



# 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 4 Number 1, 2 February 2010

- [FUNDING OUR SCHOOLS: \(2 items\)](#)
- [COMPARING SCHOOL PERFORMANCE: \(15 items\)](#)
- [CHURCH & STATE & EDUCATION: \(3 items\)](#)
- [INDIGENOUS EDUCATION: \(2 items\)](#)
- [SCHOOL LIBRARIES: Open letter to Julia Gillard](#)
- [DON'T FORGET TO CLAIM YOUR EDUCATION TAX REFUND](#)
- [EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: \(2 items\)](#)
- [TEACH FOR AUSTRALIA](#)
- [AROUND THE STATES & TERRITORIES: \(11 items\)](#)
- [RESOURCES: Water Education Toolkit](#)
- [CELEBRATIONS: \(3 items\)](#)
- [CONFERENCES: \(4 items\)](#)
- [REMINDERS](#)
- [ACSSO EMAIL NEWSLETTERS](#)

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### FUNDING OUR SCHOOLS

#### Flawed Schools Funding System Must Be Scrapped

*AEU Media Release, 18 January 2010*

Despite a record injection of funds into public schools by the Federal Government, private schools will still receive billions more in federal funding by 2013, new research released today has found.

The research by senior academic, Dr Jim McMorrow said the funding imbalance was due to an "unfair and dysfunctional" funding system put in place by the Howard Government that should be scrapped.

The McMorrow report reveals that:

- By the end of the current schools funding agreement in 2012/13, private schools will have received \$47 billion and public schools \$35 billion from the Rudd Government for building works, new equipment and running schools.
- Despite teaching over two-thirds of all students, the public school share of federal funding will be back to 36 per cent in 2012/13. An extra investment of \$1.5 billion a year in public schools would be required to return their share of education funding to the level it was under the last Labor Government (43 per cent).
- Public schools are not receiving a fair share of funding for computers in schools and trades training facilities and would be getting \$500 million extra if the money was distributed on the basis of need.

AEU Federal President, Angelo Gavrielatos said the report showed the Labor Government had taken significant and welcome steps to redress the under-funding of public schools by John Howard: "But the fact remains the Federal Government has retained the Liberal's funding system which the report shows is continuing to deliver levels of funding to private schools that cannot be justified on educational or equity grounds

"The Federal Government has said it will review schools funding this year. That review needs to begin as a matter of urgency to allow for a proper public debate on where school funding should be directed and for what purpose."

Read more at <http://www.aeufederal.org.au/Media/MediaReleases/2010/1801.pdf>

Read the Address by AEU Federal President Angelo Gavrielatos on 18 January 2010 at <http://www.aeufederal.org.au/Media/Speeches/AGavrielatos2010.pdf>

Download the McMorrow report at <http://www.aeufederal.org.au/Publications/2010/JMcMorrowreport2010.pdf>

[< top >](#)

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## **Australian Government welcomes AEU report on school funding**

*Hon Julia Gillard MP, Minister for Education, 18 January 2010*

The Rudd Government has welcomed a report released today by the Australian Education Union on school funding. This report highlights the unprecedented investment the Rudd Government is making in Australian schools.

The Rudd Government believes that all schools, government and non government, should be high quality schools.

Every dollar being spent through the Education Revolution is being spent to drive improvement in all schools and ensure disadvantage is not a barrier to a world class education.

This report confirms that significant additional funding being delivered through the Education Revolution is going to schools that need it the most.

The Rudd Government took the steps necessary to address a long standing funding anomaly which left primary students attending government schools funded at a lesser rate than secondary school students.

The increase in funding for non government schools recorded in the report reflects the increase in enrolments and indexation. As State governments remain the predominant funders of government schools, direct comparison with Commonwealth funding for non-government schools is disingenuous.

As promised, an open and transparent review of school funding will occur in the lead up to 2013, when the next four year funding deal is due to commence.

Read more at [http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Releases/Pages/Article\\_100118\\_083158.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Releases/Pages/Article_100118_083158.aspx)

[< top >](#)

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## **COMPARING SCHOOL PERFORMANCE**

### **I was wrong on league tables for schools**

*Kevin Donnelly, Sydney Morning Herald, January 15, 2010*

In 2002 I wrote an opinion piece in The Age arguing that schools should be held more accountable by publicly releasing information about results, standards and teacher performance. Drawing on overseas practice in England and the US, I argued that school data be provided by postcode and, instead of league tables, that only schools with a similar socio-economic profile be compared.

Given that the federal Labor Government - and Julia Gillard as Minister for Education - have adopted what I suggested eight years ago, readers would be forgiven for thinking I feel vindicated and that I support the new accountability measure.

Such is not the case.

Gillard's rationale behind making school results public, and allowing parents and others to compare schools, is to raise standards and to lift the performance of under-achieving schools. The track record, in both the US (under the president Bush inspired No Child Left Behind legislation) and England (where school league tables are published on an annual basis) is poor when it comes to new accountability measures raising standards.

Read more at <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/contributors/i-was-wrong-on-league-tables-for-schools-20100115-mbq5.html>

Dr Kevin Donnelly is the author of "Australia's Education Revolution: How Kevin Rudd Won and Lost the Education Wars" (Connor Court Publishing) and is director of Education Standards Institute (ESI), <http://www.edstandards.com.au>

[< top >](#)

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## **A principled stand on national testing**

*Brian J. Caldwell, 19 January 2010*

The position taken today by the Australian Education Union at its annual conference in Melbourne on a possible boycott in relation to national tests is a principled one. It is also supported by evidence of what has occurred in other countries when similar practices have or have not been introduced.

The AEU position plays out a scenario I described in my Agitation Hill Lecture in Castlemaine on May 29 last year (the full lecture is available at <http://www.educationaltransformations.com.au>).

The creation of 'league tables' is one issue. An examination of sample reports on the My School website reveals that such tables can be readily produced despite assurance by ministers that this will not occur.

As I concluded in Castlemaine: 'Unless there is agitation on an epic scale, such as refusal by teachers to administer the tests or by parents to have their children sit for them, it seems that league tables of limited validity that mean little to parents are a fait accompli'.

