



# Refugee Education Special Interest Group

## REFUGEE EDUCATION SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP (RESIG) feedback NRSA Review: A Better and Fairer Education System

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### 1. What targets and reforms should be included in the next NSRA to drive real improvements in student outcomes, with a particular focus on students who are most at risk of falling behind and in need of more assistance.

- *Mandate that state education departments and schools have anti-racism policies.* Racial and cultural diversities are now features of Australian schools. It is also well documented that visibly different students (e.g. those from sub-Saharan African countries) face pervasive racial stigma and discrimination. Schools should involve students in local policy development process.
- *Create a new distinct equity funding group, of students from refugee backgrounds (SfRB).* The subsuming of refugees within the EAL/D category prevents their particular barriers from being adequately identified or addressed. SfRB within seven years of arrival should be recognised as equity groups. Such recognition enables schools to provide refugee students with targeted academic support. In some states, the subsuming of EAL/D with broader 'Inclusion Policy' (such as in QLD) has resulted in a loss of EAL/D expertise in educational departments and school middle management.
- *Fund schools based on SfRB enrolments,* in order for them to provide appropriate assistance that is distinct from EAL/D and low SES, and is tailored to the schools' socio-cultural context. SfRB students being conflated with other students of migrant backgrounds is highly problematic and a key constraint on refugee background students getting the extra support they require
- *Increase the duration of student-tagged funding for 7 years* (needed for full language and literacy acquisition).
- *Flexibly extend the time that EAL/D students can remain in initial intensive language programs, based on need, rather than age or a set time.*
- *Institute a two-phase language support system of schools*
  - Phase One: intensive programs
  - Phase Two: a specialist network of high-support mainstream schools in capital cities, with at least one per regional city that runs parallel expert EAL/D programs.
- *Amend the Australian Curriculum to include explicit guidance on EAL/D learners in the curriculum.* There is currently no recognition of, nor provision for EAL/D beginners (beginner speakers of English) nor for refugee-background EAL/D students who have had limited prior schooling (for their age). The Australian Curriculum assumes all students have had linear progressive access to education, suitable for their age and are fully proficient in English as a first language. For

example, there is no guidance in AC (national curriculum guidelines) regarding what to do with EAL/D beginners in Y10, which is not uncommon in this learner group.

#### **ITE, PROFESSIONAL LEARNING and DEPARTMENT LEADING:**

- *Re-establish EAL/D as a teaching specialist area in all Bachelor of Education programs in universities.*
- *Mandate that universities train pre-service teachers in culturally-responsive pedagogies, linguistically and culturally inclusive curriculum and assessment. Integrate values and approaches of social justice education into all teacher training curricula.*
- *Mandate all state education authorities to include an EAL/D focused department, to maintain EAL/D expertise, liaise with and guide university ITE programs, advocate for EAL/D needs and provide systemic support to schools and teachers.*
- *Mandate and provide training for all new and existing Teachers and School Support Officers in the diversity of experiences, cultural, linguistic and educational backgrounds of students from refugee backgrounds.*

#### **SCHOOL-BASED REFORM:**

- *Every school is to be resourced and mandated to appoint a senior intercultural community development and liaison education officer focused on increasing intercultural connection within the school; implementing anti-racist strategy and activities; helping teachers map such activities to the Australian Curriculum's general capability of Intercultural Understanding.*
- *Every Local Government Area to be resourced to appoint an interschool communities liaison coordinator, to work across schools to support and link these school-based intercultural community development.*

## **2. How the next agreement can contribute to improving student mental health and wellbeing, by addressing in-school factors while acknowledging the impact of non-school factors on wellbeing.**

NB - to improve the mental health and wellbeing of students of refugee background in an empirically informed way, accurate data must be collected, which it currently is not. (See Q.4 below)

- *Mandate initial teacher education providers to include core training (rather than as elective or specialised unit) in trauma-informed and EAL/D pedagogies.*
- *Support schools to integrate trauma-responsive educational practices. Trauma-responsive schools recognise that many SfrB faced adverse events, understand that trauma affects learning, behaviour, and relationships, and create safe learning environments for all.*
- *Resource the training and appointment of wellbeing support liaison staff with both specialist refugee-focused and teacher training to connect with students, staff and refugee-background families and to lead the development and implementation of events that bring culturally diverse families together.*
- *Invest in schools becoming community-hubs (Good examples include: Milpera school in Brisbane as an intensive English Learning school; Community Hubs Australia). This*

place-based approach to schools as community hubs will increase their role as holistic learning places for all. In terms of families of refugee-background and other culturally diverse students, the community hub model increases educational engagement, family/school relationships, language acquisition and intercultural connectedness across the community.

