



# Australian Council of State School Organisations

The National Voice of Parents of Children in Australia's Public Schools and Their School Communities

## AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION DIGEST

Volume 3 Number 4, 17 February 2009

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### PLACES FOR PARENTS AT NATIONAL PUBLIC EDUCATION FORUM

Join Geoffrey Robertson in the nation's capital

*Old Parliament House, Canberra, 27-28 March 2009*

*ACSSO has reserved some spaces for parent group representatives at this important event. Registration costs \$100, while travel and all other costs are borne by each attendee; Find out more and express your interest in attending at: <http://www.acsso.org.au/forum09/>.*

The future of public education in Australia is at a crossroads. Parents, teachers, principals, policy-makers and academics around the country are pondering how state-run education services should develop in the best interests of our children and future citizens.

The National Public Education Forum provides a unique opportunity to look at the issues, the stakes, the opportunities and the obstacles as some of the country's sharpest minds present honest and informed assessments of what is right and wrong with public education in Australia.

Australian human rights lawyer, academic, author and broadcaster Geoffrey Robertson will deliver the opening session, an acknowledgement of the need to bring this discussion into the widest possible public arena, and to call on our finest thinkers.

The Forum will provide a platform for more than a dozen other key observers, thinkers and practitioners of education to have their say, culminating in a synopsis to be presented by Professor Tony Vinson, one of our leading educational and social researchers who chaired the 2001 Vinson Inquiry into public education in NSW.

The major outcome of the Forum will be a Communiqué reflecting the needs of public education for the 21st Century, as an input to public policy and government decision making processes for the next four years - and beyond.

Read more at <http://www.acsso.org.au/forum09/>

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## EDUCATION TAX REFUND

### Advice to Parents & Families from the Deputy Commissioner of Taxation



#### *The Education Tax Refund - Get 50% back*

Under the new Education Tax Refund, parents and others who are eligible can now claim 50% of their eligible education expenses up to \$750 for primary students and \$1500 for secondary students.

This means you could receive a refund each year of up to \$375 for each primary and \$750 for each secondary school student in your care.

#### **Are you eligible?**

To be eligible you must have received Family Tax Benefit Part A for each child whose education expenses you wish to claim. You can also claim the Education Tax Refund if you were stopped from receiving Family Tax Benefit Part A because your child received any of the following:

- Youth Allowance (student) aged 18
- Disability Support Pension
- ABSTUDY
- the Veterans' Children Education Scheme
- the Student Financial Supplement Scheme
- a scheme under s258 of the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004
- an Australian Postgraduate Award.

Independent students are also eligible to claim.

#### **What can you claim?**

You can claim the purchase, lease, hire or hire-purchase costs, repairs and running costs of:

- laptops, home computers and associated costs - for example, internet and paper
- educational software, printers, USB flash drives, disability aids to assist in the use of computer equipment for students with special needs
- stationery and art supplies
- school textbooks and associated learning materials
- trade tools and safety equipment for secondary school trade courses.

Some of the expenses you cannot claim include school fees or the cost of school uniforms, school excursions or travel to and from school, musical instruments or sporting equipment, clothing or footwear. For a more comprehensive list visit <http://www.educationtaxrefund.gov.au>

#### **When can you claim?**

You can claim your education expenses in your 2009 tax return. If you do not have to lodge a tax return, you will be able to lodge a separate claim with the Tax Office from 1 July 2009.

**Remember, you need to keep all receipts for expenses you claim.**

If your education expenses in one year are more than the claim limit for your children, you can add the excess to your education expenses for the following year.

For more information visit <http://www.educationtaxrefund.gov.au>

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## OPINION

### League Tables Create Incentives for Schools to Rig Their Results

*Trevor Cobbold, February 5, 2009*

National literacy and numeracy tests will now have 'high stakes' attached to them as a result of the decision of Australian education ministers, at the initiative of the Rudd Government, to publish the results of individual schools.

It means that league tables are now inevitable in Australia. This will put schools under enormous pressure to maintain reputations and enrolments.

