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Union backs teachers facing Latham's ire

One Nation politician Mark Latham's latest campaign sees him railing against a Personal Development, Health, and Physical Education (PDHPE) assessment task set for Year 8 students at a school in the Hunter Valley.

The task requires students to examine the various types of discrimination that occur in Australia and describe the positive impact of developing and celebrating diversity. "The assessment task clearly addresses syllabus content and there is absolutely nothing controversial in it," said Mark Northam, Secretary of the Independent Education Union NSW/ACT Branch, which represents 32,000 teachers and support staff in the non-government education sector.

Students are invited to choose from a wide range of possibilities, including race (particularly Indigenous), refugees, disability, LGBTQI, gender, religion, and immigrants. "That's a pretty broad list to draw from, so why Mr Latham would continually single out the LGBTQI community for specific attention is unclear. It says everything about his personal biases and nothing about the task itself," Northam said.

"We call on him to put an end to his fear campaign that targets our most vulnerable students."

As chair of the NSW Parliament's Education Committee, Mr Latham has considerable scope to promote his agenda. Launching criticism at a particular school and naming teachers on social media is entirely inappropriate.

"We stand by our members in the school Mr Latham has attacked," Northam said. "We call upon him to conduct his debate through the appropriate parliamentary process and not on social media."

The PDHPE syllabus addresses a wide range of areas, including investigating the benefits for individuals and communities of valuing diversity and promoting inclusivity.

"Despite what Mr Latham might believe, PDHPE these days about much more than physical fitness, and the personal development component has a legitimate place in the syllabus," Northam said.

"Australia is at its best when all citizens are included in civic life, be it on the sporting fields, the workplaces, the boardrooms, and the parliaments throughout this country. All syllabuses have a role to play in promoting diversity and inclusivity that allows every Australian to play their part.

For more information

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The IEUA NSW/ACT Branch represents over 32,000 teachers, principals and support staff in Catholic and independent schools, early childhood centres and post-secondary colleges.

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