It seems that agitation on this scale is now occurring.

Read more at

<http://www.educationaltransformations.com.au/files/Principled%20Stand%20on%20National%20Testing.pdf>

Brian J. Caldwell is Managing Director of Educational Transformations and Professorial Fellow at the University of Melbourne where he served as Dean of Education from 1998 to 2004.

[< top >](#)

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## **By any measure, a fairer performance indicator**

*Geoff N. Masters, the Australian, 22 January 2010*

At the heart of the threat from the teachers' union appears to be a concern that test results will be interpreted as direct indicators of how well individual schools are performing.

According to the AEU, there are two problems with such an interpretation. First, literacy and numeracy tests measure only part of what students learn in school and so only partially capture the contributions that schools are making. Second, schools work in very different socioeconomic contexts with significantly different resources, meaning that it is harder to achieve high test scores in some schools than in others.

In Australia, education systems have chosen not to go down the path of trying to construct a measure of each school's performance so that every school in the country can be compared with every other school in a single league table. Instead, the decision has been made to report actual student test results for each school, including on the My School website.

This is real transparency. It does not obscure actual student performances, and it does not suppress information on the assumption that the public might misinterpret it.

Read more at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/opinion/by-any-measure-a-fairer-performance-indicator/story-e6frg6zo-1225822296773>

Geoff Masters is chief executive of the Australian Council for Educational Research and author of Reporting and Comparing School Performances.

[< top >](#)

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## **My School website and the Education Revolution**

*Hon Julia Gillard MP, Education Minister – Interview Transcript 25 January 2010*

MARIUS BENSON: Julia Gillard, the current debate about the schools ranking argument seems to be different in that there's no specific self interest – nobody's saying the Government's just trying to serve a political agenda and the teachers union on the other hand is not seeking extra conditions or pay for its members – it's a genuine dispute about what's best for the children.

JULIA GILLARD: I think people are being honest participants in this debate, absolutely. I think there are many Australians who are absolutely passionate about the future of school education and making sure we improve schools for every child. I certainly am and that's what's driving me on to implement the My School website and also to implement the rest of our Education Revolution reforms.

I know one thing that is concerning people is what happens if a school is shown to be underperforming compared with similar schools that serve similar kids, and I can certainly reassure people we're a Government that's almost doubled the amount of money going into school education and we're certainly focussed with dedicated new money and new reforms to make a difference for underperforming schools and we're talking about money in the order of more than \$2 billion dedicated to that purpose.

MARIUS BENSON: But criticism of the plan has not just come from the education union which represents public school teachers, it also comes from private school teachers and also from parents' associations. Does that give you any pause for thought?

JULIA GILLARD: I've had these discussions with the teachers union, with the principals' association, with the parents' organisations. I've started on this journey of creating this website and our new reforms – \$1.5 billion going into disadvantaged schools, more than half a billion dollars going into literacy and numeracy, more than half a billion going into teacher quality.

I started on this journey in March 2008 as a new Education Minister. So I've literally had the last two years to have these conversations with everybody in the education system. I believe that this is right, that transparency helps, that parents are entitled to this information and that the most important thing is that this information is in the hands of everyone in the Australian nation and we act on it.

Read more at [http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Transcripts/Pages/Article\\_100125\\_104710.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Transcripts/Pages/Article_100125_104710.aspx)

[< top >](#)

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## **Julia's revolution should measure up**

*Joel Klein, The Australian, 27 January 2010*

THERE is a lot of debate over whether the Australian government and Education Minister Julia Gillard should publish school performance data and allow the public to compare results. The only people who should fear more transparency are those who have something to hide.

This is a commonsense and necessary step to ensure that parents can make informed decisions about where to send their children to school, and will enable them to hold schools accountable for helping students achieve.

Opponents contend that Gillard's My School website will humiliate children by making public a school's shortcomings. This cynical fear tactic ignores the long-term consequences of allowing students to remain in schools that don't provide them with the education they deserve. For many schools in New York City, a low progress report grade has served as a wake-up call, motivating school leaders to make changes that benefit students and to raise their grades the following year. For other schools, a low grade has exposed persistent weaknesses, resulting in leadership change, restructuring, or closure.

Read more at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/opinion/julias-revolution-should-measure-up/story-e6frg6zo-1225823741809>

Joel Klein is the New York City schools chancellor.

[< top >](#)

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## **Klein's spin ignores negative impact of testing regime on quality of education**

*Letter to the Editor, Independent Education Union of Australia, 27 January 2010*

*Martha Foote, Brooklyn, USA*

As a public school parent in New York City, I have been living through Chancellor Joel Klein's education reforms. Despite Klein's rosy spin (he budgets a hefty PR office at the Department of Education, by the way), the story is sad for the school children who have had to endure his tenure. Here are four reasons:

Test scores have trumped quality education – By staking his reputation on improved test scores, Chancellor Klein has dumbed down the curriculum and lowered the quality of teaching and learning in New York City schools.

He has mandated testing every six weeks, instituted punitive school report cards based 85 percent on test scores, and spent millions of dollars on test prep (\$80 million to the testing company McGraw Hill alone).

Excessive test prep has crowded out social studies, science, art, music and physical education resulting in children learning less. Even reading, writing and math have suffered because teachers teach to test questions rather than emphasizing deeper thinking skills such as problem-solving and analysis.

Unsurprisingly, 75% of NYC high school graduates attending New York's City University (CUNY) community colleges require remediation.

Read more at <http://www.ieu.org.au/256.html>

[< top >](#)

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## **Parents' groups back threatened test boycott**

*Jessica Shepherd, the Guardian (UK), 27 January 2010*

Parents today came out in support of a threatened teachers' boycott of primary school tests this summer. The 300,000 teachers who are members of the National Union of Teachers and the National Association of Head Teachers will vote later this year on whether to boycott Sats, the English and maths tests in English sat by 600,000 10- and 11-year-olds in May.

The teachers want ministers to abolish the tests because they are used to compile "meaningless" school league tables. The tables unfairly stigmatise schools with the most challenging pupils, and turn children's last year of primary school into a repetitive drill for the tests, they argue.

Now parents groups have defended the idea of a boycott and said they trusted teachers to know more about education than the government.