The future of some schools will also be threatened because the Prime Minister has stated that sanctions will be applied to schools that don't improve their performance.

The high stakes attached to school results creates a strong incentive for schools to improve their ranking on league tables by rigging their results.

Long experience with reporting school results and league tables in England, the United States and elsewhere shows that schools respond by manipulating their results to improve their results, ranking and reputation.

Rigging school results is a much easier and quicker way of improving school performance rankings than the hard work of effective school improvement.

Read entire article at: <http://soscanberra.com/league-tables/league-tables-create-incentives-for-schools-to-rig-their-results>

*Trevor Cobbold is an independent education researcher.*

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## Do Schools Kill Creativity?

*Sir Ken Robinson*



Creativity expert Sir Ken Robinson challenges the way we're educating our children.

He champions a radical rethink of our school systems, to cultivate creativity and acknowledge multiple types of intelligence.

Why don't we get the best out of people? Sir Ken Robinson argues that it's because we've been educated to become good workers, rather than creative thinkers.

Students with restless minds and bodies -- far from being cultivated for their energy and curiosity -- are ignored or even stigmatized, with terrible consequences. "We are educating people out of their creativity," Robinson says. It's a message with deep resonance.

Robinson's TEDTalk has been distributed widely around the Web since its release in June 2006. The most popular words framing blog posts on his talk? "Everyone should watch this."

A visionary cultural leader, Sir Ken led the British government's 1998 advisory committee on creative and cultural education, a massive inquiry into the significance of creativity in the educational system and the economy, and was knighted in 2003 for his achievements. His latest book, *The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything*, a deep look at human creativity and education, was published in January 2009.

Watch the video: [http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/ken\\_robinson\\_says\\_schools\\_kill\\_creativity.html](http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity.html)

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## INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

### Indigenous education outcomes: are the answers in the mainstream?

*Peter Buckskin, presentation at Curriculum Corporation Conference, 10 November 2008*

Australian governments have traditionally managed Indigenous education in an atmosphere of crisis and blame. This must change.

Recent reports on Indigenous performance in education show mixed results: while there has been an overall increase in enrolment across all sectors, figures for educational outcomes in literacy and numeracy have either declined or remained stable in recent years.

Indigenous students now comprise 4.2 per cent of the school population and are the most disadvantaged people in the educational system. Numerous reports, including the inquiries into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the Stolen Generations, have highlighted the importance of education in preventing serious problems in the future.

The answers to educational disadvantage can be found by bringing Indigenous students into the mainstream, but only provided that non-Indigenous educators make an effort to finally 'get it', to really understand why Indigenous education should be such a high priority. A number of changes are necessary if Indigenous education is to be brought into the mainstream.

Teachers and non-Indigenous students must develop cultural competency: not just an understanding of Indigenous identity and place, but a profound insight into the impact of colonialisation on the psyche.

Read more at <http://cmslive.curriculum.edu.au/leader/default.asp?id=58&issueID=11718#art26411>

Watch the video of the presentation at [http://www.curriculum.edu.au/conference/2008/videos/peter\\_buckskin.html](http://www.curriculum.edu.au/conference/2008/videos/peter_buckskin.html)

Download the accompanying PowerPoint at [http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/resources/CurriculumConference10\\_Nov2008\\_final.ppt](http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/resources/CurriculumConference10_Nov2008_final.ppt)

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### Engaging excellent Aboriginal students in science: an innovation in culturally-inclusive schooling

*Carol Aldous, Alan Barnes, Julie Clark - Teaching Science: The Journal of the Australian Science Teachers Association, Volume 54 Number 4, December 2008; Pages 35-39*

Last year's Aboriginal Summer School for Excellence in Technology and Science (ASSETS) was successfully held in January 2008 at the Australian Science and Mathematics School, Flinders University.

Nineteen students took part, having been recruited from across Australia on the basis of academic ability, community and teacher recommendation, and outside achievements.

The ten-day program was designed to balance academic pursuits with cultural and social activities, including basketball, Indigenous games, visits to the Tandanya Cultural Centre, local sports, and contact with Indigenous speakers and role models. Participants stayed at the Wiltja residential facility for South Australian Indigenous students.

