



# 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 25, 14 July 2009

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### COMPARING SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

*Interview with Hon Julia Gillard MP, A/g Prime Minister 10 July 2009*

ALAN JONES: Look, we've been debating here and the newspapers have been red hot with this issue about league tables, and no one seems to know what they're talking about, and I just wonder if that does include the Acting Prime Minister?

JULIA GILLARD: Well Alan, hopefully I can explain this to you. We are going to bring a new era of transparency to what's happening in our schools. When you look at our schools, there are two things – there's the mix of abilities that kids bring to school and then there's the difference that the school is making. So, it's certainly true to say that kids from advantaged households who come to school already reading and writing, you know, mum and dad are educated people, they've had a real focus on their child's education, they come to school with a range of advantages. Unfortunately, there are kids who come to school with a range of disadvantages. They come from homes where no one has ever sat down with a book and read to them – maybe their parents don't read themselves.

ALAN JONES: So will you be ranking one school against the other?

JULIA GILLARD: Well you'll be able to compare schools in your local area. So, if you're a parent looking to make a choice in your local area, you'll be able to do that. And then, the methodology will enable you to compare schools that are serving similar school populations. We want to compare like schools - schools serving similar student populations - so we can tell what difference the teaching is making.

You'll be able to get into any school and get the complete information about any school, which will be the testing information, the attendance information, the year twelve attainment information, numbers of teachers, the resources in the school, the qualifications of the teachers, the nature of the student population. You'll be able to type in any school in the country and get that information.

But what it will also do for you is it will enable you to compare one school with schools that serve similar student groups and what's powerful about that is its actually telling you - for a mix of kids that has the same challenges and same abilities - how are schools going with teaching those kids. And if you see one school going streets ahead, that means that there's great practice there that we should be sharing. And if you see one school falling way behind, that means that we should be doing something about that school because it's under-performing

and it can do better.

What the Federal Government going to make available - and I've just described that - it will be powerful; and people have never had that depth of information.

Read the entire transcript at: <http://tinyurl.com/nzfyrl>

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## DIGITAL EDUCATION REVOLUTION

### Diverse industry calls to fast-track roll-out of school computers

*Fran Foo, the Australian, July 07, 2009*

AUSTRALIA'S peak computer industry groups are at odds as to when the federal government should spend the remaining \$1billion to equip secondary schools with computers. ICT companies battered by the global recession are eager for the funds to be disbursed sooner than later.

The program has already seen one of the largest public sector deployments of Microsoft Windows 7 in the world, with more than 260,000 students and teachers in NSW set to embrace the new operating system.

The government hopes to achieve a computer to student ratio of 1:1 by December 31, 2011, with the \$2.1bn National Secondary Schools Computer Fund (NSSCF). To date, about 600 new jobs are expected to be created in NSW alone, while Victoria hopes to hire 200 IT workers.

Since NSSCF's inception early last year, three rounds of funding have resulted in about \$1.1bn given to more than 2800 government, Catholic and independent schools nationwide. The amount is set to deliver 291,820 new machines to students in years 9-12.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/lnb3pm>

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## CYBER-SAFETY

### Research shows Australian children have more links online, more risk-aware

*Australian Communications & Media Authority (ACMA), 8 July 2009*

The report, Click and Connect – Young Australians' Use of Online Social Media, found that 75 per cent of children surveyed claim they know not to give out their address or phone number online and remember key safety messages such as 'people aren't always who they say they are online'.

"Australian children are telling us the internet is part of their everyday lives, and as they approach high school, it's increasingly important to their social lives. Up to 97 per cent of 16 to 17 year olds claim to use at least one social networking service," said Chris Chapman, Chairman of the ACMA. "Australian children demonstrate a good general knowledge of online behaviours that we might consider 'risky'—they know what not to do. Up to 78 per cent of parents also report having a 'high' level of knowledge of online risks."

Most young people are using online technologies as a way to connect with their real world friends, with a small proportion—17 per cent of 12 to 17 year olds—using online social networking to build networks of new friends.

Importantly, the report highlights an ongoing need for cyber safety material that resonates with young people, as well as an improved flow of cyber safety information to parents.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/lvcuxb>

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## FUNDING

### The Public Funding of Private Education is Unconscionable

*Public Debate, ABC TV, 26 June 2009*

Once again, the IQ Squared debate series filled the auditorium of the Angel Place Recital Centre in Sydney's CBD, and this time it was to argue a hotly-felt topic, that "Public Funding of Private Education is Unconscionable".

Unusually for the series, the pre-debate poll had the audience evenly split on the issue, and speakers from both teams elicited laughter, cheers and boos. High profile speakers like Jane Caro (for) and Michael Duffy (against) made strong arguments, but the stars of the show were the student debaters.