Margaret Morrissey, of the campaigning group Parents Outloud, said: "I wish every teacher would boycott the tests – that way we wouldn't have league tables and most parents would be happier. Sats make the curriculum so rigid and put incredible pressures on pupils and teachers. It stops children getting a broad education in their last year of primary school."

[< top >](#)

Read more at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/jan/26/parents-back-sats-boycott>

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## **There's a better way of school appraisal**

*Ben Jensen, The Australian, 27 January 2010*

The My School website is a step in the right direction, but overseas experience shows these school performance indicators can be biased against schools in lower socioeconomic communities.

The solution is not to give up on transparency altogether, or to abandon the National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy, as the Australian Education Union is advocating. The benefits to students are too great. We need to improve the My School website and publish value-added measures of school performance that focus on student progress.

We must improve performance in school education. Substantial increases in expenditure have not been successful. The performance of Australian students in international testing has stagnated, and actually declined in reading literacy, indicating we are investing in the wrong areas.

We have a moral imperative to lift the progress made by 30 per cent of Australian year 9 students who perform at only the basic minimum standards of writing literacy.

The Grattan Institute report "Measuring What Matters: Student Progress", released today, argues for replacing the school performance indicators on the My School website with more accurate value-added measures. These measure the progress made by students, more accurately calculating the contribution made by each school, accounting for differences in students' backgrounds. For these reasons, teachers, school associations and unions in other countries have advocated the introduction of value-added school performance measures.

Read more at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/opinion/theres-a-better-way-of-school-appraisal/story-e6frg6zo-1225823741902>

Download the Report and other information from the Grattan Institute website: <http://www.grattan.edu.au/blogs/?p=23>

Ben Jensen is director of the school education program at the Grattan Institute.

[< top >](#)

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### **Business moves in to cash in on kids sitting Gillard's school tests**

*John Kaye MP Media release: 28 January 2010*

NSW Education Minister Verity Firth and her Federal counterpart Julia Gillard are creating a boom in businesses lining up to sell 'teach to the test' materials for schools.

"Ministers Firth and Gillard are turning the education of children into a money making business. Private companies are targeting schools and parents with costly NAPLAN 'test preparation' materials designed to help teachers 'teach to the test'.

"Valuable parts of the curriculum will suffer as schools face pressure to concentrate on NAPLAN testing to keep climbing the greasy pole of the My School website.

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

[< top >](#)

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### **Gillard's new website misses the point**

*Jane Caro, New Matilda, 29 January 2010*

On ABC1's Q&A last year, American writer and humourist PJ O'Rourke said "Beyond a certain point, complexity is fraud". He was not talking about the way Australia funds education at the time, but he certainly could have been.

As I progressed from concerned parent to public advocate ... I was continually astonished and appalled about the sheer level of complexity and confusion that surrounds the way Australia provides the vital funds that support the education of our children.

What this extraordinary amount of complexity means is that it is almost impossible to have a clear, concise and meaningful discussion about the way we fund our schools so that the general public can make an informed and sensible decision about the way they'd like to see it done.

And the reason I believe this level of complexity really has become fraudulent is it allows politicians, public servants, lobbyists, ideologues and school communities of all biases and complexions to justify just about anything, knowing

that any rebuttal will — of necessity — have to be complex, nuanced and so longwinded and technical that the average viewer/reader/listener will tune out.

Yet, it is in the name of transparency that the Federal Government today launched a new website called "My School".... Schools will be compared with supposedly similar schools and those who do the worst will be marked out with a red flag.

What we will not see is any reference to the often-vast differences in resources various school communities have at their disposal to educate their students, nor any reference to the educational, social and behavioural challenges (or lack thereof) that their students bring through the school gate.

Read more at <http://newmatilda.com/2010/01/28/gillards-new-website-misses-point>

[< top >](#)

---



[< top >](#)

---

### **School results transparent - but My School website is not**

*Thomas Hunter, the Age, January 29, 2010*

Information on the federal government's new school performance website is "crude" and "limited" and will lead parents to faulty conclusions about academic performance, say the principals of three leading Victorian schools.

Launched yesterday, the My School website ranks 10,000 Australian schools against others considered to be "similar", but principals have questioned the criteria for the comparisons and criticised the narrow, statistical nature of the information available to the public.

"What we're looking at here is crude, aggregated data," said Roy Kelley, principal of elite private school Melbourne Grammar. "People need to understand that. You can extrapolate a lot of information from that which leads you to many wrong conclusions. I would have to seriously question the education minister's statement that the data on the website is profound. It's not that."

As an example, Mr Kelley said comparisons between his school and Sydney Grammar were misleading. He said entry criteria for the two schools were different, leading to different competencies in the two student populations. However, that information was not available to parents using the website.

Read more at <http://www.theage.com.au/national/education/school-results-transparent-but-my-school-website-is-not-20100129-n2w4.html>

[< top >](#)

---

### **My School website a disaster, Hills principals say**

*Vanessa Bradbury, Hills Shire Times, 01 Feb 2010*

THE principal of the top ranked school on the My School website, James Ruse Agricultural High School, described the site as "an absolute disaster".

The My School website was described as an introduction to a new level of transparency and accountability to the Australian school system through the results of last year's national literacy and numeracy tests in years 3, 5, 7 and 9.

But James Ruse Agricultural High School principal Larissa Treskin said it was a league table for schools based on one test, which was "just terrible".

"I really don't know what the purpose of the website is," Mrs. Treskin said.

"The only idea I have is to possibly help parents choose schools. However, most parents don't have a choice and the website does not give an accurate picture of what schools do offer.

Read more at <http://hills-shire-times.whereilive.com.au/news/story/my-school-website-a-disaster-hills-principals-say/>

[< top >](#)

---

## **The great divide in school staff numbers**

*Jane Caro & Chris Bonnor, the Age, February 1, 2010*

Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard has encouraged parents to use the My School website to hold schools and teachers to account.

We, too, joined the rush last week to look at what all the fuss was about. After digging around the website for just a few hours, we would humbly like to suggest that accountability could go a little further up the food chain.