The academic component involved activities and workshops in the areas of environmental science, electronics/robotics and health science, followed by students' selection of one of these topics to investigate in greater depth. The environmental science investigation incorporated elements of the local Kurna culture, allowing the students who chose it to freely engage in 'border crossing' between science and Indigenous identity.

Read more at <http://cmslive.curriculum.edu.au/leader/default.asp?id=58&issueID=11718#art26411>

Subscribe to Teaching Science at <http://www.asta.edu.au/resources/teachingscience>

Read more about ASSETS at <http://www.education.unisa.edu.au/assets/index.htm>

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### **Aboriginal Training Programs Team of TAFE Tasmania win Award**

The Australian Education Union is pleased to announce that the winner of the 2008 Arthur Hamilton Award for Outstanding Contribution to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education is the Aboriginal Training Programs Team of TAFE Tasmania.

We congratulate the dedicated staff of the Aboriginal Training Programs whose educational practices and programs are underpinned by principles of inclusive education.

This marks the first time that a TAFE Institute has won the Award and could be the first time an application has been received from a TAFE institute.

All positions within the small but dynamic state wide Aboriginal Programs Team are staffed by Aboriginal people in identified positions. They pride themselves on providing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with quality vocational education and training and are committed to ensuring quality content and delivery of Aboriginal specific programs through strong involvement in programs not run by them.

More general training can range from basic reading, writing and maths skills to specific employment related training. They also assist with access to training at all TAFE Tasmania campuses. Aboriginal VET Officers' time is also spent in consultation with the Aboriginal community identifying future local training needs. Finally they provide Cross Cultural Awareness training and advice to both teaching and non-teaching staff and management on Aboriginal issues.

Established in 1999, this Award is in recognition of AEU members who are committed to ensuring that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have the right to high quality education throughout their lives.

Source: <http://www.aeufederal.org.au/Atsi/AHAward2008.html>

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## TERTIARY EDUCATION

### Getting a degree is an excellent investment

*Ross Gittins, The Age, February 14, 2009*

IF RECESSIONS are anything to go by, one thing we can expect this time is a rise in the year 12 retention rate. More youngsters will stay at school simply because there are fewer jobs for those who leave early. Similarly, more youngsters are likely to go on from school to university.

But is this a good thing? Depends. It's not good if the youngsters do not want to be there, are not given subjects to study they find interesting and end up disrupting those who do know why they are there.

If those who stay on do develop an interest in what they are studying, if they can see the wider possibilities that further education opens up, they and the economy will end up better off. That requires maturity, so maybe it is not so bad to keep youngsters in the system until they have had time to think things through.

But the trouble with education beyond the minimum leaving age is that it involves exercising a discipline that is hard enough for oldies, let alone young people - delayed gratification.

There is more to further education than making money, but for most people money is a big part of it. If they can find a job, young people are tempted to leave education early because they cannot wait to start earning - and spending - their own money.

What is much harder for a young person to see is that if only they delay their entry into the working world for a few years until they have gained more education, the money they will earn over their lives is likely to be a lot greater.

Read entire article: <http://business.theage.com.au/business/getting-a-degree-is-an-excellent-investment-20090213-876k.html>

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### Unis and students back fee to improve services

*Emma Macdonald, Canberra Times, 12/02/2009*

Universities and students have broadly welcomed Federal Government legislation which will enable universities to charge students up to \$250 a year to help fund services like child care and welfare

support.

But the fee, which would come into effect from July 1 this year and which students would be able to defer in a HECS-style loan, would not be allowed to be used to support political parties.

While detailed guidelines of how the funds could be spent are still being finalised, Youth Minister Kate Ellis told Parliament yesterday, "Let me be clear: the Bill is not a return to compulsory student unionism."

Universities are expected to reap more than \$100million a year from the new fee, but the money will be quarantined for use to improve student services, which were stripped of \$170million when the Howard government passed its voluntary student unionism legislation in 2006.

