

**Indigenous Primary School Achievement, Productivity Commission
Research Paper, June 2016.**

A study of the factors influencing the literacy and numeracy achievement of Indigenous primary school students confirms that teachers and schools can make a difference. The Productivity Commission's research paper released in June 2016 describes an analysis of the ACARA datasets for Year 3 and Year 5 primary students that link student demographics and school characteristics to NAPLAN results.

The analysis has provided an in-depth view into the available evidence-base about what influences Indigenous education achievement, and where there are still gaps in the evidence base. The study found the following characteristics (the figures are based on 2014 Year 5 students).

- ▶ Although the gaps in achievement are greatest for Indigenous students in remote areas, and this tends to be the focus of policy, most Indigenous students actually attend schools in metropolitan and provincial areas. 77% of schools have at least one Indigenous student.

Where Indigenous students attend school



- ▶ Socioeconomic background explains more of the variation in literacy and numeracy achievement in the observed data set (i.e. the ACARA data). However, even when observed characteristics are such as language and SES are taken into account, Indigenous primary school students still have lower test scores on average than non-Indigenous primary school students. This is across all states and territories and all areas from metropolitan through to very remote.
- ▶ In other words, the majority of characteristics relating to Indigenous student (and in fact all students) achievement are student-related characteristics. The Productivity Commission describe these as unobserved characteristics, and use the literature to suggest that these unobserved characteristics might include student attitudes, abilities and aspirations, parent engagement, school culture, and teaching styles and teacher attitudes.

What accounts for the national 'gap' in Indigenous student achievement?

55%

of the national gap in literacy is accounted for by students in provincial and metropolitan areas

Indigenous students

do less well on average, the higher the percentage of Indigenous students in the school

75%

of the national gap is accounted for by student-related characteristics

Implications for policy

- ▶ A one-size fits all approach is unlikely to be effective for improving Indigenous outcomes.
- ▶ Remote school contexts are not representative of what might be required to support all Indigenous students, and policy also needs to focus on metropolitan and provincial areas.

Implications for schools and teachers

- ▶ Teachers and schools can make a difference through a culture of high expectations, building strong teacher-student and community relationships, supporting Indigenous student identities, and individualized learning strategies.
- ▶ In schools with low Indigenous student numbers where school-wide support may not be possible, quality teacher-student relationships and understanding Indigenous cultures become even more important.
- ▶ Most teachers across Australia are likely to interact with Indigenous students at some time. An understanding of Indigenous cultures and how to establish strong relationships with Indigenous students is essential for all teachers.

The Stronger Smarter Approach

- ▶ The Stronger Metastrategies can support educators and schools in many of the areas where the Productivity Commission describe what can make a difference to improving Indigenous student outcomes.
- ▶ The Productivity Commission report says that some schools are 'punching above their weight' in educational outcomes for Indigenous students, but their research used de-identified school data, and the actual schools are unknown. Is this you? At the Institute, we believe that schools using the Stronger Smarter Approach are improving outcomes for Indigenous students and are ideally placed to provide information on 'what works'. Can you help fill the evidence gap?

For more information, see the Stronger Smarter Institute's full research review of the Productivity Commission's report, and more details about the Stronger Smarter metastrategies on the Institute's website at www.strongersmarter.com.au . Contact us at enquiries@strongersmarter.com.au.