Here's what a few hours work uncovered. According to enrolment and staffing stats for a selection of more than 20 large (mostly 1000-plus enrolments) metropolitan schools taken from the My School website, to get a teacher at a large, metropolitan non-government school you need to have about 10.1 students. To get a teacher in a large, metropolitan government school you need 14.8 students.

In terms of non-teaching staff in schools - those employees who relieve teachers of administrative and other support tasks - you need 21 students to get a support staff member in a large, metropolitan non-government school and a staggering 84.4 students in a similar-sized government school.

But, like all comparisons between schools, these stats - while revealing - must be taken in context. The schools compared are similar in total enrolment and geographical location, but many of the non-government schools are K-12 schools that cater for boarders.

To check for this, Hurlstone Agricultural High School, a government boarding school, was included in the selection, even though it is a little smaller in enrolment size. It has 14.1 students for each of its teachers and 60.3 for each of its support staff. A smaller non-government school that also caters for boarders, Tara Anglican School, has 10.6 students per teacher and 16.3 students for each non-teaching staff member. And, as a further check, Australian Bureau of Statistics data on student/teacher ratios back up these statistics.

So, if, as Gillard advises, there are any lazy teachers needing a kick up the proverbial, don't look for them in a government school. Clearly if the website is correct and government schools are, on average, outperforming many of their fee-charging equivalents, then government school teachers must be working very hard indeed, against the odds. They not only teach more students, they are given vastly less support to do so.

The urgent question is: how long can they maintain this performance in the face of such skewed staffing handicaps?

Read more at <http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/politics/the-great-divide-in-school-staff-numbers-20100131-n6fu.html>

[< top >](#)

---

## **Parents to mark teachers in My School expansion**

*ABC News, 1 February 2010*

The Federal Government has promised to expand its controversial My School website, saying parents have been asking for more information.

The Government says it will invite parents to fill out a survey about issues like bullying at their child's school and will publish the results online.

But teachers and parents groups are already raising concerns about the way that information is to be presented.

Read more at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/02/01/2807076.htm?section=justin>

[< top >](#)

---

## **My School: narrowing the great divide**

*John Birmingham, National Times, 2 February 2010*

The law of unintended consequences is a wonderful thing, as we've seen again the last week, with the launch of the federal government's My School website.

In the weeks leading up to the launch you could've been forgiven for thinking it was all some horrific New Right plot to expose the failings of hundreds of underperforming state schools, staffed by lazy communists, timeserving hacks and angry 1960s throwbacks Who Hate Everything About Australia.

Instead the hard questions are suddenly hovering like black thunderheads over the ivy-covered sandstone battlements of those super-privileged fee factories to which the upper classes (yeah, we got 'em) send their offspring as a birthright, and to which the struggling arriviste demographic struggle to send theirs in the hope that ... well, I'm not sure really. Perhaps they hope something might rub off.

How many of them would be wondering about the value for money they're getting now that they can directly compare results across a range of government and private schools?

Read more at <http://www.nationaltimes.com.au/opinion/blogs/blunt-instrument/my-school-narrowing-the-great-divide/20100201-n8jv.html>

[< top >](#)

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## **CHURCH, STATE & SECULAR EDUCATION**

### **Politics and religion: crossed paths**

*David Marr, Sydney Morning Herald, December 26, 2009*

... More than ever, the role of faith in the politics of Australia is a puzzle that gets to the heart of values in this apparently live-and-let-live country. Separation is not the live political issue in this country that it is in the US. The Supreme Court there has interpreted words nearly identical in both our constitutions to prevent public money being paid to religious institutions. In that far more religious society (92 per cent of Americans believe in God v 68 per cent of Australians) battles over church and state provoke continuous political flashpoints.

Not here. Our High Court long ago ticked off on public money pouring into church schools, something almost unthinkable in the US. These billions are safer than ever since Mark Latham's reform proposals were shot down in flames at the 2004 election. Last year the High Court declined to test if our constitution allowed Canberra to subsidise World Youth Day. Again: unthinkable in the US.

... But the decision to fund chaplains in state schools may be a step too far. Though it has caused some public unease, Rudd delighted the national conference of the Australian Christian Lobby in November by announcing this Howard government initiative would be extended for another year at a total cost of \$208 million. And its life in some form was promised thereafter.

Max Wallace, crusading atheist and author of *The Purple Economy: Supernatural Charities, Tax and the State*, is the driving force behind a plan by the Humanist Society of Queensland to challenge the funding in the High Court. "The court agreed to schools funding because it was money for education, not religion," says Wallace. "But this is money for religion. We have them on record. They have compromised themselves completely."

Read more at <http://www.smh.com.au/national/politics-and-religion-crossed-paths-20091225-lezy.html>

[< top >](#)

---

## **Exclusive Brethren schools get \$70m in funding**

*Rick Wallace, the Australian, 12 January 2010*

THE Rudd government is handing more than \$70 million to schools run by the Exclusive Brethren, a religious sect Kevin Rudd described as an "extremist cult" that breaks up families.

The sect's schools have secured more than \$8.4m under the government's school building stimulus package and they will share in \$62m in recurrent taxpayer funding.

Documents show a Brethren-run school at Swan Hill in northern Victoria was granted \$1.2m for a library and \$800,000 for a hall when its most recent annual report shows it had just 16 pupils and already had a library.

Grants data released by the commonwealth shows that Brethren schools in every state received funding under the \$12.4 billion schools stimulus package. Despite the Brethren's past disdain for computers, figures show its schools have received more than 300 under the commonwealth computers-in-school initiative.

Brethren schools have also secured grants under the Schools Pride program. All up, the 2400 children in Brethren schools will each receive the equivalent of \$26,127 in recurrent funding and \$11,200 in stimulus funding.

Read more at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/politics/brethren-schools-get-70m-in-funding/story-e6frgczf-1225818215683>

[< top >](#)

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## **Exclusive Brethren enjoying \$1m taxpayer windfall**

*Rick Wallace, The Australian, 13 January 2010*

THE Exclusive Brethren is getting more than \$1 million a year in "overpayments" for its NSW schools under the Rudd government's independent schools funding system.