Read entire article: <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/news/national/national/general/unis-and-students-back-fee-to-improve-services/1431684.aspx>

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### **Call for outer-suburbs unis**

*Luke Slattery, The Australian, February 11, 2009*

AN estimated 20 new outer-suburban teaching universities will be needed to meet ambitious enrolment targets set by the Bradley review of higher education, according to Monash demographer Bob Birrell.

In a paper for the Australian Universities Review, published today, Dr Birrell and fellow Monash University researcher Daniel Edwards endorse the Bradley review's call for a spike in the higher education participation rate from 29 per cent in 2006 to 40 per cent by 2020.

But they argue such a "massive" increase in university enrolments is unlikely to be met by prestigious inner-city universities more interested in quality than quantity, while the system as a whole faces capacity constraints.

"It is clear that the existing university infrastructure will be unable to cope," Dr Birrell concludes.

"Incremental expansion on existing metropolitan campuses could only provide a small fraction of the required capacity. New campuses will have to be built in locations which best serve the populations with the least access."

Read more at <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,,25038160-12332.00.html>

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### **No point in Bradley's vouchers**

*Andrew Norton, The Australian, February 11, 2009*

FOR more than a decade, first as a ministerial adviser and later as a think-tank researcher, I have argued for a higher education voucher scheme.

But now the Bradley higher education review has finally put vouchers on the policy agenda, I oppose the proposal.

The Bradley plan won't work as intended, and risks perverse outcomes.

Under the Bradley voucher scheme -- or a demand-driven entitlement system, as the review calls it -- universities would no longer have student places allocated to them by Canberra. Instead, the idea is that universities would expand or shrink according to student demand and their own strategic decisions.

Once a new regulatory system is in place, the Bradley committee proposes opening the voucher system to any higher education provider meeting accreditation standards.

In principle, the dynamism of a voucher scheme would significantly improve on the status quo, in which the most powerful force is inertia.

To work as planned, a voucher system must have a price-setting mechanism. The price per student place provides the incentive to take additional students, replacing the command mechanism of the funding agreement.

The flaw in the Bradley voucher scheme is that there is no clear process for setting prices for student places that provide adequate financial incentives.

Read entire article: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,,25036450-25192,00.html>

*Andrew Norton is a research fellow with the Centre for Independent Studies. This article is based on an paper titled Fixing Prices: Why Vouchers Won't Work While Government Sets Fees, published today by the CIS.*

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## Universities receive \$73 million for teaching and learning

*Hon Julia Gillard MP, Minister for Education, 5 February 2009*

A total of 32 Australian universities will share more than \$73.14 million for excellence and improvement in teaching and learning, the Minister for Education, Julia Gillard announced today.

The successful universities have been recognised for their achievements as part of the Australian Government's 2009 Learning and Teaching Performance Fund.

In 2009 the fund will reward more universities than ever before. This follows the Rudd Government's decision to introduce an improvement component, which recognises universities for improving their teaching and learning performance over time.

Under the previous Liberal government, only universities with the very best outcomes were eligible to receive funding with Learning and Teaching Performance Fund.

As a result only a few, mainly prestigious universities received funding and little, if anything, went to regional and less well resourced universities.

The introduction of the improvement focus has meant that some universities were eligible for funding for the first time, while universities that have achieved excellence in learning and teaching continue to be rewarded.

Read more at

[http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Releases/Pages/Article\\_090206\\_101318.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Releases/Pages/Article_090206_101318.aspx)

Further information about the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund at

<http://www.deewr.gov.au/learningteachingperformancefund>

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## HEALTH & WELL-BEING

### **New guidelines declare closing time for teen drinkers**

*Jill Stark, Sydney Morning Herald, February 1, 2009*

TEENAGERS should delay drinking for as long as possible under strict new Federal Government alcohol guidelines that warn there is no safe consumption level for children under 18.

The National Health and Medical Research Council's guidelines warn parents that alcohol is particularly dangerous for under-15s and they should try to delay their teenagers' drinking for as long as possible.

