



Weekly Briefing For Member Schools

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[Education Minister Criticises Opponents of School Performance Information](#)

Education Minister Julia Gillard has claimed that those who oppose the publication of school performance information were not helping struggling students to improve.

[Auditor General to Conduct Audit of Capital Funding Program](#)

The Auditor General has determined that there is sufficient cause for him to undertake an audit of the Australian Government's *Building the Education Revolution* program, to determine whether it is providing taxpayers with value for money.

[New South Wales to Open 'Centres of Excellence' to Improve Teacher Quality](#)

The New South Wales Government will use National Partnerships funding to establish 50 schools as specialists in teacher training and development.

[Researcher Argues that Genetic Factors are the Major Determinant of Student Performance](#)

Research has suggested that genetic factors are more important than teacher quality in determining students' literacy performance in the early years of schooling.

[Brotherhood of St Laurence Calls for Government School Education to be Free](#)

The Brotherhood of St Laurence has claimed that the true cost of educating students in a government school is preventing some families from accessing a full education.

[Australian Government Proposes Overhaul of the Health System](#)

The Australian Government's proposed changes to the health system include recommendations for all Australian primary schools to have access to a school nurse.

[Parliamentary News](#)

Forthcoming sitting dates for the Victorian and Australian Parliaments.

[Privacy Commissioner's Youth Advisory Group](#)

The Office of the Victorian Privacy Commissioner has called for nominations from young people who are interested in joining a privacy advisory group.

[Seminars for the week beginning 3 August 2009](#)

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Education Minister Criticises Opponents of School Performance Information

Daly Telegraph, Bruce McDougall, 29/07/09

The Australian Government Minister for Education, The Hon. Julia Gillard, MP, has written an article critical of those who want to prevent the publication of school performance information. Minister Gillard's online article claimed that those who opposed publications were 'burying their heads in the sand' and that their attitudes would not help struggling students to improve. She argued that a national survey had demonstrated that 80 per cent of respondent parents wanted school performance information to be made public and claimed that 'what seems to have been lost in the argy bargy is the desire of parents to provide the best education for their children...Parents know well-informed governments can target resources and their child can be given the best possible educational opportunity.' Minister Gillard emphasised that the release of school performance information would not be used to punish schools, but argued that governments, schools and teachers needed to be accountable for student outcomes. She also indicated that 'there will be strict new protocols on the use of data...to ensure that if comparisons are made they are meaningful and that any school's performance is properly understood in context'. Go to www.thepunch.com.au/articles/parents-deserve-more-information-about-schools/ to access a copy of Minister Gillard's article.

Auditor General to Conduct Audit of Capital Funding Program

The Australian, Matthew Franklin, 25/07/09; Sunday Mail, Glenn Milne, 26/07/09

The Australian Auditor General, Mr Ian McPhee, has announced that he will conduct an audit into the Australian Government's *Building the Education Revolution Program* (BER) in order to ensure that it has provided Australian taxpayers with value for money. Following criticism from the Opposition and the media of the administration of the BER, Mr McPhee undertook a preliminary enquiry into the BER, which examined how the Australian Government determined which school projects would receive funding and whether the Australian Government was properly monitoring the spending. Mr McPhee indicated that the audit would begin in August 2009. The Shadow Minister for Education, The Hon. Christopher Pyne, MP, announced that 'the Auditor-General has...decided there is a case to answer about waste and mismanagement', while the acting Minister for Education, The Hon. Mark Arbib, MP, stated that the Australian Government welcomed the opportunity to 'showcase BER'.