Despite being assessed as wealthy, the Brethren's mushrooming network of schools is being funded at a higher rate than independent schools in battling regional communities such as Bourke and Longreach. The secretive but financially savvy sect has taken advantage of a "no-disadvantage" clause put in the funding system by the Howard government, of which the Brethren was a strong supporter.

Federal education authorities warned the funding loophole was giving the Brethren a windfall, according to a 2006 report seen by The Australian, but nothing was done about it.

Read more at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/exclusive-brethren-enjoying-1m-taxpayer-windfall/story-e6frq6nf-1225818598020>

[< top >](#)

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## **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

### **Public comments sought on draft Indigenous Education Action Plan (IEAP) – by 28 February 2010**

*Hon Julia Gillard MP, media release, 16 December 2009*

The draft IEAP presents an evidenced based approach to "Closing the Gap" between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians.

The Action Plan has been informed by a review of the past four years of activity in Indigenous education under Australian Directions in Indigenous Education.

The Action Plan aims to bring together the activities at the national, state and local levels across six areas which evidence shows will have the most impact on "Closing the Gap":

- readiness for school;
- community engagement and connections;
- attendance;
- literacy and numeracy;
- leadership, quality teaching and workforce development; and
- pathways to real post-school options.

Under the Indigenous Education Action Plan, States and Territories will be required to develop school level strategies to address underperformance identified by the new transparency measures.

In addition, States and Territories will be asked to direct National Partnership resources for universal preschool to helping the young children who will go to those schools to be ready to learn.

Read more at [http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Releases/Pages/Article\\_091216\\_114019.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Releases/Pages/Article_091216_114019.aspx)

Obtain draft IEAP and details on how to submit comments at <http://www.mceecdya.edu.au>

[< top >](#)

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## **Six new centres for Indigenous children in NSW**

*Hon Kate Ellis & Hon Linda Burney, media release, 31 December 2009*

Minister for Early Childhood Education, Child Care and Youth, Kate Ellis and NSW Minister for Community Services, Linda Burney, today announced six additional Children and Family Centres for NSW to improve the quality of life for Indigenous children and their families.

Based on a very successful model operating in New Zealand and the USA, these centres will be located in communities where intergenerational disadvantage is entrenched.

They will be built at Lake Macquarie, Shoalhaven, Brewarrina, Gunnedah and Walgett, and a second centre will be constructed in the Blacktown area, in addition to the Campbelltown, Blacktown and Ballina centres announced earlier this year.

Further information is at <http://www.deewr.gov.au/earlychildhood>

Read more at [http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Ellis/Media/Releases/Pages/Article\\_100104\\_093551.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Ellis/Media/Releases/Pages/Article_100104_093551.aspx)

[< top >](#)

---



[< top >](#)

---

## **SCHOOL LIBRARIES**

### **My School: Open letter to Julia Gillard**

*The Hub, Campaign for Quality School Libraries in Australia, 28 January 2010*

Throughout the media frenzy that has accompanied the launch of the My school website, your message has been, "We need to identify underperforming schools and seek ways to improve their performance".

In recent years, a particular primary school won the National Literacy and Numeracy Week Award for \$10 000 in recognition of the quality of its literacy program. Now, just a few years later, according to the My school website, it is scarcely meeting the national average for literacy benchmarks, and in several categories, it is statistically below the average.

What might explain the change? Could it be that then the school had a fully qualified teacher librarian, a full-time ESL teacher and a Reading Recovery teacher? Now, under a different leadership, it does not.

Research study after research study, here and overseas, has shown that one of the most important indicators of academic performance is the quality of a school's library, particularly if it has a qualified teacher librarian and an integrated information literacy program.

Read more at <http://hubinfo.wordpress.com/2010/01/28/my-school-open-letter-to-julia-gillard/>

[< top >](#)

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## **DON'T FORGET TO CLAIM YOUR EDUCATION TAX REFUND**

### **\$527 million in unclaimed Education Tax Refund**

*Hon Julia Gillard MP, Hon Wayne Swan MP, 22 January 2010*

As parents send their children back to school this year, the Government encourages them to keep their receipts so they can take advantage of the Education Tax Refund [in their Tax Return for year ended 30 June 2010].

Figures from the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) have revealed that only half of all eligible Australian families have lodged a claim [in their Tax Return for year ended 30 June 2009], leaving more than \$500 million in unclaimed benefits.

According to the ATO, as at 13 November 2009, 794,720 claims for the Education Tax Refund have been processed for 1,375,167 children of an estimated 2,669,000 eligible children. Only \$488 million of the projected \$1.02 billion cost has been claimed in tax refunds.

Taxpayers still have until March-April 2010 to claim out of pocket education expenses for the 2009 school year, if they lodge their individual tax returns for 2008-2009 through a tax agent.

For more information about the Education Tax Refund visit <http://www.educationtaxrefund.gov.au>

Read more at [http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Releases/Pages/Article\\_100122\\_075320.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Releases/Pages/Article_100122_075320.aspx)

[< top >](#)

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## **EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

### **Study shows more still needed in overhaul of early childhood education**

*Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), 22 December 2009*

The radical overhaul of Australia's preschool sector will require better legislating for the sector and increasing the number of early childhood education teachers, according to a policy paper released by ACER.

The policy brief, Preschool Education in Australia, summarises the current structure of preschool in Australian in contemplation of major policy shifts announced by the Commonwealth. It follows a Council of Australian Governments (COAG) commitment last year to a "radical makeover" of the preschool sector.

The policy brief highlights a need for more nationally consistent and comparable preschool data. Information about the preschool sector is currently 15 to 20 years behind what is available about schools.

Inconsistencies are also noted in how early childhood education is regulated across Australian states. Stark differences can be found in the qualifications and salary of staff employed in 'stand alone' preschools and long day care settings.

The policy paper, *Preschool Education in Australia*, was prepared by ACER Principal Research Fellow Dr Andrew Dowling and Research Fellow Kate O'Malley. It is available from the ACER research repository.

Read more at [http://www.acer.edu.au/enews/1001\\_DowlingOMalley.html](http://www.acer.edu.au/enews/1001_DowlingOMalley.html)

[< top >](#)

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## Launch of new online tool to help families budget for child care

*Hon Kate Ellis MP, Minister for Early Childhood, 7 January 2010*

Minister for Early Childhood Education and Child Care Kate Ellis today launched a new online tool to help families budget for child care.

