



# AUSTRALIAN PARENTS COUNCIL Incorporated

*The National Federation of Organisations Representing Parents of Non-government School Students*

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## ISSUE PAPER

### INCENTIVES FOR TEACHERS IN DISADVANTAGED SCHOOLS

APC is committed to the principle that all students have a right to access and receive a quality education to enable them to attain their potential.

We are therefore very supportive of providing incentives to teachers to work in disadvantaged schools, but believe it is necessary to ensure that teachers with the personal and professional capacities to make a positive contribution in disadvantaged schools are attracted to, prepared for and nurtured in such work.

We also believe it is necessary to be clear about what the term 'disadvantaged school' means. For the purpose of this paper, we presume the term might cover schools in low socio-economic communities or schools with high proportions of Indigenous students, students with disabilities or students from refugee families or schools in small rural or isolated communities.

As far back as 1965, education writer Nancy O'Brien, in *Preparing Elementary Teachers for Culturally Disadvantaged Schools*, claimed that there are two major considerations in successfully educating culturally disadvantaged students. Firstly, she said teachers of the disadvantaged "must have good mental health, want to teach the disadvantaged, and be creative, curious, highly skilled, professional and unprejudiced". Secondly, O'Brien contended it is necessary to provide pre-service preparation of teachers of the disadvantaged to skill them to "base classroom programs on children's needs, understand the peer culture of the child, establish and maintain a healthy emotional climate in the classroom, function democratically in classrooms and enable children to practice democratic skills, learn ways of arranging an effective classroom environment, be creative in their teaching, become skilful in selecting appropriate learning experiences for individual children, and evaluate old concepts of educational practice in light of recent research".

APC believes that O'Brien's approach is sound and we submit that appropriate incentives for teachers to work in disadvantaged schools need to be multi-faceted and go beyond the teachers themselves. Our range of appropriate incentives therefore includes:

- In depth pre-service of undergraduate teachers to provide them with the necessary knowledge and professional skills to work with students in disadvantaged schools. This would need to include extensive in-school work experience and could possibly even extend to an internship programme.
- Quality professional development opportunities for practicing quality teachers in 'regular' schools who may wish to transfer to a disadvantaged school. We believe

such professional development is essential because a teacher who is highly proficient in a 'regular' school environment might not necessarily have the capacity to transfer their skills into a disadvantaged school. As much 'weeding out' of potentially unsuitable candidates as possible needs to occur in the preparation process to ensure, to the greatest degree possible, that teachers with appropriate personal and professional characteristics are attracted into working with disadvantaged young people. Young people in such circumstances require a stable schooling environment and so we should focus on attracting teachers into disadvantaged schools who are most likely to stay for a reasonable amount of time.

- Pre-service and professional development for teachers in disadvantaged schools should include extensive content around establishing and nurturing relationships with the parents of disadvantaged students and their local communities. The National Framework for Family/School Partnerships, currently before MCEETYA for endorsement, would be very suitable for such development to be based upon.
- Adequate levels of school resources must be provided to ensure that teachers in disadvantaged schools are appropriately supported to be intuitive and creative in their classroom practices and able to provide their students with a vibrant and exciting schooling experience.
- The pay scale for teachers in schools identified as being disadvantaged, including any performance incentives, should be set at a higher level than that which applies for 'regular' schools.

Finally, to ensure that the most appropriate teachers are attracted to work in disadvantaged schools and remain for reasonable lengths of tenure, a similar process to the one outlined above will need to be adopted to attract and support high quality principals and school leaders to provide the high quality of school leadership that is required to successfully transform and sustain disadvantaged schools and their communities.

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