New South Wales to Open 'Centres of Excellence' to Improve Teacher Quality

Media Release, The Hon. Julia Gillard, MP, & The Hon. Verity Firth, MP, 31/07/09; The Australian, Justine Ferrari, 31/07/09; Daily Telegraph, Bruce McDougall, 31/07/09; Sydney Morning Herald, Anna Patty, 31/07/09

As part of the Australian Government's National Partnership on quality teaching, the New South Wales Government has announced that it will designate 50 government and non-government schools as 'centres of excellence' that will specialise in teacher training and development. Primary and secondary schools in disadvantaged communities that 'consistently achieve strong results' will be selected to participate in the \$750 million project. These schools will be linked to a university teaching faculty and will be expected to play a role similar to that of teaching hospitals, with students undertaking teaching courses able to attend the schools at all stages of their courses. The schools will also be required to share their expertise via video-conferencing facilities with 200 other remote schools. Each participating schools will receive start up funding for the program, additional staffing support and will be allocated an extra teacher from the pool of 'highly accomplished teachers' that the project will establish (see Weekly Briefing 23/09). The New South Wales Minister for Education, The Hon. Verity Firth, MP, claimed that 'the centres for excellence will be hubs where our next generation of teachers can observe high-quality teaching first-hand and gain practical experience under close supervision'. The Executive Director of the Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales, Dr Geoff Newcombe, indicated that a 'virtual independent schools centre for excellence' would be established to facilitate the sharing of teaching practices across targeted New South Wales independent schools.

Researcher Argues that Genetic Factors are the Major Determinant of Student Performance

Sydney Morning Herald, Heath Gilmore, 25/07/09; Sydney Morning Herald, Adele Horin, 25/07/09

A researcher from the University of New England has argued that teacher quality is less important in determining students' performance in early literacy than genetic factors. Dr Brian Byrne conducted research into 500 pairs of identical twins in Australia, the United States and Scandinavia over 10 years. He compared twins who shared the same teacher with those who were in different classes over the first three years of their schooling and found that, while teachers and schools had some impact on students' literacy performance, the same genetic background and home life provided twins with 'the same ability to learn'. Dr Byrne's research suggested that 'the teacher effect' accounted for approximately eight per cent of the variation in student performance in the early years. Dr Byrne claimed that 'there could be individual teachers who would be particularly effective or ineffective, but in terms of the greater whole, basing public policy such as league tables or pay performance on them would be less scientifically justified than people think...Basically, what is needed is more patient and better resourced teaching for these kids who are struggling, and if these kids congregate in particular schools, that is where the resources should be going'.

Brotherhood of St Laurence Calls for Government School Education to be Free

Herald Sun, Karen Collier, 30/07/09

The Brotherhood of St Laurence has released a report that has claimed that 'free' education does not exist, with the cost to parents of sending their children to government schools increasing by more than twice the rate of the Consumer Price Index over the past 20 years. The *Cost of a 'Free' Education* report has claimed that costs such as voluntary levies, books and stationery, excursions, uniforms, camps, computers, transport, sport, student lunches, tutors and extra-curricular lessons such as music and dance have resulted in Victorian parents paying an average of \$3600 per annum to send their children to government primary schools and \$3900 to government secondary schools. The report claimed that increasing numbers of families were keeping their children at home for some school events because they were unable to afford to additional cost. It argued that additional funding needed to be provided to government schools to ensure that they were genuinely free for parents, and stated that 'many children are effectively unable to participate fully in education due to financial hardship and education

costs'. The report also demanded a 'crackdown on middle-class welfare' to ensure that the most disadvantaged students received sufficient support to ensure that they completed school, achieved academically and secured jobs. It recommended that:

- the Australian Government's education tax refund be abolished, with the savings being allocated directly to needy schools
- the Victorian Government introduce a means test for the School Start Bonus
- public transport, school camps and excursions be made free in order to reduce student absenteeism
- all schools provide students with second-hand uniform shops

Australian Government Proposes Overhaul of the Health System

Canberra Times, Emily Sherlock, 28/07/09

A report from the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission has recommended that all Australian primary schools have access to a child and family health nurse. The report argued that providing schools with access to a nurse would be useful for schools and students by 'promoting and monitoring children's health, development and wellbeing, particularly through the important transition to primary school'. The report also recommended that:

- health literacy be embedded as a 'core element' of the national curriculum and should be included in any national skills assessment at both the primary and secondary levels
- pre-school and school dental programs be extended
- food and nutrient supplementation be provided for indigenous students in certain communities
- schools provide integrated health promotion and early intervention programs
- national 'youth-friendly, community-based services' provide screening for mental disorders and sexual health
- specialist clinical services be created for the prevention of and intervention in early psychosis.