Tim Mathews from Caringbah High gave a convincing personal argument that public schools need more money, and was himself evidence that public schools produce articulate, confident and clever kids. Sam Molloy, from Sydney Grammar, gave a thoughtful response to the affirmative team's argument, and in the end it was the negative that won the day, 53% to 41%, with only 6% undecided.

Watch Tim Matthews' presentation at: <http://tinyurl.com/l4ou8z>

More on ABC site: <http://tinyurl.com/nmw4z6>

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## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

### Research study shows the first three years are key to school success

*Adele Horin, the Age, July 6, 2009*

How children are faring before they turn four is a strong guide to early school success, according to a major study. It is more important than what happens to them in the year immediately before they start school.

The Federal Government has promised to provide 15 hours a week of free preschool for the nation's four-year-olds. But the study indicates the importance of investment in the earlier years, too.

The Child Care Choices study is unique in Australia for having followed an initial group of children - more than 670 - from child care to school for six years.

The team of researchers, led by Jennifer Bowes of Macquarie University's children and families research centre, focused on children who used some formal child care - usually long-day-care centres - and did not include children cared for exclusively by parents, nannies or other carers.

Find out more about the Project: <http://tinyurl.com/l3qu6j>

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## **Public consultations in July enable Parental input on child care**

*Kerry-Anne Walsh, Brisbane Times, July 5, 2009*

PUBLIC consultations will be held across Australia so parents can have their say on early childhood education and child care.

Early Childhood Education Minister Kate Ellis said yesterday the meetings would be held in metropolitan and regional areas in the second half of July.

Ms Ellis's announcement followed agreement by state and federal ministers on Thursday on several changes that could significantly increase early childhood education costs.

The Council of Australian Governments endorsed last week a report that outlined reform options in child care and early education.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/nqfxtc>

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## **AWARDS & PRIZES CLOSING SOON**

### **NEiTA Inspirational Teachers Awards 2009:**

*Nominations closing 31 July 2009*

Nominating a teacher, principal, or director for the ASG Inspirational Teaching Awards through the NEiTA teaching awards program, provides parents, school and early childhood communities with a unique opportunity to say thank you to an outstanding and hard-working teacher.

You can nominate online at <http://tinyurl.com/msblnp>

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## **Schools First**

*Applications closing 14 August 2009*

Schools throughout Australia are invited to apply for a Schools First award and be in the running to share in the \$5 million pool of award money.

Schools First, developed by NAB, ACER and the Foundation for Young Australians, is designed to recognise excellence in school-community partnerships. It is Australia's largest ever corporate-backed education initiative and is open to all schools around the country.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/lv9vzj>

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## AROUND THE STATES & TERRITORIES

### ACT: Young Canberrans understand the value of 'earn or learn'

*Andrew Barr MLA, 7 July 2009*

The number of ACT students in vocational and educational training (VET) increased by 2.9 per cent to 24,700 students in 2008, according to a report released today by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). The Australian vocational education and training statistics: Students and courses 2008 publication shows that the national increase was 1.9 per cent.

The report also finds an increase in the number of indigenous students, those from a non-English speaking background and students with a disability undertaking VET. Importantly, the number of students in the ACT aged 15 to 19 engaging in VET increased by 1.4 per cent.

Minister for Education and Training Andrew Barr said the results show ACT Labor's policies and investment in the education system are meeting the needs of students and businesses.

Read entire release: <http://tinyurl.com/nsjj3d>

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### NSW: Schools seize incentives to lift performance of Indigenous kids

*Bruce McDougall, Daily Telegraph, July 13, 2009*

SCHOOLS in New South Wales are reporting a stunning turnaround in Aboriginal student test scores after receiving thousands of dollars in incentives to improve.

Principals are being paid an extra \$6000 a year and teachers offered special financial inducements under a \$40 million plan to lift the performance of indigenous children in class.

Some schools have recorded more than 20 per cent improvements in literacy and numeracy during the past three years. Major improvements also have been made in attendance rates and behaviour while suspension numbers have dived.

At Glebe Public School in the inner-west, where almost half of the students are indigenous, Year 2 children are reading at up to three years above the expected level for their grade.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/ndetqx>

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## **NSW teachers to strike if school league tables published**

*Courier Mail, July 13, 2009 (AAP)*

TEACHERS in New South Wales have voted to support industrial action if school league tables are published using national assessment data.

NSW Teachers Federation president Bob Lipscombe said he hoped that state ministers would scrap plans to publish league tables before teachers walked out. However, up to 70,000 federation members were prepared to strike next year if necessary.