The Child Care Estimator shows families what financial support the Government can give them through the Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate.

The Child Care Estimator is part of recent upgrades to [mychild.gov.au](http://mychild.gov.au) and builds on the suite of estimators currently available on the Centrelink website. The new Child Care Estimator is also available at <http://www.centrelink.gov.au>.

For more information on Australian Government early childhood education and child care initiatives visit <http://www.mychild.gov.au>.

Read more at [http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Ellis/Media/Releases/Pages/Article\\_100108\\_143335.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Ellis/Media/Releases/Pages/Article_100108_143335.aspx)

[< top >](#)

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[< top >](#)

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## TEACH FOR AUSTRALIA

*Speech, Hon Julia Gillard MP, Teach for Australia Reception, Melbourne, 21 January 2010*

Tonight I am here to offer my sincere congratulations to our 45 pioneering Teach for Australia associates. You are playing a unique role in creating a new and better future for Australian schools.

Each of us in this room is driven by the same passion, the same desire to ensure every Australian child whatever their background, gets a world-class education.

Each of us in this room believes that demography is not destiny, that children from the poorest and most difficult backgrounds can learn and achieve and if they fail to do so, we the adults have let them down.

And each of us in this room believes that teacher quality is the single greatest in-school influence on student engagement and achievement.

Professor John Hattie puts it this way: 'It is what teachers know, do, and care about which is very powerful in this learning equation.'

The power of Teach for Australia is its ability to recruit high-achieving graduates who may otherwise not have considered a career in teaching.

I see in this room inspiring people with a mission to make a difference to those students who need it most. And shortly you will be in schools, joining established teachers motivated by the same mission.

I expect you to be welcomed by those teachers because I believe the best people aren't afraid to be surrounded by the best people.

Read more at [http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Speeches/Pages/Article\\_100122\\_074612.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Speeches/Pages/Article_100122_074612.aspx)

[< top >](#)

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## **AROUND THE STATES & TERRITORIES**

### **ACT: New home for French Aust preschool?**

*ABC News, 27 January 2010*

The ACT Government has found a potential new site for the French Australian preschool.

The preschool's existing lease at Red Hill Primary School expires at the end of this year.

The Government has identified a site behind the Griffith shops.

Chief Minister Jon Stanhope says the Government will fund the construction on the condition the preschool pays to fit-out the building.

Read more at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/01/27/2802641.htm>

[< top >](#)

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### **NSW: Inquiry into provision of education to students with a disability or special needs**

*Submissions closing 19 February*

On 3 December 2009, Ms Robyn Parker MLC, announced a new Inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs.

"Interacting with the education system can be a frustrating and confusing experience for parents of a child with a disability or special needs, as they attempt to ensure that their child gets adequate support to reach their full potential", said Ms Parker.

"An area of concern for teachers and parents alike is the adequacy of funding for children with a disability or special needs attending NSW schools. The Inquiry was established in recognition of their concerns", Ms Parker noted.

The Committee will investigate best practice approaches in determining the allocation of funding to children with a disability or special needs.

The closing date for submissions is Friday, 19 February 2010.

Prior to lodging your submission we recommend reading How to Make a Submission at [http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/web/common.nsf/key/CommitteesLCSubmissionsHowToGuides/\\$file/Making+a+submission+brochure.pdf](http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/web/common.nsf/key/CommitteesLCSubmissionsHowToGuides/$file/Making+a+submission+brochure.pdf) and for background reading, Standing Committees of the Legislative Council at [http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/web/common.nsf/key/CommitteesLCSubmissionsHowToGuides/\\$file/standing+committees+of+the+lc.pdf](http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/web/common.nsf/key/CommitteesLCSubmissionsHowToGuides/$file/standing+committees+of+the+lc.pdf).

Read more and lodge an online submission at

<http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Prod/parliament/committee.nsf/0/47F51A782AEABBABCA25767A000FABEC>

[< top >](#)

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## **NSW: Non-government schools reduce claims for special HSC help**

*Anna Patty, Sydney Morning Herald, January 12, 2010*

Many of the private schools whose students received among the highest level of special allowances for the Higher School Certificate examinations in 2008 reduced their claims for special provisions by up to 10 percentage points last year.

Among schools that the Herald highlighted was Masada College in St Ives. In the 2008 HSC 29.5 per cent of its students received special provisions; last year the figure was 19 per cent.

The special provisions granted include Braille papers, large print papers, use of a reader and/or writer, and extra time or rest breaks for conditions including physical and emotional conditions, such as anxiety.

The Greens MP John Kaye said it was unlikely that the significant drop in special provisions claims was "just coincidence" after schools were "publicly shamed a year ago".

Read more at <http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/schools-reduce-claims-for-special-hsc-help-20100111-m2s4.html>

[< top >](#)

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## **NSW: Spotlight falls on keeping kids in school**

*ABC News, 28 January 2010*

As thousands of Hunter students start the new school year today, the Education Department says it will be looking to improve the region's low retention rates.

More than 100,000 students are expected to enrol at Hunter and central coast public schools in 2010.

The Hunter has the third lowest retention rates in New South Wales, with only 51 per cent of students going on to year 12.

The department's regional director, Robyn McKerihan, says with the school leaving age being raised to 17 this year, the focus will be on getting more students to stay on.

"Research very clearly shows that productive engagement with education up until the years 18 and 19 makes a significant difference in success in their chosen career," she said.

Read more at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/01/28/2803311.htm>

[< top >](#)

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## **QLD: Qld reviews allowance for remote children**

*ABC News, 29 January 2010*

Queensland's Department of Education and Training says it is reviewing its Living Away from Home Allowances for geographically isolated children and their families.

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association has asked the State Government to re-examine the allowance after it found increases were not keeping pace with school fees.

The department's assistant director-general, Adam Black, says the scheme has four components and some are tied to the Consumer Price Index.

He says an outcome of the review is expected this year.