The report concluded that 'acting early to keep our children healthy is one of the most powerful investments our society can make'. Go to www.nhhrc.org.au/internet/nhhrc/publishing.nsf/Content/nhhrc-report to access a copy of the report.

Parliamentary News

The Victorian Parliament (Assembly and Council) resumed sitting on Tuesday 28 July 2009 and rose on Thursday 30 July 2009. Both Houses will next sit from Tuesday 11 August 2009 until Thursday 13 August 2009. The Australian Parliament (House of Representatives and Senate) rose on Thursday 25 June 2009 for the Winter Recess. Both Houses will resume in the Spring Session on Tuesday 11 August 2009.

Privacy Commissioner's Youth Advisory Group

The Office of the Victorian Privacy Commissioner (OVPC) intends to establish a Youth Advisory Group to inform and support OVPC's privacy awareness work with young people. The aim of the work is to inform young people about the importance of protecting the privacy of their personal information and about their privacy rights. OVPC is seeking nominations from Victorians aged between 15 and 25 who would be interested in participating in the advisory group. Members of the advisory group would meet for half a day, four times a year and would assist in developing materials and events for young people. Applications to join the advisory group must be submitted to OVPC by Friday 25 September 2009. Go to www.privacy.vic.gov.au/dir100/priweb.nsf/content/851796A57CEA73FDCA2570F30081BD0A?OpenDocument for further information or to access a copy of the application form.

Seminars for the week beginning 3 August 2009

Day	Seminar Name	Time	Venue
Monday 03/08	Prep-6 Literacy Coordinators' Network (Day 3 of 4)	9.30 am – 3.00 pm	Seminar Room
	Assessment and Learning for Students and Teachers (Day 3 of 4)	9.30 am – 3.00 pm	Training Centre
Tuesday 04/08	Developing Strong Thinking Skills in Authentic Mathematical Contexts	9.00 am – 4.00 pm	Training Centre
Wednesday 05/08	VCE Preparation for the LOTE Oral and Written Exams	9.30 am – 4.30 pm	Seminar Room
	Multiliteracies Action Learning Project (Day 1 of 3)	9.00 am – 4.00 pm	UM Hawthorn
Thursday 06/08	Authentic Learning – Integrating Pedagogy and ICT for more Accomplished Schools (Day 4 of 5)	8.30 am – 4.30 pm	Training Centre
	Enhancing Learning in the Middle Years Through ICT (Day 3 of 4)	8.30 am – 4.30 pm	Seminar Room
	Multiliteracies Action Learning Project (Day 2 of 3)	9.00 am – 4.00 pm	UM Hawthorn
	Leadership Skill Building for New Leaders (Day 3 of 4)	9.30 am – 3.30 pm	Como Hotel
Friday 07/08	Developing Positive, Pro-Social, Supportive and Resilient Learning Environments	8.30 am – 4.00 pm	Training Centre
	Enhancing Learning in the Middle Years Through ICT – Program Two (Day 4 of 4)	8.30 am – 4.00 pm	Seminar Room
	Multiliteracies Action Learning Project (Day 3 of 3)	9.00 am – 4.00 pm	UM Hawthorn
	Leading 21 st Century Schools for Heads of Department (Day 3 of 4)	9.30 am – 3.30 pm	Como Hotel

The Seminar Room is located at 20 Garden Street South Yarra. The Training Centre and Board Room are located at 30 Garden Street South Yarra. The Como Hotel is located at 630 Chapel Street South Yarra. The University of Melbourne's Hawthorn Campus (UM Hawthorn) is located at 442 Auburn Road Hawthorn.

Note: The AISV Weekly Briefing is also available on the AISV web site, including back issues. The AISV web site is at <http://www.ais.vic.edu.au>.

To obtain further information on any of the above matters, please contact AISV

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