



MEDIA RELEASE

From:

African Think Tank Inc.

**WORKING WITH
VICTORIA'S AFRICAN COMMUNITY
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Comparing school Vs school or comparing the have's and not have.

The African Think Tank (ATT) regards high quality, accessible education, particularly in critical skills, as the single most important factor in enabling all Australians to gain a foothold, so all will contribute productively to the economy.

However, significant educational barriers to the most disadvantaged groups, including newly arrived refugees, are often subtle and/or invisible to decision makers. Therefore, we view with great concern recent policies which may spawn unintended consequences, including the stigmatization of schools premised on the demographics of their student populations. This is particularly unwarranted as such schools have highly motivated students who need strong development of basic skills, particularly literacy, grammar, spelling, and mathematics, in order to achieve strongly.

Parents frequently express their concern that refugee children are not being given strong teaching in these vital areas; and that they are being involved in programs that ostensibly have little direct educational value in terms of a child being groomed for tertiary education and employment. Such programs may be 'fashionably experimental,' even covered in the media as progressing social issues; and/or conceived of for refugee youth by decision makers without consultation with their communities and parents. Such programs may have social engineering goals which should be met outside of school contexts, not at the expense of tuition time for children who have already had disruption to their basic schooling.

The ATT calls for the government funders to endorse schools which prioritise the most important academic skills for life and study in Australia, so children and adults feel engaged in purposeful work and do not drop out, disillusioned with the 'soft' work they are given in some disadvantaged schools with large refugee populations.

We regard the quality of teaching and the need for schools to focus on teaching and learning as imperative, and we call for an open forum to which all may contribute to identify the factors driving down educational performance in refugee adult and child learners. We also believe the best teachers, as identified by students as teachers with superior classroom teaching skills, need to be duly recognized and rewarded.

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In my view as the chairperson of the African Think Tank, it is unnecessary attrition via dropping out of African learners with concern, particularly as it so uncharacteristic of African cultures. "Africans have long cherished the dream of a good education, striving to learn as much as possible at all stages in the refugee pipeline, with some people educated in the camps entering university and succeeding there on arrival in Australia," he says. "What is of great concern is the attrition of motivation, aspiration and hope many adult and child learners experience in on arrival educational facilities and schools here. We need to get to the bottom of the barriers to effective teaching and learning so refugees can fulfill their potential, with urgent action."

Educational research has consistently highlighted the dependence of the most disadvantaged students on high quality teaching. The ATT strongly endorses well-conceived measures to support the best teachers being able to focus on teaching. We call on educational decision makers to ensure good teachers are supported and motivated to teach; with other support systems taking up all non-teaching functions; and with quality teaching of basic skills to a high degree of mastery the key priority.

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