Obtained exclusively by The Sun-Herald, the guidelines reverse the advice given in the controversial October 2007 draft that 15- to 17-year-olds could consume some alcohol under parental supervision.

The tough new guidelines also warn that having more than four drinks on any one occasion sharply increases the risk of serious harm and consuming more than two drinks a day seriously heightens the risk of death from alcohol-related disease or injuries.

Read entire article

<http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2009/01/31/1232818794666.html?feed=fairfaxdigitalxml>

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## AROUND THE STATES AND TERRITORIES

### **NSW: Leaky schools to get upgrade**

*The Australian, February 10, 2009 (AAP)*

SCHOOL buildings across NSW with sewage and storm water problems, leaky roofs and toilets that do not work will be upgraded and repaired over the next two years, the NSW Government announced.

NSW Minister for Education and Training, Verity Firth, said the Government had asked all NSW public school principals to nominate minor works projects that needed to be done at their schools.

"The Rees Government has been listening to principals about what needs to be fixed to resolve maintenance issues once and for all," she said yesterday.

In the November mini-budget, \$150 million had been set aside to fix maintenance problems causing a major inconvenience to schools.

"The funding was allocated in addition to the \$878 million already being spent on upgrading and building new school facilities in the 2008/09 NSW Budget," Ms Firth said.

Projects to be funded include 36 new security fences at a cost of \$7.5 million, 266 toilet upgrade projects at a cost of \$52.5 million, 193 roofing repair projects at a cost of \$43.7 million, and 301 repairs to sewers and storm-water drains at a cost of \$42.8 million.

Source: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,,25033530-5006784,00.html>

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### **NT: Alice Springs bus service 'bypassing' town camp children**

ABC News, Feb 9, 2009

An Alice Springs youth worker says he is disappointed the Northern Territory Government has not acted immediately to resolve transport issues for town camp children to get to school.

The Government is funding a free bus service to school students, but Reg Hatch from Tangentyere Council said it does not service town camps.

He says his organisation is not funded to provide school transport, but it has been doing so since school resumed.

The Minister for Central Australia said after last Wednesday's meeting of MLAs that a package of youth measures would be announced in two weeks, but Mr Hatch says it is too long to wait.

"The thing I'm looking for is just to try and get the kids to school and we don't have the capacity to do that currently," he said.

Source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/02/09/2485958.htm?section=business>

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## QLD: Queensland Smart State? More like Vacuum State!

*John Ridd, Online Opinion, 9 February 2009*

At the start of the century Anna Bligh was the Queensland Minister for Education. There were slightly encouraging signs that she recognised that the educational standards in the States' schools were unsatisfactory.

However the emphasis was on the easily measured and simplistic issue: the retention rate into Year 12. Sadly nothing was done then, or since, to rectify the problem of poor standards.

Subsequent Ministers of Education never showed any real signs whatsoever that they realised how bad the situation was.

Even less was there any recognition that the root of the problem lay with the Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) who determined the subject syllabi for all subjects for all schools and for all Years.

Now, in the last few months, Ms Bligh, now the Premier, has had the unpleasant experience of seeing two major studies/tests that demonstrate beyond argument that the situation is grave.

The Trends in International Maths and Science Study (TIMSS) showed, yet again, that the condition of mathematics in Australia is weak. For example in Year 8 algebra, variously described in the literature as "the language of higher mathematics" and "a gatekeeper to educational opportunity", the global average is 500, Australian children scrambled 471.

It is not just that our children are beaten by the "big boys" such as Taipei, Japan, Singapore and Korea, who are so far ahead as to be in a different league altogether, but also by (as a sample), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, England, Hungary, Lithuania and Malta. I stopped halfway down the alphabetical list.

Taking mathematics as a whole, the performance of our more gifted children is embarrassingly feeble: 45 per cent of Year 8 Taipei students reached the "advanced" benchmark. In Australia it was 6 per cent. In the Queensland, the Vacuum State, it was 3 per cent.

