



# Weekly Briefing For Member Schools

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## [Research Criticises the Margin of Error for Benchmark Testing](#)

A researcher has claimed that measurement errors on national literacy and numeracy benchmark testing would diminish their effectiveness as tools to monitor student improvement.

## [Teacher Quality Ranked as the Leading Determinant of Student Performance](#)

A researcher has recommended that school improvement policies focus on teacher quality as the most significant factor in improving student performance.

## [Monash University Considers Changing Selection Criteria](#)

Monash University will consider introducing 'transition' colleges to enable more students to undertake tertiary study.

## [Paper Calls for Schools to Improve Students' Knowledge of Communication Technology](#)

A paper has argued that schools spend too much time focusing on basic literacy and numeracy, to the exclusion of employment skills.

## [Australian Government to Expand Primary School Mental Health Program](#)

The Australian Government will allocate \$18.7 million to expand the *KidsMatter* program.

## [Schools in Drought Affected Areas to Receive Additional Funding](#)

The Australian Government will provide \$17.4 million to schools to support families affected by drought.

## [Victorian Government Schools to Receive Additional Internet Funding](#)

The Victorian Government will provide free internet access for all government schools from 2010.

## [Parliamentary News](#)

Forthcoming sitting dates for the Australian and Victorian Parliaments.

## [Census at School](#)

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has launched the 2010 *CensusAtSchool* project.

## [Seminars for the week beginning 12 October 2009](#)

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### Research Criticises the Margin of Error for Benchmark Testing

*The Age, Dan Harrison, 05/10/09*

New research has questioned the reliability of student results in the national literacy and numeracy benchmark tests. Associate Professor Margaret Wu from the Assessment Research Centre at the University of Melbourne has claimed that, where students are tested annually with a 40 item test such as the national benchmark tests, measurement errors would lead to an expected 16 per cent of students 'appearing to go backward when they had actually made a year's progress'. Associate Professor Wu also estimated that potential errors in classroom averages from benchmark tests could be equivalent to more than half a year's growth. She argued that the margin of error for the benchmark tests was too large to monitor individual student progress accurately, but claimed that a more regular, computer-based test would enable more accurate and effective measurement of student improvement. In response, Professor Barry McGaw, the Chairman of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), accepted that there 'will always need to be cautious to interpret results in ways that take account of the extent of imprecision', but claimed that this 'is not a reason to abandon assessment'. He also argued that a trade off existed between more extensive measurement to reduce uncertainty and the amount of time that schools were expected to devote to completing benchmark tests. The Australian Primary Principals' Association (APPA) called for the Australian Government to include information about the margin of error on the national, online report card for each school.

### Teacher Quality Ranked as the Leading Determinant of Student Performance

*The Advertiser, Lauren Novak, 08/10/09*

At an Association of Independent Schools of South Australia conference, a New Zealand researcher has argued that class sizes, school resources and student socioeconomic background all had less of an impact on student performance than teacher quality. Ms Debra Masters, from the University of Auckland, claimed that 'teachers often underestimate the effect they have on student learning. They say it's the parents' fault, the school's fault, someone else's fault. This deficit approach is wrong.' She argued that the most effective teachers 'knew the curriculum, were passionate about education, set clear instructions for students and were "activators" of student potential'. Ms Masters recommended that teachers be required to obtain higher qualifications, while their salaries should be improved and greater community appreciation should be engendered for the profession. APPA agreed that teacher quality was important, but warned that people should not 'underestimate the impact of a child's background [on their performance] because the research also shows that's a determinant'. The Australian Education Union argued that 'the size of the class and the support mechanisms available are just as important' as teacher quality.

### Monash University Considers Changing Selection Criteria

*The Age, Farrah Tomazin, 09/10/09*

The Vice-Chancellor of Monash University, Professor Ed Byrne, has indicated that the university is considering changes to its student selection processes. In response to Australian Government calls for universities to increase the proportion of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, Professor Byrne claimed that tertiary entry (ENTER) scores limited some students' access to university study. He claimed that Monash University was keen to expand its selection processes to ensure that students from a wider range of backgrounds attended the university, and suggested that Monash University was considering the introduction of a post-school 'transition' college. Students enrolling in the transition college would undertake preparation for university and would upgrade their skills before a formal assessment was undertaken to qualify them for entry into an undergraduate course. Professor Byrne stated that he was 'a firm believer that you can have a range of routes of entry into university that don't in any way diminish the standard. You could look at ways of assessing young people robustly to make sure they have the desire, the passion and the ability for a university education, and then, through a transition process, improve their skill sets before a formal assessment which replaces the ENTER as the major route to university.' Professor Byrne indicated that the expansion project was likely to be focused on the university's Berwick, Peninsula and Gippsland campuses.

### Paper Calls for Schools to Improve Students' Knowledge of Communication Technology

*Sydney Morning Herald, Anna Patty, 08/10/09*

A paper has been released arguing that schools are failing to prepare students for employment. The draft white paper *A Real Education Revolution* was prepared by a behavioural change management consultancy firm, the Centre for Skills Development. The paper has claimed that schools are too focused on teaching basic literacy, numeracy and computer skills, and has called for schools to ensure that students develop more sophisticated technology and communication skills. It also argued that, while communication technologies were a key part of the work environment, 'the average classroom is decades behind'. The paper has recommended that more students participate in public speaking and debating in order to develop their communication and analytical skills.

