

# AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION DIGEST

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Do you know of an event or resource that schools should know about? Email us at [letters@acsso.org.au](mailto:letters@acsso.org.au)

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## **NATIONAL SCIENCE WEEK**

National Science Week, held 18-26 August 2007, is an annual nationwide celebration of Australian achievements and capabilities in science. It aims to increase community awareness and understanding of the role of science, engineering, technology and innovation in maintaining and improving our society, economy and the environment.

These are education issues central to the future of all young people across Australia, and to our national future sustainability and prosperity.

To assist schools in their celebration of National Science Week, the Australian Science Teachers Association (ASTA) through the assistance of the Australian Government produces the Schools Kit, the ASTA Teacher Resource Book and makes grants available to schools through the state/territory Science Teachers Associations.

Read more at <http://www.scienceweek.info.au/schools/>

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## **Australian Science Festival**

*Exercise Your Mind... Canberra 15 – 27 August 2007*

The 15th annual Australian Science Festival promises a feast for the senses with about 100 events on show at dozens of locations around Canberra.

Some of the highlights include: music you can see, scientific challenges for athletes, fake scabs and blisters, learning about water and the psychology of fear.

International guests include Jeremy Leggett, one of the world's foremost climate change scientists, and the eminent water expert, Lord Selborne.

Read more at <http://www.sciencefestival.com.au>

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## **SA Hosts International Solar Schools Competition**

*Hon Jane Lomax-Smith, Minister for Education & Children's Services 27 July 2007*

Students from around the world are invited to enter an International Solar Schools competition, to coincide with the 3rd International Solar Cities Congress to be held in Adelaide in February next year.

Students from around the globe can submit a design to redevelop an existing city or neighbourhood, demonstrating how sustainable communities can be achieved.

Minister Jane Lomax-Smith says international interest and sponsorship commitments from government and the private sector reaffirms Adelaide's lead as an education and solar city.

Read more at <http://www.premier.sa.gov.au/news.php?id=1909> and <http://www.solarcitiescongress.com.au>

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## **HOT TOPIC: PERFORMANCE PAY FOR TEACHERS**

### **Build a performance pay system fit for a profession**

*Lawrence Ingvarson, The Canberra Times, 20 June 2007*

The debate over performance pay for teachers has almost been derailed by a failure to look beyond the narrow confines of individual schools or state school systems and to focus on the central issue of what needs to be done to improve teaching standards for school students.

Teaching is one of the few professions in the country that does not have its own certification system for identifying highly accomplished practitioners. One guideline for approaching this challenge is to look to the US where the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards provides an endorsement that a teacher has met specified high standards of teaching practice.

Its certification provides the most rigorous and legally defensible system operating internationally. Teachers submit a variety of forms of evidence, including evidence of student learning over time and videotapes of their teaching. No other system for assessing teacher performance has subjected itself to so many tests of its validity and reliability and, as a result, its fairness and legal defensibility.

The US experience identifies two distinctions that need to be made in the Australian performance pay debate.

Read more at <http://www.acsso.org.au/ingvarson070807.pdf>

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## **HOT TOPIC: ASSESSMENT**

### **NSW schools embrace A-E report: minister**

*The Age July 25, 2007*

The NSW government insists that more than 90 per cent of schools are complying with new student report procedures.

Education Minister John Della Bosca said media reports that teachers had blocked demands for the reports, which used A to E grading and rank students' performances, were inaccurate.

"A survey by the NSW Education Department for the first six months of this year shows the overwhelming majority of schools are either fully or largely using A-E word descriptors based on a five-point scale," Mr Della Bosca said.

"This is consistent with the NSW Board of Studies, Department of Education and Training and Commonwealth requirements."

The Teachers Federation claimed it had won a three-year battle with the NSW government to stop using the "one size fits all" report requested by Premier Morris Iemma, News Ltd newspapers said.

Teachers said they had not faced disciplinary action for not using the A to E reports.

Mr Della Bosca said the 90 per cent of teachers using the report cards were substantially more than the 78 per cent who adopted the new system in 2005.

He said a survey by the Education Department also had found the majority of parents supported the new reporting style.