Read more at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/01/29/2804553.htm>

[< top >](#)

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## **SA: Improvement in Aboriginal school retention**

*Hon Jane Lomax-Smith MP, SA Education Minister, 29 January 2010*

Greater numbers of Aboriginal students are being retained at school in South Australia, according to a new national report released today. Apparent retention rates published in the Productivity Commission's Report on Government Services show:

- The rate for full-time Aboriginal students from Years 8 to 10 increased 8 percentage points from 87.6% in 2007 to 95.6% in 2008.
- The rate for full-time Aboriginal students from Years 10 to 12 increased 8.2 percentage points from 50.6% in 2007 to 58.8% in 2008.

The figures are for full-time students only and do not count the large number of students in South Australia who mix part-time schooling with training and work (9.8%).

Education Minister Jane Lomax-Smith says while more needs to be done, it's pleasing to see an improvement.

Read more at <http://www.ministers.sa.gov.au/images/stories/mediareleasesJAN10/rogs.pdf>

[< top >](#)

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## **TAS: More than \$168 Million for Tasmanian Schools**

*Hon Julia Gillard MP & Premier and Minister for Education and Skills, David Bartlett*

The Minister for Education, Julia Gillard, and the Tasmanian Premier and Minister for Education and Skills, David Bartlett, today announced a \$168 million National Partnership that includes funding for 112 schools across Tasmania to ensure that Tasmania's most disadvantaged students aren't left behind.

The Smarter Schools National Partnerships between the Australian Government and Tasmanian education authorities will help the most disadvantaged students by targeting those from low socio-economic backgrounds, improving teacher quality and improving the literacy and numeracy for all children but most particularly those at risk of falling behind.

Tasmania will receive up to \$93.5 million from the Australian Government which the State Government is matching as required by the Australian Government.

More information is available at: [www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/Programs/SmarterSchools](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/Programs/SmarterSchools).

Read more at [http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Releases/Pages/Article\\_100107\\_084916.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Releases/Pages/Article_100107_084916.aspx)

[< top >](#)

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## **VIC: New \$2.5m Early Learning and Care Centre for Foster**

*Hon Kate Ellis MP & Hon Maxine Morand, 2 February 2010*

Minister for Early Childhood Education and Child Care, Kate Ellis, and the Victorian Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development, Maxine Morand, today announced a new Early Learning and Care Centre in South Gippsland.

The new centre will be built at Foster and will be jointly funded by the Federal Government (\$1.85 million), the Victorian Government (\$500 000) and the South Gippsland Shire (\$200 000).

The Foster centre will cater for up to 58 children and offer long day care, kindergarten, family day care, occasional care, maternal and child health, play groups, parenting programs and allied health services.

It will be built adjacent to the South Gippsland Secondary College and within walking distance of Foster Primary School.

The Foster centre will open by the end of this year and cater for communities including Foster, Yanakie, Fish Creek, Sandy Point, Waratah Bay, Port Franklin, Toora, Welshpool, Port Welshpool and Walkerville.

Read more at [http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Ellis/Media/Releases/Pages/Article\\_100202\\_094522.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Ellis/Media/Releases/Pages/Article_100202_094522.aspx)

[< top >](#)

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## **WA: MP laments training centre closures**

*ABC News, 28 January 2010*

Wagin MP Terry Waldron says he is disappointed with the closure of three education and training facilities in Western Australia's Great Southern.

The Gnowangerup Training Centre is the latest to close due to lack of students.

The Katanning Residential College and Darkan District High School have also been forced to shut.

Mr Waldron says the closures puts pressure on regional families to send their children away for education.

"What always concerns me as a country Member of Parliament is when people have to travel further to access their education," he said.

"I'd like to have education access as close as possible, so that's disappointing that some of the skills learnt there will not be available."

Read more at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/01/28/2803717.htm>

[< top >](#)

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## **WA: Hundreds of teaching graduates miss out on jobs**

*ABC News, 1 February 2010*

The State Education Minister, Liz Constable, says more than 700 teaching graduates have missed out on jobs in public schools this year.

About 1,200 teachers graduated from university last year, but only 500 of those have secured jobs with the Education Department.

A department spokesperson says some of the graduates will have been employed by the private sector.

Dr Constable says almost every teaching position across the state has been filled but she believes many of those who missed out will be employed by the end of the year.

She says teacher numbers are the best they have been in years.

Read more at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/02/01/2806767.htm>

[< top >](#)

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## **WA: New era in Western Australian public education begins.**

*Education Minister Liz Constable, 1 February 2010*

Education Minister Liz Constable today visited Highgate Primary School - one of the State's 34 Independent Public Schools - to welcome students, parents and teachers to day one of a new era in public education in Western Australia.

The establishment of these Independent Public Schools would give greater control to schools while still providing the support and benefits of the public school system and was one of the State Government's key election commitment.

"For the first time, principals, teachers and the wider school community will be empowered with greater responsibility to ensure students have the best possible learning opportunities and outcomes," Dr Constable said.

"The IPS initiative will allow strong leadership to flourish in the public school system, but it will bring other benefits - it means greater responsibility for principals and flexibility in their recruitment of teachers and other school staff."

Read more at <http://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Lists/Statements/DispForm.aspx?ID=133072>

[< top >](#)

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## **LEARNING & TEACHING RESOURCES**

### **Australian Government launches the Water Education Toolkit**

The Water Education Toolkit is the first national water education resource of its type in Australia, bringing together hundreds of online water education materials into one easy and convenient place.

It provides Australian teachers and schools with better access to a multitude of water curriculum and resource material, to enhance students understanding and awareness of this valued natural resource.

The classroom provides a great environment for children and young adults to learn about water issues and incorporate water savvy behaviour into their everyday lives.

Teachers and students will be able to find case-studies, lesson and unit plans, visual aids, in-class activities, Indigenous cultural resources, informational resources, games, experiments - and much more.

Read more at <http://www.environment.gov.au/wet>

[< top >](#)

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## **CELEBRATIONS**

### **International Mother Language Day**

*21 February 2010*

International Mother Language Day, proclaimed by the General Conference of UNESCO in November 1999, has been observed around the world yearly since February 2000 to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism.

International Mother Language Day on 21 February 2010 provides an opportunity to celebrate the values of linguistic diversity and the importance of multilingual education.

