Empowering Indigenous Girls Through Education

Why are we doing this?

We cannot close the gap in disadvantage between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians without investing in the educational opportunities of Indigenous girls and young women.

Right now, less than six in ten Indigenous female students complete secondary school as opposed to eight in ten non-Indigenous students.

Labor believes we must invest in engaging young people at school and beyond to have full opportunity to participate in further training, education and work.

Low engagement with education creates economic and social disadvantage, but when Indigenous students achieve Year 12 or its equivalent, there is almost no disparity in employment between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Empowering and engaging girls and young women will contribute to the Closing the Gap targets to:

- Improve attendance and retention rates of Indigenous girls from Year 7 to 12;
- Improve attainment of Year 12 or equivalent; and
- Increase participation in employment.

We also know specific strategies to address gender inequality is critical in the prevention of family and domestic violence, with an Indigenous woman 34 times more likely to be hospitalised as a result of family violence.

Labor’s plan

Labor will partner with the Stars Foundation to empower Indigenous girls through education and gender equity.

We will build on their existing programs in schools in the Northern Territory, to provide 7155 student places through an expanded program in the Northern Territory and new programs in New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and Victoria.

The program supports Indigenous girls and young women at risk of disengaging from education, providing full-time school-based mentors including sport, art, music, dance and community experiences to achieve targets and outcomes.

The successful model references the Clontarf program for engaging boys in education by providing full-time mentors and uses extra-curricular activities to engage students,
increase attendance and retention rates, increase Year 12 attainment, health and wellbeing outcomes and enrich successful transitions to employment or further education.

The Foundation will work with other organisations delivering school-based mentoring to girls and young women to engage and support students.

Who will benefit?

Labor’s investment will secure places in the program for 7155 students, with equal contributions to be matched by philanthropic organisations and state and territory governments.

There is a need to provide gender equity in school based engagement programs for Indigenous girls and young women.

Over recent years, significant investment has been directed at male youth, resulting in improved outcomes for young Indigenous men, but this has not been the case for young women.

School-based engagement mostly funded through the Sporting Chance Program created 300 additional places for boys. A review of the program in 2010 found that only 13 academies were specifically targeted to girls, while 28 were for boys and 13 were co-education, but dominated by boys.

This investment dedicates resources to the only national organisation solely dedicated to the engagement, development and empowerment of Indigenous girls and young women, as recommended by the 2013 NT Review of Indigenous Education, A Share in the Future.

Labor’s record

This investment complements the key investments Labor has made in the early years, and maternal health including establishing 38 Aboriginal Children and Family Centres which provide holistic and culturally-appropriate early education, health and family support services to thousands of families.

It also complements Labor’s needs-based school funding policies which provide additional resources for Indigenous students.

This investment also complements Labor’s commitment to develop targets to improve community safety and reduce incarceration for Indigenous peoples. A 2013 Curtin University study of the Clontarf program found young men who did not participate in the program were three times more likely by age 24 to reoffend than Clontarf program participants.

While investments in remote school attendance are important, Labor believes we must also invest in keeping kids at school and the engagement and empowerment of Indigenous girls and young women.

The Liberals have ripped over half a billion dollars from Indigenous programs and frontline services, and created uncertainty for organisations and communities through its chaotic tender process, and discontinued investments in key services like Aboriginal
Family and Children Centres targeting the education and support for the early years, young mums and Indigenous families.

**Financial implications**

Labor’s investment has been costed by the independent Parliamentary Budget Office. The investment will cost around $8.4m over the forward estimates.

Funding for this policy will be offset from existing announcements Labor has made in making sure multinational companies pay their fair share of tax in Australia, reducing superannuation tax concessions and abolishing the Emissions Reduction Fund.