
NOVEMBER 1, 2022

School Students' Statement on the Right to Education



We, high school students gathered on Awabakal land in Newcastle, Australia in November 2022, make this Statement about the human right to education.

We direct this Statement to governments, education authorities, and all those with power to make change in education systems.

We invite other young people to join our call for universal access to the right to education by signing this Statement.





Education is a human right. It is protected by Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Education gives people purpose and power. It brings freedom, knowledge, cultural and social literacy, and communicates the past, present, and future of humanity. Education nurtures and secures one's identity, allows us to reach our true potential, and provides us with a sense of autonomy. It also encourages individuality through the pursuit of passions, promotes moral and ethical growth, and empowers us to pursue justice for ourselves and others. Education is a key to accessing our other human rights – it empowers people, opening doors and minds.

Education lifts people out of poverty, gives them the capacity to innovate and contribute to society and the environment. Through education we learn about ourselves, engage with others, and discover different ways of living and thinking. With equal access to the right to education, young people gain the tools to drive social change. Education saves lives. When people have full access to education, learning can be a joyful experience.



Yet many young people face obstacles as they seek to exercise their human right to education. These obstacles include:

- Financial barriers to accessing school and post-school education, including high education costs, wealth inequality among families and young people, and rising costs of living, housing and transport;
- Language and cultural barriers for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds;
- Legal barriers to access for people who are not nationals of the country where they reside;
- Persistent racism in societies and educational institutions;
- Insufficient provision of cultural learning about the histories, languages and knowledges of First Nations peoples;
- Gender discrimination barring access to education for girls and women;
- Variable access to the technologies used to facilitate learning, including appropriate computers and internet access;
- Insufficient accommodations and support for students experiencing mental health issues, which can mean that students bear high levels of responsibility for supporting themselves and their peers;
- Barriers to inclusive practice in educational institutions, including inconsistent use of appropriate terminology to ensure inclusion, lack of inclusive amenities, gendered sporting facilities and arrangements;
- Teacher shortages and insufficient pay, resourcing and training for teachers to support students in their holistic needs;

- Insufficient provision of support staff, including trained teachers' aides, and wellbeing staff and programs;
- Disconnection between learning environments and home environments, limiting the provision of appropriate supports for students in need;
- Lack of adequate and appropriate same-sex, queer and sexual education;
- Poor physical facilities in schools, including unsafe and inaccessible buildings;
- Continued prevalence of bullying, making educational institutions unsafe for excluded students;
- Strict uniform requirements, which can impose excessive costs and inhibit student freedom to express identity;
- Systemic issues with the design of education, particularly:
 - Intense focus on student achievement and capacity, which can drive hierarchies based on performance, minimise people to their academic performance, and add pressure and stress;
 - Continued focus on examinations as a key means of measuring achievement; and
 - Provision of intensive inputs to students who are regarded as high achieving, rather than the provision of individualised and appropriate supports to all learners to strive to meet their personal capacities.





Bearing in mind these obstacles, we call on Governments to:

- Consult with young people about the protection and promotion of the right to education;
- Pass comprehensive human rights laws that protect the right to education in full, and implement laws in consultation with young people;
- Ensure that schools cannot legally discriminate against students or staff, and conduct frequent reviews to promote the implementation of human rights standards in educational institutions;
- Invest more in education as a fundamental social need and good;
- Invest well in education, including by prioritising areas of need and equity, and ensuring the safety and accessibility of basic infrastructure in schools;
- Alleviate financial barriers to education for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who are not nationals of the country where they reside;
- Address transport issues that limit access to education;
- Streamline the provision of technology to schools and ensure equitable access to necessary computing and other resources for all learners;
- Accommodate student mental health needs on par with other health needs;
- Resource individualised models of student support that account for the individualised impacts of health and disability on learners;

- Improve teacher pay, conditions, and supports to ensure that teachers are better resourced to support students;
- Reduce class sizes to give teachers greater capacity to support all students' needs;
- Consider systemic reforms to education systems, including:
- More comprehensive language and cultural learning opportunities to reflect community diversity;
- Progressive and continual review to include the diversity of experiences and identities across curriculum;
- More flexible and tailored assessment regimes to facilitate personalised learning that offers all learners the best chance of success;
- Enhancing the transparency of assessment regimes, including in relation to the scaling of results; and
- Reducing the competitive nature of schooling that is linked to rankings and standardised tests.





We also call on education providers to:

- Improve student access to leadership, advocacy, and effective complaints mechanisms, providing opportunities for students to have their voices heard, listened to, and acted upon, and promoting student autonomy;
- Collaborate with students and their families in the design and delivery of learning and support programs;
- Devote appropriate supports to all students regardless of their capacities;
- Provide adequate wellbeing supports for all students, including in terms of staffing, programs, resources and environments;
- Collaborate across education sectors including schooling and further and higher education to ensure student access to appropriate post-school learning;
- Improve resourcing for teachers, including in cultural competencies, technology training, and mental health support capacity;
- Enhance teacher opportunity to teach to their training, interests and skills;
- Facilitate the inclusive provision of education, including by:
 - Focusing on the holistic growth of all students;
 - Promoting wellbeing, for example by using breaks and support programs to protect against stress and burnout;
 - Designing assessment to cater for student capacities;
 - Modifying classrooms to facilitate learning;

- Using visual symbols and the environment to make inclusive culture visible;
- Avoiding putting pressure on diverse students to speak for their culture/ability against their wishes;
- Respecting student beliefs in their diversity and promoting learning about diversity; and
- Facilitating inquisitive curriculum.

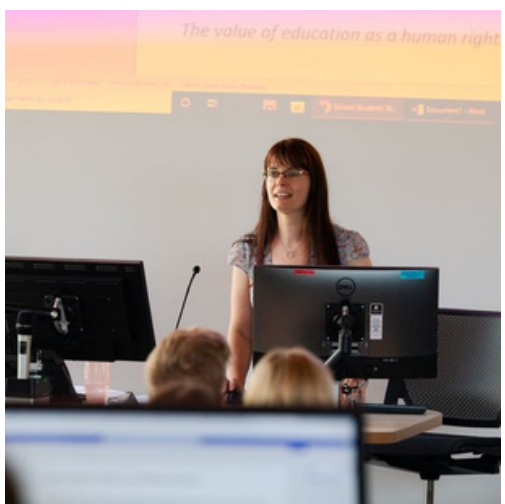




We invite other young people to join our call for universal access to the right to education by signing this Statement.

This Statement was drafted and adopted at a gathering of over 70 students from 17 diverse high schools in the Hunter Valley region of New South Wales, on 1 November 2022. It reflects the views expressed by the students in a Youth Forum on the Right to Education in local, national, and global contexts. The Forum was hosted by the Centre for Law and Social Justice at the University of Newcastle, Australia, in association with the Human Rights for New South Wales Alliance.







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