Speaking in Sydney at the federation's annual conference, Mr. Lipscombe launched a scathing attack on NSW Education Minister Verity Firth for her support of tables comparing schools' performances. He also criticised sections of the media, saying some newspapers stood to gain financially from their publication.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/mtsqq6>

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## **NSW: Julia Gillard announces new 'super teacher' plan**

*AAP, 10 July 2009*

Radical new plans to boost exam results by enticing a new breed of super teachers to work in the worst performing schools have been unveiled by Federal Education Minister Julia Gillard.

The first 100 Highly Accomplished Teacher positions will be advertised in New South Wales in October before the plan is rolled out across the rest of Australia.

Each of the new elite teachers, who will earn up to \$98,000 - will earn a higher salary than their colleagues and teach fewer classes.

Ms Gillard says the aim of the scheme is to put the best teachers where they are most needed.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/l6ety2>

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## **NT: Research team shows early education key to indigenous adult health**

*ABC News, Jul 10, 2009*

Giving Indigenous children quality early education is the most effective tool in improving their adult health, according to a Northern Territory-based research team.

The Menzies School of Health Research this week won a Life Education Australia award for its study into the link between poor education results for Indigenous children and their poor health.

Menzies director, Professor John Carapetis, says there is growing evidence connecting early brain development with adult health problems.

"Particularly with pregnancies where there might be smoking and alcohol abuse and small babies, and then early exposure to many different stresses early in life," he said.

"There's increasing evidence that that sets the scene for early onset of diabetes, of heart disease, of the sort of things that Aboriginal people die of at a very early age."

Menzies started to explore the link three years ago, and early results show quality preschool education is a key to setting up Indigenous kids for life, he says.

Source: <http://tinyurl.com/mtqwk8>

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## **NT: Damning education review forces restructure**

*ABC News, Jul 9, 2009*

The Northern Territory Government has promised to improve education results in the Territory by restructuring the education department.

The changes are in response to a damning review by Dr Chris Sarra which found a lack of direction and ad hoc decision making in the education department.

"There is a preponderance of unrelated initiatives based on the search of the 'silver bullet' - reflecting a lack of systemic coherence," the report found. It added there was "a lack of focus on the quality of performance and results".

The Chief Minister, Paul Henderson, accepted the findings and said more needed to be done to create a better education system.

"The report identified three main problems: structural incoherence, a lack of focus on results and a culture which accepts inefficiency and low expectations," Mr Henderson said. "Since this review was commissioned, we have done a lot to tackle these issues."

In response to the review, the Government will employ an executive director focussed on transforming Indigenous education. There will also be a new head of school education as well as regional managers. The department says no one will lose their job under the restructure.

Source: <http://tinyurl.com/n5mgyu>

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## **NT: Mills slams Labor's education 'slogans'**

*ABC News, Jul 10, 2009*

The Northern Territory Opposition says the Government is more interested in protecting its public profile than improving education results.

The Territory Government has promised to improve education outcomes by restructuring the education department following the release of a damning review.

Opposition Leader Terry Mills says a departmental reshuffle will do little to improve classroom results.

The Government says it will release a new strategic plan for the department in the coming weeks.

Source: <http://tinyurl.com/m58ck6>

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## **QLD: Government must do more to curb school violence**

*Tanya Chilcott & Rosemary Odgers, Courier Mail, July 09, 2009*

SHOCKING levels of student suspensions from Queensland's state schools have been revealed; with the Government admitting not enough has been done to combat violent behaviour. The Opposition has labelled the escalating violence "another crisis" the Government had been ignoring.

Education Minister Geoff Wilson yesterday took the unprecedented step of releasing school-by-school discipline data, acknowledging more needs to be done to quell increasing behavioural problems.

The Government is now considering longer suspensions and the ability for principals to exclude their own students without departmental input, while asking schools to revise their behavioural plans.

It follows revelations in The Courier-Mail earlier this year of a 20 per cent hike in suspensions from state schools between 2006 and 2008, with more than 55,000 handed out last year.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/n2ho7w>

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## **QLD: 10,000 teachers on leave as temporary ones fill in**

*Natalie Gregg, Courier Mail, July 09, 2009*

ABOUT 10,000 Queensland teachers or a quarter of the workforce are on some form of short or long-term leave, Education Queensland says.

Those on leave are replaced by an increasing number of temporary teachers, who have no job security and are often not paid through the school holidays.

Nearly 6600 teachers are on long-term leave.