### Australian Government to Expand Primary School Mental Health Program

*Media Release, The Hon. Nicola Roxon, MP, 05/10/09*

The Minister for Health and Ageing, The Hon. Nicola Roxon, MP, has announced that the Australian Government will allocate \$18.7 million to expand a primary school mental health initiative. A pilot of the *KidsMatter Primary Initiative*, involving 101 Australian schools had previously been implemented, which aimed to promote mental health, prevent mental illness and initiate early intervention for primary school students. Minister Roxon announced that \$12.2 million would be allocated to implement the initiative in up to 400 schools across Australia in 2009 and 2010. In addition, the Australian Government has allocated \$6.5 million over three years to develop and pilot a *KidsMatter* project for the early childhood sector. Visit [www.kidsmatter.edu.au](http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au) to access further information about the project and an evaluation of the initial pilot program.

### Schools in Drought Affected Areas to Receive Additional Funding

*Media Release, The Hon. Julia Gillard, MP & The Hon. Tony Burke, MP, 05/10/09*

The Minister for Education, The Hon. Julia Gillard, MP and the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, The Hon. Tony Burke, MP, have announced that the Australian Government will allocate \$17.4 million to schools in order to help drought-affected rural families to meet education expenses. Across Australia, the *Drought Assistance for Schools* program will provide approximately 2310 eligible schools with exceptional circumstances drought assistance funding. Eligible schools will receive base funding of \$1000 plus a per capita allocation of \$100 per full-time equivalent students recorded on the 2008 school census, up to a maximum of \$10,000. Schools will be required to use the funding for items that provide support for students which is directly related to schooling, including text books, uniforms, subject levies, excursions and campus. Schools can choose to provide subsidised support for the whole school, or for individual classes or students. Visit [www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/DroughtAssistanceforSchools/Pages/home.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/DroughtAssistanceforSchools/Pages/home.aspx) for further information about the program and to access a list of eligible schools and their funding allocations.

### Victorian Government Schools to Receive Additional Internet Funding

*Media Release, The Hon. Bronwyn Pike, MLA, 05/10/09*

The Victorian Minister for Education, The Hon. Bronwyn Pike, MLA, has announced that the Victorian Government will provide free internet access for all government schools from 2010. Minister Pike estimated that the policy would save government schools \$9.5 million per annum. Individual schools would remain responsible for managing appropriate levels of internet use. The Chief Executive of AISV, Ms Michelle Green, has written to the Victorian Treasury, seeking a similar arrangement for independent schools.

### Parliamentary News

The Australian Parliament (House of Representatives and Senate) rose on Thursday 17 September 2009. The House of Representatives will next sit from Monday 19 October 2009 until Thursday 29 October 2009. The Senate will not sit in the week starting on Monday 19 October 2009, but will instead consider the Supplementary Budget Estimates. The Senate will then sit from Monday 26 October 2009 until Thursday 29 October 2009. The Victorian Parliament (Assembly and Council) rose on Thursday 17 September 2009. Both Houses will next sit from Tuesday 13 October 2009 until Thursday 15 October 2009.

### Census at School

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has launched the 2010 *CensusAtSchool* project for students. *CensusAtSchool* allows Australian students from participating schools to collect and analyse data about themselves and students in schools across the world by completing an online questionnaire similar to the Australian Census of Population and Housing. The project also provides resources for teachers to implement the Census data in the curriculum. The online questionnaire will be open from Wednesday 27 January 2010 and will remain open for the first half of 2010. The ABS has also announced that, from 2010, *CensusAtSchool* will be conducted annually, rather than every two years as previously. Go to [www.abs.gov.au/censusatschool](http://www.abs.gov.au/censusatschool) for further information on the project.

### Seminars for the week beginning 12 October 2009

Day	Seminar Name	Time	Venue
Monday 12/10	Leadership Skills for New Principals (Day 4 of 4)	8.30 am – 4.00 pm	Como Hotel
	Creative Language Learning – MovieMaker and You Tube	9.30 am – 3.30 pm	Seminar Room
Tuesday 13/10	How to Differentiate the Curriculum to Cater for All of the Students in Your Classroom	9.00 am – 3.30 pm	Hamilton
	Leading 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Schools for Heads of Department (Day 4 of 4)	9.30 am – 3.30 pm	Como Hotel
Wednesday 14/10	Learnosity Review	9.00 am – 4.00 pm	Seminar Room
	Leadership Skill Building for New Leaders (Day 4 of 4)	9.30 am – 3.30 pm	Como Hotel
Thursday 15/10	Reading to Learn – Reading and Writing in the Middle Years (Day 7 of 8)	9.30 am – 3.00 pm	Training Centre
	Integrating Pedagogy and Web 2.0 Technologies for Authentic Learning in the Classroom (Day 5 of 5)	9.30 am – 3.30 pm	Seminar Room
	Assessment and Learning for Students and Teachers	9.30 am – 3.30 pm	Bayview Hotel
Friday 16/10	Reading to Learn – Reading and Writing in the Middle Years (Day 8 of 8)	9.30 am – 3.00 pm	Training Centre
	Working Wikis for Learning	9.00 am – 3.30 pm	Seminar Room

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 Hamilton workshop will take place at The Hamilton and Alexandra College, Chaucer Street Hamilton. The Bayview Hotel is located at 52 Queens Road Melbourne.

*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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