Use this day to recognise the importance of language and literacy – and why not as a "curtain raiser" for Harmony Day in March – see below.

You can find some background information about previous IML Days on UNESCO website, and shortly material on the 2010 event will be available: [http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=38724&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=38724&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

[< top >](#)

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## **Clean Up Australia Day**

7 March 2010 [Friday 5 March for Schools]

Everything you need to know is at: <http://www.cleanup.org.au/au/>

[< top >](#)

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## **Harmony Day**

21 March 2010

"Everyone Belongs"

Harmony Day is supported by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) and celebrates the cohesive and inclusive nature of our nation, promoting the benefits of cultural diversity.

The key message of Harmony Day is Everyone Belongs. It's about community participation, inclusiveness, respect and a sense of belonging for everyone.

Since Harmony Day began ten years ago, thousands of schools, community groups and organisations across Australia have hosted Harmony Day events. There is no limit to the range of activities that can be held for Harmony Day and we encourage schools, community groups, local government and businesses to get involved and actively support this day of celebration.

Read more at <http://www.harmony.gov.au/harmony-day/>

[< top >](#)

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## **CONFERENCES**

### **"Reggio Children" – the Reggio Emilia approach to early education**

4-6 March 2010, Eton House Education Centre, Singapore

Of interest to everyone concerned with early childhood education and with a key focus on professional development and learning opportunities for practitioners in the field, this unique international forum will be led by presenters from the Reggio Children International Network.

Early bird registration date now extended to 8 February 2010!

Read more at [http://childcarewa.com/files/admin-images/Reggio\\_Conference\\_Date\\_Claimer.pdf](http://childcarewa.com/files/admin-images/Reggio_Conference_Date_Claimer.pdf)

[< top >](#)

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### **iNet online conference for students: "Students as agents of change"**

8-15 March 2010

The March iNet online conference for students only encourages young people to consider what changes need to take place in their schools so that they are well prepared for the future world in which they will live and work. The topic is 'Students as agents of change. What should teachers and adults involved in your learning be doing to prepare you to learn, live and work in the 21st century world? What can you do?'

Register your students (or yourself) online, at no cost: [http://www.cybertext.net.au/inet2010\\_student.php](http://www.cybertext.net.au/inet2010_student.php)

Students are asked to set out their expectations of the adults around them in school in helping them prepare for their future. Students can also discuss whether getting involved in making changes in school is important for them. Students are asked to share experiences of being involved in changing something that matters to them in their school, community or internationally. Students are invited to submit resources around the conference theme which could include films, poems or essays. Some questions to get you started:

? How can you work with teachers and other adults in school to help them prepare you to live, learn and work in a world that is changing so rapidly we can only imagine what it will be like in 5 , 10 or 15 years time?

? What key things need to happen to enable you to contribute to discussion and take action on issues that matter to you in school, your local community and internationally?

Read more at [http://www.cybertext.net.au/inet2009\\_student.php](http://www.cybertext.net.au/inet2009_student.php)

[< top >](#)

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## **"Growing up fast and furious: Impacts of violent and sexualised media"**

*19 March 2010*

Teachers Federation Conference Centre, 37 Reservoir Street, Surry Hills, NSW 2010

In this important and timely conference leading researchers will review the evidence related to children's experiences with a range of violent and sexualised media, examine their marketing, and discuss appropriate regulatory responses, including how well our classification systems reflect current research.

Email <mailto:admin@youngmedia.org.au> to receive further information about this event

[< top >](#)

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## **11th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference**

*"Celebrating 30 years of advancing understanding of Australian Families"*

*7-9 July 2010, Melbourne Convention Centre, Melbourne Victoria*

Details of the Conference, program and registration arrangements will be progressively published at <http://www.aifs.gov.au/conference>

[< top >](#)

[< top >](#)

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[< top >](#)

[< top >](#)

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## **REMINDERS**

19-21 February - SEAA / SASOSE Conference - Hindmarsh, SA - <http://www.seaa.org.au/2010conference/>

22-23 February - Green Universities - Melbourne, VIC - <http://www.informa.com.au/conferences/education/green-universities>

7 March 2010 - Clean Up Australia Day - <http://www.cleanup.org.au/au/>

24-26 March - Going Global 4 - London, UK - <http://www.britishcouncil.org/goingglobal.htm>

6-9 April - Digital Diversity Conference - Melbourne, VIC - <http://acec2010.info/>

7-9 April - Career Development Association of Australia Annual Conference - Adelaide, SA - <http://www.onqconferences.com.au/pages/CDAA2010.php>

8-11 April - Global Language Convention - Melbourne, VIC - <http://www.wesleycollege.net/convention.cfm>

9-10 April - National Coalition against Bullying Conference - Melbourne, VIC - <http://www.amf.org.au/NCABConference/>

19-20 April - Kidsafe Playground Conference - Perth, WA - <http://www.kidsafewa.com.au/>

19-21 April - Language Education: An Essential for a Global Economy - Singapore - <http://www.relc.org.sg/seminar.html>

29-30 April - 8th Annual Higher Education Summit - Adelaide, SA - <http://www.highereducationsummit.com.au/>

25-28 May - Inclusive Learning Technologies Conference 2010 - Gold Coast, QLD - <http://www.spectronicsinoz.com/conference/>

4-5 June - Early childhood education conference 2010 Melbourne, VIC - <http://www.togetherwegrow.com.au/2010registration.html>

4-7 July - National Conference for Teachers of English & Literacy - Perth, WA - <http://www.englishliteracyconference.com.au/index.php?id=46&year=10>

6-9 July - 17th International Conference on Learning - Hong Kong - <http://thelearner.com/Conference-2010/>

21-24 July - Second Paris International Conference on Education, Economy & Society - Paris, France - <http://education-conferences.org/default.aspx>

[< top >](#)

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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)
- Family School Partners : <http://www.familyschool.org.au/news/> (monthly)
- Public Education Voice : <http://www.acsso.org.au/pev.htm> (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). Details of products, services, events, resources or points of view are provided for information only; publication does not imply endorsement or recommendation. No warranty is provided nor liability accepted by ACSSO, its members or employees.

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