



Opening Address

Anthony Bennett

Chairperson, Indigenous Education and Boarding Australia

12 March 2019. Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre.

“These are our children you are caring for so you look after them as family”

These words to me from a concerned Indigenous parent said it all and they have stuck with me.

If these were our own children what would we think when the Closing the Gap report is released in February every year?

Would we tolerate such poor outcomes for our own children?

In an age of Royal Commissions and risk management how are we able to treat our Indigenous students as family?

Do we even understand what it means to be family?

Welcome to the 2019 National Indigenous Education and Boarding Symposium.

I opened with these questions because it is easy to see the world through our own perspective and over the next two days we will open our eyes to many perspectives as we explore the challenges of Indigenous education and boarding.

It is an important time for Indigenous education and boarding in Australia.

One look at the Closing the Gap education outcomes and it is clear we need to take action. To do **Whatever it Takes** - the theme for our Symposium.

The challenges of Indigenous education and boarding are complex and require complex solutions. **Whatever it Takes** is a call to action.

Addressing the complex challenges are beyond any single organisation but we can, and should do, **Whatever it Takes** within our own context.

You were invited to attend the Symposium by Boarding Australia but if you were at the opening function last night or noticed the logo on the opening slide you will have seen the name Indigenous Education and Boarding Australia.

It is our vision that *all Indigenous students attain educational outcomes that enable them to be successful in their future choices.*

As an organisation we decided Boarding Australia needed to change to achieve our vision. We are now - Indigenous Education and Boarding Australia.

To be an effective leadership organisation focussed on closing the education gap we have a new look Board, and a new logo branding.

I hope you will support our new direction and find ways to get involved in our future activities.

In coming weeks you will be invited to become an affiliate of Indigenous Education and Boarding Australia. We want you to join to be part of a movement doing **Whatever it Takes** but we also want your affiliation to be a low cost - high value investment.

We will soon advertise ABSTUDY workshops that will occur in May and we have planned a Cultural Leadership residential workshop for July.

I mentioned earlier that meeting the complex challenges of Indigenous education and boarding are beyond any single organisation.

As the Chairperson of a reborn organisation, and while I have the floor, I want to outline some of the big issues that as I see them

Firstly, the educative value of Indigenous boarding

Boarding is a time that can, and does, add an educative value to the lives of Indigenous students outside of the classroom. The reality for boarding students is they spend around 35 hours at school and 133 hours in boarding each week. Boarding is much more than just providing comfortable bedding and keeping students fed on a healthy diet.

It is important that we identify the key learning and development outcomes that Indigenous students gain from attending boarding, including health and well-being.

Parent, family and community engagement

One of the key success factors for boarding, and education generally, is the support by parents and the value they place on education. The empowerment of the voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents of boarding students at local, regional and national level is critical in developing strong family and community support for their young people to attend boarding and complete their education.

This is a priority for Indigenous Education and Boarding Australia.

A boarding education is not welfare

ABSTUDY is the primary source of government funding for most providers of Indigenous boarding. ABSTUDY is a welfare payment yet boarding is clearly an essential element of providing an education for students from the bush who do not have access to secondary education options in their communities.

Importantly indigenous education and boarding should be addressed as an education investment, not a welfare payment.

Education in the bush is failing to prepare students for boarding

A perennial challenge for secondary boarding schools is that students from regional and remote areas enter boarding with lower educational levels than their age equivalent. Primary education is provided in homeland, community or exit schools (different names are used in different states).

Unless the standard of education in these schools increases the challenge for boarding schools will continue.

It is clear that where there is inadequate secondary education available, that the function of homeland, community and exit schools is to prepare students for boarding.

Indigenous Cultural Boarding Standard

The House of Representative standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs recommended that there needs to be an Indigenous Cultural Boarding Standard.

Indigenous Education and Boarding Australia intent is to seek funding to support the development and implementation of an Indigenous Cultural Boarding Standard to complement the Boarding Standard for Australian schools and residences.

2019 is a federal election year. In coming months we will all be asked to vote for the next government. One important issue for all of us here is what are the major parties promising to deliver in the area of Indigenous education and boarding.

The Symposium is calling to do Whatever it Takes so what are our politicians saying? We have invited both the Liberal coalition and the ALP to address the Symposium.

Whilst state and federal governments have a major impact on what we do as educators that should not stop us doing Whatever it takes.

The symposium in itself won't close the Indigenous education gap, it is what we do, what we all do, when we return to our workplaces that will bring about positive change.

If we work smartly, work in partnership, and do Whatever it Takes, bit by bit, residence by residence, school by school we can together close the education gap.