Read entire article: <http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=8522>

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## **SA: New Learning Hub teaches students to be "water smart"**

*Hon Jane Lomax-Smith MP, Minister for Education, 12 February 2009*

The State Government will invest \$1.5 million in school water education programs over the next three years through the new SA Water Learning Centre.

Minister for Water Security Karlene Maywald and Minister for Education Jane Lomax-Smith today officially launched the centre - a new information, training and learning hub focused on sustainable water use.

Minister Maywald says the centre, located at SA Water's new headquarters on Victoria Square, will build on existing water education in schools, communities and the broader South Australian community.

"Educating our communities on the importance of sustainability of our water supplies is vital, particularly in the face of the worst drought on record, and this innovative and interactive learning facility will play a key role," she said.

Read more at <http://www.ministers.sa.gov.au/news.php?id=4321&print=1>

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## **TAS: Parents call for leadership on school closures**

*ABC News, 12 February 2009*

Tasmania's parents and friends want the State Government to show more leadership over which state schools will need to close.

The Premier, David Bartlett, has consistently said the government will not force any schools to close or merge, despite projections there will be 10,000 fewer students in a decade.

The president of the State School Parents and Friends, Jenny Branch, said it may be politically unpalatable, but the standard of education is suffering while the government fails to act.

"It should be clear from the government what the expectation is to when a school is viable and not viable, and when we're not giving the best to the children within that school and we need to make change.," Ms Branch said.

The Association is also demanding the State Government reviews its system of school associations.

Ms Branch said the government made associations compulsory for all state schools, but had not carried out a review to ensure they're working.

She said in many cases the associations could be working more effectively.

"We often hear stories that they're just told things by the Principal and they accept that because they don't know what their responsibilities are," Ms Branch said.

"We also get some really good stories of really good practising school association that are doing wonderful things in their schools. Now we need to blend the two of those together so we get the best possible representation," she said.

Source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/02/12/2489347.htm?site=hobart>

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## **TAS: Changes to school bus fares will be costly**

*Sally Glaetzer, Hobart Mercury, February 12, 2009*

CHANGES to school bus fares will cost Tasmanian parents an extra \$400 a child each year, the State Opposition says.

But the State Government yesterday accused the Liberal Party of grossly under-estimating the cost of its promise to provide free bus travel for seniors and students.

Under changes designed to provide fare uniformity across Tasmanian school bus routes, students will pay 75 per cent of the Metro student fare to get to school in 2010.

Yesterday, Opposition infrastructure spokesman Jeremy Rockliff said that would equate to \$9.80 a week for students entitled to a concession.

Infrastructure Minister Graeme Sturges said the new bus fare system was fair and sustainable.

Mr Sturges said the Opposition's policy was unsustainable.

Students can apply for a student bus pass for free travel to and from school if their parents are pensioners or concession-card holders.

Source: [http://www.themercury.com.au/article/2009/02/12/54875\\_tasmania-news.html](http://www.themercury.com.au/article/2009/02/12/54875_tasmania-news.html)

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## **VIC: Private students get more exam aid**

*Farrah Tomazin, The Age, February 12, 2009*

MORE private school students receive special consideration in their VCE exams each year compared with public school students.

Figures from the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority show that almost 1100 students from Catholic and independent schools received special examination arrangements last year compared with 703 students from government schools, raising questions about whether some students are getting an unfair advantage.

Special consideration is granted to VCE students who have special needs during their exams. For instance, some may be sick, suffering personal problems, or have a disability that may require extra writing time or other assistance.

While the system has been relatively uncontroversial in Victoria, in NSW a recent 10 per cent jump in the number of private school students applying for special consideration during their Higher School Certificate prompted concerns that some elite private schools may be abusing the system.

The Victorian figures show the number of non-government students receiving special exam arrangements has outweighed that of government school students for the past three years.

Read more at <http://www.theage.com.au/national/private-students-get-more-exam-aid-20090211-84tt.html>

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## **VIC: \$7.4 Million Investment in Early Learning Centres**

*Hon Maxine McKew MP, Parl Sec for Early Childhood Education & Care, 5 February 2009*

Victorian communities are set to benefit from a \$4.9 million investment by the Brumby and Rudd Government for new early learning centres in Yarraville and Port Melbourne.