Queensland Teachers Union president Steve Ryan said the Education Department's poor administration and policy of replacing those on long-term leave with temporary teachers were the main reasons for the problem. Mr. Ryan said the disruption to classrooms also meant some children had more than one teacher in a school year.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/n2e2t3>

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## **QLD: Part-time teachers disrupting classes, union warns**

*Natalie Gregg, Courier Mail, July 06, 2009*

CLASSROOMS are being disrupted and teachers left in limbo by an increasing number of their colleagues being employed on temporary contracts.

Current statistics from the Queensland Teachers' Union show the problem is worst in the state's southeast, where about 15 per cent of all teachers are on temporary contracts compared with 6.5 per cent in north Queensland and 9 per cent in Wide Bay-Burnett.

Statistics also show the percentage of temporary teachers in Queensland has been rising from 8.5 per cent in 2000 to 12.5 per cent this year.

Queensland Association of State School Principals president Norm Hart agreed the trend was disruptive, but said many principals had no choice but to hire temporary teachers to fill in for those on long-term leave.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/l43cc1>

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### **SA: More Aboriginal early childhood teachers**

*Jay Weatherill, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation and Early Childhood Development, 7 July 2009*

More Aboriginal people are studying to become early childhood teachers under a State Government scholarship program currently underway with Macquarie University in Sydney.

Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation and Early Childhood Development Minister Jay Weatherill said that there were about 80 Aboriginal teachers working in South Australian public schools and preschools.

Under the joint initiative with the university, a further 10 Aboriginal South Australians are pursuing careers in early childhood education.

"We know how crucial the early years are to children's development and training more Aboriginal early childhood teachers will mean more positive role models for Aboriginal children during this important time in their development," Mr Weatherill said.

Read entire release: <http://tinyurl.com/l94ap4>

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### **TAS: Polytechnic may limit students: expert**

*ABC News, Jul 10, 2009*

A United States education expert believes Tasmania's polytechnic system could limit students in the future.

Professor David Pearson is in Hobart for a national literacy conference being attended by more than a 1,000 delegates.

He says a better alternative to Tasmania's polytechnic model would be academies that prepare students for a technical career but do not give up on academic courses.

"It assumes that kids at a certain age have a clear idea of what they want to do for the next 10 or 12 years and a lot of kids just don't know," he said.

"So I think you've always got to have sort of an academic support system for kids who go down the polytechnic road because if you don't then a kid will be in tough shape to try and change their direction."

Source: <http://tinyurl.com/n7fy8j>

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## **VIC: Student ID plan under fire**

*Farrah Tomazin, the Age, July 14, 2009*

The movements of every Victorian student through the education system will be tracked by the State Government as part of a multimillion-dollar project that has sparked privacy concerns among parents, teachers and opposition parties.

From this week, thousands of students under the age of 25 will be given a unique student identification number, allowing the state Education Department to monitor them as they progress through primary school, secondary school, or vocational education and training.

Every student's number will be recorded within a central register, providing details such as the child's name, date of birth, sex, enrolment history, and movements between schools.

Education Minister Bronwyn Pike said the project — which is costing taxpayers more than \$5 million — would help identify students at risk of dropping out, while ensuring the Government had accurate information on student movement and retention rates. But some fear the plan could result in serious privacy breaches if strict controls are not put in place.

Parents Victoria spokeswoman Elaine Crowle said the initiative could prove valuable in preventing students who moved between schools from "getting lost in the system".

But she added: "There do have to be a lot of safety measures put in place to make sure student identification is not compromised - and that the information is used only on a 'needs-to-know' basis."

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/mss2fa>

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## **WA: Remote kids lose their lunch as program axed**

*Natasha Robinson, the Australian, July 14, 2009*

THE axing of nutrition programs in schools in remote Aboriginal communities has led to heavy criticism of the West Australian government and the prediction by one principal that school attendance will drop.

The state Health Department was unable to reveal yesterday how many schools were set to lose their nutrition programs, but a health official has told one affected school that no annual contracts funded under the four-year Australian Better Health Initiative program will be renewed in this financial year.

School nutrition programs are seen as critical to school attendance in many remote Aboriginal communities.

The axing of the programs is part of a larger series of cuts by the West Australian government to preventive health programs funded under the Australian Better Health Initiative.

The principal of one of the schools affected by the funding cut has described the West Australian Health Department's decision to discontinue its nutrition program as irresponsible.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/lkzbw3>

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## **WA: Schools 'dumb down' Year 12s to lift ranking**

*Bethany Hiatt, West Australian, 13 July 2009*

WA schools are pushing many Year 12 students to choose easier subjects so they can avoid exams and schools can potentially lift their ranking on so-called league tables, an analysis of new enrolment figures reveals.

