Dare to Lead honours five

Schools win leadership awards for collaboration with Indigenous communities.

By Dallas Bastian

Five Australian schools have received awards in recognition of their achievements in the enhancement of Aboriginal student outcomes and work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.

Dare to Lead, an initiative of Principals Australia Institute, presented the Awards for Excellence in Leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education.

"It's really a project from within the profession that asks principals the question, 'Are we doing the best we can to enhance the outcomes of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students?'" national project director Peter O'Beirne says.

"It's a great opportunity for us to share the success of those schools with others," O'Beirne says. "And that's a big motivation for the awards -- not just the recognition but also the opportunity to learn and share."

In deciding which schools will receive the awards, Dare to Lead looks for schools that have taken strategic action to make a difference to the outcomes of Indigenous students, demonstrated through data and through their involvement within the community in terms of decision-making and advice. In addition, Indigenous development must be an ongoing focal point for school leaders. Here are the five winners.

**BRAY PARK STATE SCHOOL, QUEENSLAND -- HIGH ACHIEVEMENT**

Bray Park State School was recognised for its efforts in closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous academic results, the formation of an Indigenous advisory committee and its work strengthening links with elders through a community organisation based in the school.

The school set up personal learning plans for each student, identifying their needs, interests and pursuits. In the process, some shared interests emerged.

"One commonality amongst many of the students was their desire for visual arts and music," the focus teacher for Indigenous education, Jo Reid-Speirs, says.

As a result, a music program was set up with the aim of improving students' literacy skills and student attendance. Ukulele lessons were initiated for Indigenous students, eventually being opened up to the entire school, with the goal of strengthening reconciliation.

"I needed to break down the barriers and this has been a wonderful way to do that," Reid-Speirs says.

The lessons are conducted in an allocated Indigenous learning space, where a range of activities are enacted, including an afterschool homework program run by the students' parents, who also painted the school's ukuleles with Indigenous artwork.

The school's efforts to make connections with the Indigenous students' parents and community began under the direction of Averil Milne, the literacy and numeracy support teacher. Milne still makes home visits when issues arise.

Another room was set up within the school to provide the Indigenous community and its elders a place to hold advisory meetings and discuss student issues.

"Through all the things that we're doing we're trying to embed those Indigenous perspectives within the school in a way that is welcoming and open," Reid-Speirs says.

Other initiatives include a drumming program, Australian Football League recruitment activities and the purchase of iPads to improve student learning.

"We've got children who aren't Indigenous who want to be Indigenous," Reid-Speirs says.
How do you feel about being an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander at our school?

“I feel happy, safe and proud to be Indigenous.”
Sophie

“Good, I've got to realise I'm Indigenous and I can do things that relate to my culture.”
Janaya

“I feel good because our school has stepped up and does more for feel proud to be Aboriginal.”
Tamika

“Nice because I've got a beautiful family and we have a beautiful room.”
Nikita

“Deadly!”

“I feel enthusiastic and happy about being Aboriginal at Bray Park. It helps us to know what we can do with our lives.”
Kane

“I feel happy that in the Indigenous room we have opportunities.”
Phoebe

“I love it, I feel proud because I love my culture. I love it because I learn things about my culture.”
Leila

“I feel proud when I walk around the school.”

“I'm not just Australian.”
Allygra

“My culture is richest.”

“Amazing because we do fascinating things in this room. I've learnt that we are the oldest culture. I love the art and music.”
Leilani

“Ever since I've been coming to the Indigenous room, I haven’t been bullied. I'm happy about being Aboriginal.”
Phoebe

“Proud and strong.”

“Exciting because we get to learn about my culture and I feel proud.”
Kea

“Nice because I've got a beautiful family and we have a beautiful room.”
Nikita

SINGLETON HIGH SCHOOL, NSW
HIGH ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

A total of 105 Indigenous students at Singleton High School had NAPLAN scores above the state average. All of the school’s Indigenous Year 12 students completed the year in the past two years. The school has also established an Aboriginal Education team within its staff.

Singleton engaged in Dare to Lead’s School to Work transition program between 2010 and 2012, which provided Indigenous students a pathway to a career. It then gained funding to continue the work within the project as part of the Yinpi School to Work transition program.

The school also developed personal learning plans, in consultation with each student and their parents. The plans included data on the pupil’s strengths and weaknesses, goals after school, interests, family history and cultural information.

ORANGE PUBLIC SCHOOL, NSW – HIGH ACHIEVEMENT

Orange Public School was recognised for improved student performance. Every one of its Indigenous students achieved at or above national benchmarks in NAPLAN testing for 2010 and 2011.

In a bid to make mathematics more engaging, the school adjusted the maths curriculum after seeking influence from Aboriginal parents and a community advisory group. The four-year project, funded by the Australian Mathematics Association, aimed to improve outcomes for Indigenous students by making the subject more engaging.

“The school undertook training in Stronger Smarter leadership with Chris Sarra ... then worked with Dr Tyson Yunkaporta to implement [Eight Aboriginal Ways of Learning] pedagogy,” Orange Public principal Toni Macdonald says.

“The community was an integral part of the learning and this proved to be a wonderful opportunity to form strong and lasting relationships,” Macdonald says.

The community also developed an Aboriginal garden within school grounds. Macdonald says student engagement increased through opportunities to take their learning outside the classroom.

The school secured further funding through the Parent and Community Engagement fund, and has since been able to develop the Mudjiba Dharrara learning place.

“Parents are engaged with our Aboriginal teachers in growing knowledge and understanding of the ways and the subjects that children are learning through information sessions each week,” Macdonald says. She adds that students are gaining cultural knowledge they are taking back to the classrooms.