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## **HOT TOPIC: DRUGS IN SCHOOLS**

### **NCETA to REVIEW Drug Testing in Schools**

The National Centre for education and Training on Addiction (NCETA) has been contracted by the Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) to conduct an assessment of the impact, implications, viability and effectiveness of drug detection and screening measures in Australian schools.

The review has two key objectives:

To examine the positive and negative impacts and implications of the range of drug detection and screening measures currently available for schools in Australia

To assess the viability and effectiveness of alternatives to drug detection and screening programs for schools

Written submissions closed on 27 July, but participation is still available via an anonymous online survey, which remains open until 24 August.

Read more at

[http://www.nceta.flinders.edu.au/projects/new\\_projects.html#DTinSchools](http://www.nceta.flinders.edu.au/projects/new_projects.html#DTinSchools)

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## **OPINION**

### **The Stupid Country**

## *Jane Caro August 1*

In the US, 90 per cent of students attend public schools; the government provides no funding to private schools because the Supreme Court's interpretation of the separation of church and state in that country prevents public funding going to faith-based schools.

Only public schools in America are expected to shoulder the burden of compulsory education for all American children. Private schools receive no government funding and so are free to select the students they will educate via both the fees they charge and the offering of scholarships.

Wealthier American parents have a choice of schools but they must pay the full cost to access it.

There are, of course, both good and bad schools in America, with schools in poor neighbourhoods struggling - as they do the world over - to educate children who are often disadvantaged in many ways.

However, schools in the US mostly reflect the community they serve, with the middle classes present in public schools at about the same percentage as they are in the society as a whole.

This of course means the public education system benefits from the energy, commitment and concern of articulate, well-educated parents who have themselves been able to successfully navigate their way through life.

Funding of public schools reflects this fact and while it is not able to cancel out all the inevitable inequalities between poor and wealthier neighbourhoods, at least American public policy is (mostly) designed to close those gaps, rather than to exacerbate them.

Read more at <http://www.acsso.org.au/caro070807.pdf>

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## **AWARDS & PRIZES**

### **Launch of National Awards for Quality Schooling**

#### *Media Release Hon Julie Bishop MP 25 July*

The 2008 Australian Government National Awards for Quality Schooling, which celebrates excellence in Australian schools, were launched today at Perth Modern School, a selective State Government school, by the Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon Julie Bishop MP.

"These annual Awards recognise and reward our outstanding teachers, principals, schools and support staff, who play crucial roles in providing a quality education to young Australians," Minister Bishop said.

The Australian Government is providing \$1.2 million for the Awards including up to \$100,000 for the winner of the prestigious Medal of Distinction.

"The Awards are one way of raising the quality and status of our teaching profession. They have had a significant positive impact on individual Award winners, schools and

communities and have inspired others to achieve excellence in quality schooling," Minister Bishop said.

"I encourage all interested educators to nominate, specifically teachers, principals, support staff members and schools at pre-primary, primary and secondary levels."

The Australian Governments Summer Schools for Teachers programme announced as part of the 2007-08 Budget further highlights The Australian Government's commitment to reward and recognise Australia's best teachers.

"This initiative will enable our top teachers to engage in high quality professional development to enhance their skills and contribute to improving overall student outcomes," the Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon Julie Bishop MP, said.

Read more at <http://www.teachingaustralia.edu.au>

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## **TERTIARY EDUCATION**

### **More school leavers failing to go on to uni**

*Adam Morton the Age July 30, 2007*

THE proportion of young Australians going to university has stalled despite Federal Government claims that it is tackling the nation's professional skills shortage by offering more places than ever.

An exclusive analysis of the latest census data for The Age shows that the number of 18-to-21-year-olds not in higher education is growing at a faster rate than those who study at a university or private tertiary college.

In the five years to 2006, the number of young adults not at university jumped by 29,345 — 3.9 per cent — while those studying rose by 8489, or 3.1 per cent.

The finding comes as employers in areas such as accounting, engineering and health professions say they cannot fill skilled graduate vacancies. Professional bodies argue the shortfall continues despite Australia importing record levels of professional migrants — more than 45,000 were granted visas in 2005-06 alone.