Curriculum Council chief executive David Wood said he was concerned that Year 12 enrolment data showed many students had opted for new courses at the easiest level, which did not involve exams. "I had expected this would be more prevalent in schools from lower socio-economic areas, but indeed it is schools from across the socio-economic spectrum, including some high-profile independent schools," he said.

New courses being rolled out to Years 11 and 12 are offered at three levels of difficulty according to students' ability. Students in stage one do not sit exams but exams are compulsory in stages two and three.

University-bound students are expected to study stage two in Year 11 and stage three in Year 12. Less academic students are expected to start at stage one in Year 11 and move to stage two in Year 12 — but many are staying in the first stage.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/mg2brr>

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## **WA: Kimberley kids log into virtual classrooms**

*Joseph Catanzaro, West Australian, 7th July 2009*

On Myroondah station two hours from Derby, Hana and Jed Smith are getting ready for school. There are no other children in their classroom, a purpose-built building on their parents' million-hectare property, and the closest teacher is 130km away. Sitting down at a computer, Hanna, 8, and Jed, 6, log into a computer program and enter a virtual classroom. Across the Kimberley their 60 classmates do the same.

Now in its 50th year of operation, the Kimberley School of the Air allows children in isolated communities and on remote cattle stations across 610,000sqkm of the Kimberley to get a good education and keep in touch with their peers.

This week, some of those students drove up to 10 hours to take part in the Kimberley School of the Air mini-camp, held on the Smith property. Despite interacting with each other every day during school, many of the 20 primary school students who made the trip to the camp had not met their classmates or teachers.

Read article: <http://tinyurl.com/lztlzu>

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## **WA: Uni enrolments 'surging in the downturn'**

*ABC News, Jul 10, 2009*

West Australian universities say they are experiencing a significant increase in midyear enrolments as poor economic conditions make the job market more competitive.

Murdoch University has reported a 70 per cent increase in enrolments from last year, while at the University of Western Australia enrolments have risen by 22 per cent.

Curtin and Edith Cowan University have also recorded higher than average enrolments.

Murdoch University's deputy vice chancellor, Gary Martin, says there has been a significant increase in enrolments in courses linked to careers such as primary school teaching and law.

"There's certainly quite a number of students who have contacted us and said they are employed but they want to be more competitive in the workplace and their employers are certainly demanding a lot more of them," he said.

Source: <http://tinyurl.com/n3khwz>

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## REMINDERS

31 July - Nominations close for NEiTA ASG Inspirational Teacher Awards - <http://tinyurl.com/ojjh3z>

31 July-1 August - NSW Federation of Parents' & Citizens' Associations Annual Conference - Penrith, NSW - <http://tinyurl.com/ofzcvw>

6-7 August - Professional Development Network School Leaders' Conference - Gold Coast, QLD - <http://tinyurl.com/grfnoh>

13-14 August - Isolated Children's Parents' Assoc. of Australia Federal Conference - Longreach, QLD - <http://tinyurl.com/pdnxcr>

18-19 August - Parents Victoria Annual State Conference - Melbourne, VIC - <http://tinyurl.com/mw5faq>

22 August - Tasmanian Parents & Friends Association State Annual Conference - <http://tinyurl.com/lzqrpn>

29-30 August - Western Australian Council of State School Organisations Annual State Conference - Burswood, WA - <http://tinyurl.com/nydplr>

31 August-6 September - Reach for the Stars - <http://tinyurl.com/l3zh3e>

2-4 September - ARACY Conference - Melbourne, VIC - <http://tinyurl.com/qljgzv>

26-28 September - ACEL International Conference - Darwin, NT - <http://tinyurl.com/pgf6cq>

2-4 October - Australian Curriculum Studies Association Biennial Conference - Canberra, ACT - <http://tinyurl.com/pcslmo>

12-13 October - ACSSO National Conference - Hobart, TAS - <http://tinyurl.com/q8njl3>

24-26 November - Family Relationship Services Australia National Conference - Sydney, NSW - <http://tinyurl.com/lz433t>



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## ACSSO EMAIL NEWSLETTERS

- Australian Education Digest : <http://tinyurl.com/d2o8zu> (weekly)
- International News Roundup : <http://tinyurl.com/cswpka> (monthly)
- Values Education : <http://tinyurl.com/dls7rv> (monthly)
- Languages Education : <http://tinyurl.com/c59eda> (monthly)
- Ensemble - Music Education : <http://tinyurl.com/dedyz4> (monthly)
- Family School Partners : <http://tinyurl.com/qvleza> (monthly)
- Public Education Voice : <http://tinyurl.com/cy7s78> (quarterly)

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