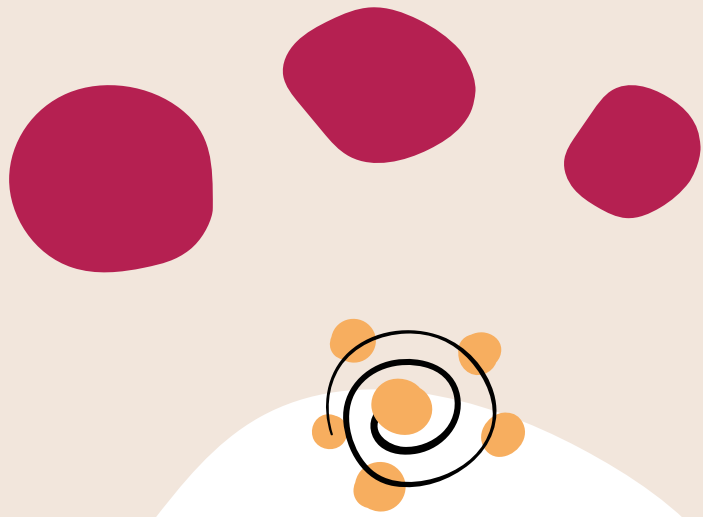


MOVEMENT BUILDING

Back the voices and agency of young people in building a movement for change by working with community, state and national decision-makers.

Partner with diverse stakeholders in the education ecosystem to foreground Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander thought-leadership, research, and perspectives.

Work with diverse coalitions of stakeholders to co-design models of First Nations-led education.



ORGANISATIONAL GROWTH

Strengthen organisational sustainability through multiple income streams and strong governance.

Grow NIYEC's membership and supporter base

Support the long-term personal, cultural and career journeys of our employees and volunteers.



RECLAIMING OUR RIGHTS

Research and test innovative learning and pathway approaches that centre our rights and prepares young people for the complex futures they will inherit.

Produce youth-led and/or youth-centred research on the future of education.

Work with key stakeholders to develop culturally-safe and responsive recognition and credentialing frameworks aligned with our social, economic and cultural values.



RECLAIMING OUR FUTURE



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