Ms McKew said each of the centres will meet the needs of local communities, providing additional long day care places and maternal and child health services.

"Australia's future will be shaped by the support we provide for our children's development today. The Rudd Government recognises that across Australia there are communities with an ongoing need for high quality, affordable child care and we are acting to meet that need." Ms McKew said.

"Integrated facilities provide a diverse range of services in one convenient location supporting the health and development of children and families."

The Rudd Government will contribute \$3.2 million towards the centres, with the Brumby Government contributing \$1.7 million towards the centres; local governments will contribute the remainder.

The centres are part of the Australian Government's \$114.5 million commitment to have early learning and care centres operating in priority areas across Australia by 2010.

Ms Morand said the Brumby Government investment in these two early learning and care centres builds on its \$43 million commitment to construct 95 children's centres across Victoria.

Read entire release:

[http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/McKew/Media/Releases/Pages/Article\\_090206\\_160846.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/McKew/Media/Releases/Pages/Article_090206_160846.aspx)

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## **VIC: Audit Report - Large Achievement Gaps in Victorian Schools**

*Trevor Cobbold, February 9, 2009*

A new report by the Victorian Auditor-General on literacy and numeracy achievement in Victorian government schools has cast more light on the achievement gaps between students.

It shows very large achievement gaps between high-achieving and low-achieving students, between students from rich and poor families and between regions in Victoria. It also shows that these achievement gaps have not reduced over the past 10 years.

The report found that the lowest-achieving students were around two years of learning behind the highest-achieving students in both literacy and numeracy for Years 3 to 9. However, it notes some improvement amongst the lowest-achieving students in literacy though not in numeracy.

The analysis also found that the achievement gap between students from low- and high-SES (socio-economic status) schools was wide at all year levels for both literacy and numeracy.

Students from low-SES schools were up to a year or more below the achievement level of their counterparts from high-SES schools for both literacy and numeracy. This achievement gap widened as students progressed through school from Years 3 to 9. In Year 9, the gap represented 15 months of learning for both literacy and numeracy. There was no change in the gaps at each Year level between 1998 and 2007.

Read entire article: <http://soscanberra.com/equity-in-education/large-achievement-gaps-revealed-in-victorian-schools>



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## CONFERENCES & EVENTS

### Teaching Australia Workshops: The Future Focused School

*March - May 2009 at locations around Australia*

School leadership teams are invited to attend The Futures Focused School two-day workshops designed to assist schools incorporate futures thinking in their strategic planning.

The workshops will be held in metropolitan and regional areas around Australia from March to May 2009.

Brian Caldwell and David Loader from Educational Transformations will deliver the workshops.

For more information and to register visit <http://www.teachingaustralia.edu.au>

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### Teaching Australia Master Class: Leading Schools in the Digital Age

*March - May 2009 at locations around Australia*

Principals and school leaders are invited to register for Teaching Australia's Master Class: Leading schools in the digital age to explore the creative use of digital technologies in schools.

The classes will be held in metropolitan and regional areas around Australia from March to May 2009.

The Master Classes will be presented by national award winning principals, as well as either Mal Lee, Michael Gaffney or Allan Shaw, contributing authors of *Leading a digital School - principles and practice* - Mal Lee and Michael Gaffney (Ed.)(2008), ACER Press.

For more information and to register visit <http://www.teachingaustralia.edu.au>

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### Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) National Conference 2009

#### Building a Fair Australia in Tough Economic Times

*2-3 April 2009, Australian Technology Park, Sydney*

This major annual event will examine the impact of the economic downturn on fairness in Australia. How will low income and disadvantaged Australians be affected and how should policymakers and the community and welfare sector respond?

The second day of the conference includes elective forums to give conference delegates the opportunity to participate in discussion.

The annual ACOSS Conference brings together ACOSS members, community sector leaders, academics, non profit organisations and philanthropic organisations with an interest in social justice as

well as federal and state government representatives.