There is a debate about whether more year 12 graduates should be enticed to go to university to produce more professionals, even if it lowers academic standards.

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## **CONFERENCES AND EVENTS**

### **21st Century Curriculum: Taking Bearings - Curriculum Corporation 14th Annual Conference**

*Sydney 12 – 13 November 2007*

Globalisation, the evolution of advanced technologies and greater national consistency in the curriculum will be the context for education in the 21st century.

Join leading national and international educationalists, researchers, policy makers and practitioners as they investigate how innovative curriculum can unlock the potential of all young people to shape the 21st century.

The themes of the Conference that will be explored through Keynotes and in Workshops include:

- Key values and ideas that shape the curriculum
- Learning in an interconnected world
- Characteristics of a successful learner in the 21st century
- Excellence and equity in the curriculum
- 21st century expectations of schools and the profession.

Read more at

<http://www.curriculum.edu.au/conference/2007/conference.asp?id=19468>

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## REMINDERS

### Anti-Poverty Week 14 to 20 October 2007

Poverty Week focuses on poverty around the world, especially in the poorest countries but also in wealthier countries such as Australia. Its main aims are to:

- strengthen public understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty and hardship around the world and in Australia
- encourage research, discussion and action to address these problems, including action by individuals, communities, organisations and governments.

We hope that schools throughout Australia will organise something during the Week, whether it is a big event or a more modest activity. There is no need to seek official approval.

Wednesday 17 October is suggested as a special day for Education and Poverty. However schools are very welcome to hold activities on whichever days of the Week suit.

Official opening activities will be organised on Sunday 14 October and Monday 15 October.

The Anti-Poverty Week website offer background details, fact sheets, promotional materials and links to other information and ideas. **Read more at** <http://www.antipovertyweek.org.au>

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**HP and ACEL - Fun in the Classroom Competition** - Closes 6 August  
[http://www.hp.com.au/edu/funinclassroom/default.asp?jumpid=em\\_r4176\\_a\\_u\\_en/hpeducation/accelcomp/funclassroom](http://www.hp.com.au/edu/funinclassroom/default.asp?jumpid=em_r4176_a_u_en/hpeducation/accelcomp/funclassroom)

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**Associations Forum National Conference** - Sydney - 29 & 30 August  
[www.associations.net.au](http://www.associations.net.au)

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**Queensland Association for Gifted and Talented Children Inc 2007 Regional Conference** - Emerald - 30 August  
[www.gagtc.org.au/regconf2007](http://www.gagtc.org.au/regconf2007)

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**SPERA National Conference** - Perth - 30-31 August - <http://www.spera.edu.au>

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**Flexible & Distance Learning Conference** - Brisbane - 19 to 21 September - <http://www.aades.edu.au>

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**National Outdoor Education Conference** - Ballarat - 20 to 23 September  
[www.outdooreducationaustralia.org.au](http://www.outdooreducationaustralia.org.au)

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**Linking Latitudes India Conference** - New Delhi & Agra, India - 30 September to 4 October - [http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/index\\_flash.htm](http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/index_flash.htm)

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**Humane Education: a compassionate ethic for animals** - Brisbane - 5 & 6 October - [www.ciwf.org.au](http://www.ciwf.org.au)

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**2007 ACEL International Conference** - Sydney - 10 to 12 October  
<http://www.aceconference2007.com>

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**Anti-Poverty Week** - 14 to 20 October - [www.antipovertyweek.org.au](http://www.antipovertyweek.org.au)

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**UNICEF Day for Change** - 24 October - <http://www.unicefdayforchange.org.au/>

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**ACSSO National Education Conference** - Darwin - 22 & 23 October  
[www.acsso.org.au/natconf](http://www.acsso.org.au/natconf)

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**RESOURCES**

**Fundraising Directory** - [www.fundraisingdirectory.com.au](http://www.fundraisingdirectory.com.au) and [www.fetesandfestivals.com.au](http://www.fetesandfestivals.com.au)

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**Drug Awareness Website** - [www.drugawareness.com.au/](http://www.drugawareness.com.au/)

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**Australian Schools Directory** - [www.australianschoolsdirectory.com.au](http://www.australianschoolsdirectory.com.au)

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