# Current Data – Participation and Inclusion

Attendance

A significant contributor to education outcomes for Koorie students is that, on average, Koorie students attend school at much lower rates than their non-Koorie classmates. While attendance in 2020 was impacted due to the COVID-19 context, the trend in data was consistent with previous years, where Koorie students at all year levels were absent at around twice the average overall rate.

Average days lost due to student absence in government schools 2020

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|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Prep | Year 1 | Year 2  | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 | Year 7 | Year 8 | Year 9 | Year 10 | Year 11 | Year 12 |
| Koorie | 26.2 | 26.3 | 26.2 | 25.4 | 26.5 | 27.2 | 28.7 | 35.6 | 41.6 | 40.6 | 38.5 | 32.7 | 23 |
| All students | 13.9 | 14.6 | 14.1 | 13.5 | 13.3 | 13.6 | 13.8 | 16.4 | 19.7 | 20.8 | 18.6 | 16.3 | 12.6 |

There are both measurable and immeasurable factors that contribute to the achievement gap between Koorie and non-Koorie learners. Around 69% of this gap can be accounted for by differences in measurable student, school and home factors. The other 31% of the achievement gap (by Year 3) is due to factors that are hard to measure – such as differences in teacher and teaching quality, school-readiness and early development outcomes, student engagement and parental engagement. This 31% of the achievement gap is potentially unique to, or more keenly felt by, Koorie students.

The single most important measurable factor explaining the student achievement gap between Koorie and non-Koorie learners can be attributed to differences in school attendance rates. Research[[1]](#footnote-1) suggests that if Koorie students attended at similar rates to non-Koorie students, the achievement gap would be reduced by around 9 NAPLAN points — or around 15% alone.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Nationally, approximately only 46% of Indigenous students (Years 1- 10) attend 9 out of 10 school days — the threshold at which students’ learning is adversely impacted by non-attendance. That means that 54% of Indigenous students’ learning is impacted adversely by the amount of school that they miss.[[3]](#footnote-3) Such regular attendance gaps begin to emerge from as early as 6 and 7 years of age and are often persistent setting a pattern observed into later schooling years.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The vast majority of explainable differences between Indigenous students and their non-Indigenous peers results from differences in their parents’ educational attainment, in schooling years and beyond.[[5]](#footnote-5) This means that not only are Koorie students adversely impacted by the ongoing effects of colonisation on the school system they are learning in today, but their education is also adversely impacted by the negative experiences that their parents have had in the past. This indicates that, to address the achievement gaps for school aged children over the long-term, efforts must be amplified to increase adult and further education opportunities, experiences and outcomes for Koorie people.

We know there are many factors that contribute to school attendance or absenteeism, including both ‘push factors’ (such as limited teaching quality, racism, bullying and teasing, lack of cultural inclusivity and safety, and lack of, or low-quality, teaching of Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum) and ‘pull factors’ (such as high mobility, lack of parental insistence that children go to school, family pressures and carer responsibilities, sickness, and Sorry Business and cultural obligations surrounding deaths). Koorie students are more likely to be experiencing both the push and pull factors affecting their attendance than their non-Koorie classmates.

Koorie students positive responses to sense of connectedness (Students Attitude to School Survey)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
| Year 4 to 6 | 80.4 | 79.3 | 77.9 | 75.1 |
| Year 7 to 9 | 48.1 | 52.8 | 51.8 | 52 |
| Year 10 to 12 | 44.4 | 47.1 | 47.6 | 51 |

Proportion of Koorie Students who experience bullying behaviour at School (Students Attitude to School Survey)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
| Year 4 to 6 | 25.6 | 23.7 | 21.9 | 22 |
| Year 7 to 9 | 28.4 | 25.9 | 24.6 | 17.3 |
| Year 10 to 12 | 22.3 | 16.8 | 18.8 | 14.4 |

There are additional factors that are specifically relevant to Koorie attendance and engagement at school. These relate to the cultural inclusivity and responsiveness of their learning environment and whether or not their school, teachers, principal, classmates, curriculum, learning materials and physical learning environments recognise, value and respect their culture, history, family and community. While we don’t yet have an accurate measure of the cultural inclusivity of a school, data is collected on the below proxy indicators which provide some identification of schools’ efforts to prioritise cultural safety and inclusivity. Some of these measures are also an indication of the efforts of schools to increase Aboriginal-led decision making.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2018 | 2019 |
| Number of Victorian Government schools having undertaken whole-of-school staff Community Understanding and Safety Training (CUST) | 1,276 of 1,787 school campuses as of 24 May 2021 |  |
| Number of schools that teach a Victorian Aboriginal language | 19 | 25 |
| Number of schools that flew the Aboriginal flag during the year | 1153 | 1269 |
| Number of schools that acknowledge Country at school assemblies and/or special events | 1268 | 1401 |
| Number of schools that display a sign acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the area | 520 | 618 |
| Number of schools that incorporate Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum | 1423 | 1449 |
| Number of schools with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students as school captains | 122 | 127 |
| Number of schools that actively encourage parents, carers, families of Koorie students to be involved in the student’s learning and school activities | 952 | 1004 |
| Number of staff that have received professional learning focussed on Koorie education outcomes | 369 | 537 |