- *Resource each school with a Community Education Co-ordinator* whose role is to facilitate interagency collaboration between community groups, adult education providers and schools to offer social and educational engagement. A place-based community hub model of cross-sectoral learning offers resourcing and productivity efficiencies in terms of value-adding to infrastructure, communications, skill-sharing, educational engagement and achievement, and social cohesion.

### **3. How the next agreement can support schools to attract and retain teachers**

- *Address inequities in funding between government and non-government schools.*
- *Address the limited numbers of qualified prospective teachers from CALD backgrounds to the profession.*
- *Stop responsabilising teachers for student results and resource schools according to need.* Vastly reduce the amount of paperwork teachers need to engage in, which does not have the desired impacts on student outcome, and instead enable teachers to invest their time and effort in building learning relationships with all students, which does impact student outcomes.
- *Move towards pay and recruitment models that more highly value teachers and teaching.* Prioritise and trust teacher-student relationships and teacher care and professionalism for more effective prevention of students 'falling through the gaps'. (See for example, Finland's education system)
- *Create accreditation programs for teachers with refugee backgrounds, and mandate that universities adopt flexible and supported admissions processes.* Appoint an expert group that includes at least 50% refugee-background educators to develop, implement and monitor these processes across universities.
- *Systematise the model of schools as community hubs, and provide on-site EAL/D leadership in all schools, whereby teachers are supported and empowered to facilitate effective and holistic educational support for their refugee-background students.*

### **4. How data collection can best inform decision-making and boost student outcomes**

- *Distinguish between students from refugee backgrounds (first and second generation) and students from the broader category of 'LBOTE' in all data collected.*
  - Currently, the statistical architecture that sits around the NAPLAN tests fails to adequately represent language learners, and in particular, completely hides those EAL/D students who are in the early stages of learning English, as well as EAL/D students of refugee background who may have had limited or no prior education. Research on NAPLAN performance has found that any student who is in the early stages of learning English is being tested on language rather than literacy in that test, rendering the results invalid.

- LBOTE as a category conflates two very diverse groups: (1) those whose families have extensive cultural capital such as migrants who've arrived on professional class visas and who often do very well in NAPLAN tests, and (2) students with refugee backgrounds who may have had severe interrupted schooling or none at all. LBOTE has been used in NAPLAN and drives a literacy rather than language response that undermines EAL/D.
- Educators need the capacity to identify EAL/D and SfRB as separate categories, although students could belong to both groups, across systems and in NAPLAN.
- *Prioritise high level EAL/D and SfRB specialist knowledge and advocates within all state education departments.* These experts are needed to understand the contexts within which data has been collected, and thereby correctly interpret data, better coordinate shared knowledge and understanding of wellbeing, language, settlement data, and guide systemic decision making,

**5. How to ensure public funding is delivering on national agreements and that all school authorities are transparent and accountable to the community for how funding is invested and measuring the impacts of this investment.**

- *Implement the original Gonski (1) policy of funding students on the basis of equity indicators rather than funding different sectors.* Currently, government schools in Australia enrol about 65% of all students and teach around 85% of all students from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, proportionately, they are gaining less funding than non-government schools. This is directly leading to a fall in standards and the result is that **Australia has one of the most inequitable schooling systems in the OECD.** Fund public schools up to 100% of the education standard, not the current 85-90% and reduce funding of non-government schools from their current 110/120% to 100%.
- *Require that all equity funding delivered to non- government schools be clearly accounted for in terms of how it is spent, to the same accountability standards for non-government schools as required for government schools.*
- *Hold all schools accountable for their EAL/D student initial assessment and enrolment procedures and systems (collect this data).*
- *Resource schools with the EAL/D experts in order to utilise nuanced diagnostic tools, in order to efficiently and effectively target learning support. These tools (such as EAL/D Bandscales) are available, but are chronically under-used.*

*Foreground qualitative, relational measures of transparency and accountability, rather than (or in addition to) quantitative, impersonal measures, by mandating community-based and public activities, as qualitative forms of community answerability. For example, annual inter-school events for sharing and celebrating school-based policy enactments, training and community activities in each LGA.*

On behalf of the RESIG membership





