

PANPA NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR

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THE NATION 3⁺



Year 8 student Riarna Milgate, 12, from western NSW, at Loreto Normanhurst on Sydney's north shore

SAM MOOY

If I were PM? These two have their speeches ready



JUSTINE FERRARI
NATIONAL EDUCATION
CORRESPONDENT



Jerome Pang

JEROME Pang, 18, and Riarna Milgate, 12, are hopeful their generation will yield Australia's first indigenous prime minister.

While Riarna, a Year 8 student, has her sights set on representing Australia in netball, Jerome, a first-year law student, plans to pursue a career in politics with a shy hope of becoming prime minister. "Realistically, I don't think so, but you never know.

"I didn't think I would get into law and here I am," he said. "For indigenous people I think now is our time to stand up and have a good go at it. I think it is definitely possible and hopefully comes to fruition with my generation."

Jerome, from Mount Isa, and Riarna, from Coonabarabran in western NSW, will meet Tony Abbott and other politicians in Canberra today as joint winners of the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation's competition "If I were PM". The two are part of the

foundation program that provides scholarships and mentoring to send indigenous students to private boarding schools and supports them in further studies or their chosen career.

It launched the campaign last year after a Newspoll survey revealed two-thirds of Australians did not believe they would see an indigenous prime minister in their lifetime, with most believing government initiatives to close the gap in social and educational standards are failing.

The foundation invited its almost 400 scholarship students to record a speech they would make as the first indigenous prime minister. Jerome spoke of the need to empower indigenous people, through constitutional recognition, greater representation in parliament and more say in the management of land, particularly in dealing with the mining and agricultural industries. "If we are

to progress as a people, we need to not only remember our past and our ways and our culture but also to adapt and excel in the ways of the modern Australian nation," he said.

Jerome, who went to Marist College Ashgrove in Brisbane and started studying law at Queensland University of Technology this year, said he believed the mining boom had not delivered the same benefits to indigenous people as to the rest of the community.

In her speech, Riarna spoke of the dominance of technology in modern life and the negative social consequences, particularly for children, saying it was "empowering Australian society" and isolating people.

Riarna, who attends Loreto Normanhurst in northern Sydney, also spoke of the need to help less fortunate countries, particularly in having access to a good education.

AIEF chief executive Andrew Penfold said the organisation believed education was the key to overcoming the challenges faced by the indigenous community.

"We wanted to show . . . that by opening the doors to quality education, we could open the doors to influential offices and perhaps one day, the highest office in the land," he said.

ANDREW PENFOLD PIO