ACOSS is the peak council of the community services and welfare sector and the national voice for the needs of people affected by poverty and inequality.

For program and registration: <http://users.tpg.com.au/adsl444m/bulletinfinal.htm>

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## **Professional Development Network 13th Annual School Leaders' Conference**

### **The 3 Rs of Leadership: Revolutions, Revelations & Reality**

*6-7 August 2009, Sofitel, Gold Coast*

The Conference offers a unique opportunity for passionate school leaders to engage with the future of education.

Outstanding international, national and local speakers will identify imminent educational trends and issues and provide you with the knowledge and skills necessary for your future focussed school.

The Conference will draw on your expertise and enthusiasm and inspire you to drive academic and cultural changes in your school.

Speakers include Professor Allan Walker (The Chinese University of Hong Kong), Professor Barry McGaw (McGaw Group Pty Ltd) and Ms Kathe Kirby (The University of Melbourne).

Read more at <http://www.griffith.edu.au/conference/professional-development-network-leadership-conference-2009>

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## **Isolated Children's Parents' Assoc. of Australia - Federal Conference**

### **Educational Pathways - Accessing Opportunities for Learning**

*13-14 August 2009, Longreach Qld.*

Further info at <http://www.icpa.com.au>

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## **REMINDERS**

21 February - International Mother Language Day - <http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/language/index.html>

26-27 February - Victorian Indonesian Language Teachers Annual Conference - Melbourne, VIC - <http://www.mltav.asn.au/indonesian/content/view/146/163/>

2-5 March - BIG Skills Conference - Sydney Australia - [http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training\\_skills/programmes\\_funding/programme\\_categories/Conferences/](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training_skills/programmes_funding/programme_categories/Conferences/)

16-18 March - IASTED International Conference on Web-based Education - Phuket, Thailand - <http://www.iasted.org/conferences/home-644.html>

21 March - Harmony Day - <http://www.harmony.gov.au>

23-26 March - International Conference on Computer Supported Education - Lisbon, Portugal - <http://www.csedu.org/CFP.htm>

3-5 April - WA Childcare and Early Childhood Education Conference - Perth, WA - <http://www.waecec.com.au/>

15-18 April - International Outdoor Education Research Conference - Beechworth, VIC - [http://www.latrobe.edu.au/oent/research\\_conf\\_2009.htm](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/oent/research_conf_2009.htm)

17-21 April - National Art Education Association National Convention - Minneapolis, USA - <http://www.naea-reston.org/convention.html>

1 May - Australian Museum Eureka Prizes nominations close - <http://www.australianmuseum.net.au/eureka/>

21 May - Education 09 - London, UK - <http://www.govnet.co.uk/education/>

31 May - Australian Rural Education Awards nominations close - <http://www.spera.edu.au>

4-7 July - Contasta Science Education Conference - Launceston, TAS - <http://www.cdesign.com.au/conasta58>

5-8 July - World Conference on Higher Education - Paris, France - [http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=56642&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=56642&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

8-10 July - SPERA National Conference - Flinders University, SA - <http://www.spera.edu.au//conferences/callforpapers.pdf>

13-16 July - Conference of the Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers - Fremantle, WA - <http://www.aamt.edu.au/2009-conference>

26-28 September - ACEL International Conference - Darwin, NT - <http://www.acef.org.au/index.php?id=858>

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## ACSSO EMAIL NEWSLETTERS

Australian Education Digest : <http://www.acsso.org.au/aed.htm> (weekly)

International News Roundup : <http://www.acsso.org.au/roundup.htm> (monthly)

Values Education : <http://www.valuesineducation.org.au/news.htm> (monthly)

Languages Education : <http://www.languageseducation.com/news.htm> (monthly)

Ensemble - Music Education : <http://www.ensemble.org.au/news.htm> (monthly)

Public Education Voice : <http://www.acsso.org.au/pev.htm> (quarterly)

Family School Partners : [http://www.familyschool.org.au/?page\\_id=6](http://www.familyschool.org.au/?page_id=6) (quarterly)

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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