*Data note: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a much lower number of Victorian government schools completed the School Surveys in both 2020 and 2021. This is compared to completion rates of 95% in 2019 and 99.7% in 2018. These differences in completion rates mean that 2020 and 2021 numbers cannot be reliably compared to previous years and as such have not been included here.*

However, lower rates of feeling connected to their school, as well as lower attendance rates, remain significant challenges. This highlights that we need to do more to ensure the system and schools are culturally safe and engaging places for Koorie learners so that they can reach their full potential – including Aboriginal children and young people experiencing multiple risk factors such as those in out-of-home-care, those in contact with the youth justice system, those with disability and those experiencing mental ill-health.

**NAPLAN**

(Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, NAPLAN was not held in 2020. At the time of writing, NAPLAN data from 2019 was the most recent available.)

An increase in the number of Aboriginal learners achieving scores in the top three bands for NAPLAN testing shows significant growth in literacy and numeracy skills across most school years and Aboriginal students in Victoria outperform Aboriginal students in most other states and territories.

The percentage of Aboriginal students in the top three bands for NAPLAN Reading increased between 2008 and 2019 for all years (3, 5, 7 and 9), with the largest increase (9.6 per cent) in Year 5 Reading. The percentage of Aboriginal students in the top three bands in NAPLAN Numeracy increased across Years 5, 7, and 9, and rates decreased for Year 3.

While these improvements should be recognised, on average, Koorie students’ NAPLAN achievement remains at levels significantly lower than their non-Koorie classmates. While Koorie students make the same educational gains as non-Koorie students throughout school, they are more likely to commence school with lower levels of literacy and numeracy skills and, despite the efforts of students, families and schools, and some significant catch-up supports and investment, most often students are not able to catch-up throughout their schooling years.

**Post-Year 12 Participation**

Destination of Koorie Year 12 completers

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
| Bachelor degree |  27.70  |  32.90  |  29.80  |  32.50  |
| Certificate/Diploma |  12.90  |  16.80  |  15.70  |  13.90  |
| Apprenticeship/Traineeship |  17.40  |  15.50  |  17.30  |  16.40  |
| Employed |  27.70  |  24.70  |  29.20  |  23.20  |
| Looking for work |  11.60  |  9.20  |  7.40  |  12.10  |
| Not in labour force, education or training |  2.60  |  0.90  |  0.60  |  1.90  |

We continue to see significant growth in the number of Koorie students completing school with a VCE, VCAL or VET in Schools Certificate, increasing from 175 students in 2005, to 523 students in 2017, and to 677 students in 2020. However, we know there can and should be continued efforts to ensure that senior secondary schooling is of value to students and sets them up for the post-school education and/or employment pathway of their choice.

The proportion of Aboriginal young people engaged in education, training or employment after they leave school has grown significantly across the last decade. According to the On-Track survey, in 2020, Aboriginal Year 12 completers were more likely to go on to do a bachelor degree, apprenticeship or traineeship or be employed, and were less likely to be looking for work than Aboriginal Year 12 completers in 2009.

Of the Aboriginal Year 12 completers surveyed in 2020, 62.8% went on to further education and training, 13.9% undertook a certificate or diploma, 16.4% enrolled in an apprenticeship or traineeship, and 32.5% commenced a bachelor degree at university. While this is low compared to non-Aboriginal Year 12 completers (55% of whom commenced a bachelor degree), a significantly smaller proportion of Aboriginal young people were surveyed, making it difficult to draw strong conclusions from the data, given that minor movements in such small numbers lead to large fluctuations in proportions of the population (in 2020, the number of young people surveyed who identified as Aboriginal was around one per cent of the total survey sample).

Despite fluctuations between years, some general trends have emerged over the past five years in the destinations of Aboriginal students who have completed Year 12. Each year since 2016, between 50-to-60% have gone on to either employment or study at the bachelor degree level. Reflecting state-wide trends, there has also been a decrease in the proportion of Aboriginal students who have completed Year 12 pursuing a certificate or diploma. Unlike for non-Koorie school leavers, COVID-19 does not appear to have disrupted the trend of more Aboriginal Year 12 completers pursuing an apprenticeship/traineeship (16 per cent in 2020, up from 12 per cent in 2016). In 2020, COVID-19 also impacted the previously consistent reduction in the proportion of Aboriginal Year 12 completers looking for work.

1. Centre for Independent Studies, 2021. Mind the Gap: Understanding the Indigenous education gap and how to close it. P.2 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. CIS, 2021 and Productivity Commission analysis found that around 15 per cent of the explained differences in student ‘value-added’ achievement is due to differences in school attendance. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. \*\* Attendance rates are the number of actual full-time equivalent student-days attended by full-time students in Years 1 to 10 as a percentage of the total number of possible student-days attended over the period.

\*\*\* Attendance level is the proportion of full-time students in Years 1-10 whose attendance rate in Semester 1 is equal to or greater than 90 per cent. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. CIS, 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. CIS, 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)