



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

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COMPARING SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

The great as yet unrealised potential of “My School”

Peter Garrigan, President, Australian Council of State School Organisations, 8 April 2010

Since the Rudd Labor Government was elected in late 2007 we have seen a welcome turnaround in education – and an accelerating focus on transformative change aimed at moving all the levers of education forward together.

More immediately, this year has seen the advent of a uniquely ambitious (but still, of course, very much a “work-in-construction”) national initiative in the January launch of the first stage of the “My School” website.

Because of the necessarily incomplete state of its development at the point of its public launch, the lively and often acrimonious debate that has raged through the media since then has been focused obsessively on the obvious shortcomings of what has been published so far, its limitations and its capacities for misinterpretation.

Far less reflection, passion and ink has been expended on the more expansive strategic possibilities or potential of this initiative as an integrated information resource which could and should provide a multi-faceted understanding of the dynamics of student learning – their personal and intellectual development – in each and every school community across the country.

The ultimate purpose of the site is to contribute to achieving Federal Education Minister Julia Gillard’s recently affirmed commitment to Australia’s families: “We want to make sure that every student – in every community – can achieve their potential”.

That is an aspiration which every parent, every family and every community will warmly applaud.

Read entire article: <http://www.acsso.org.au/garrigan100408.pdf>

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The essential importance of the national tests

Hon Julia Gillard MP, Meeting of Education Ministers - Press Conference, 15 April 2010

In the context of making sure kids get that great education in every school, today we have been talking about the delivery of this year's national tests.

And my ministerial colleagues and I are absolutely agreed. National testing is important for a child's education. It's important for their parents so their parents can have the national report card that tells them how their child is going at school. It's important for schools to have the information from the national test and for teachers so that they know how students are going and what needs to be done to make sure that every child reaches the high standards that we want to see them achieve.

And national testing is also vital for the My School website. It is very important that parents and community members around the country can look at the information on My School and benefit from that transparency. My School has put more information into the hands of Australian parents than they have ever had before about Australian schools.

As ministers we are resolved together to call on the Australian Education Union to stop its proposed boycott of the national tests. It is clear to us as ministers that this proposed boycott by the Australian Education Union would be bad for students in state schools.

Read entire transcript:

http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Transcripts/Pages/Article_100416_082052.aspx

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In support of the teachers boycotting NAPLAN

Parents Victoria blog, April 14, 2010

When push came to shove, as demanded by a media that insists on things in black and white for the titillation of its readership, we supported the AEU boycotting of NAPLAN. We have received some negative email on that, were even described in one as "utterly contemptible" and asked "just who do you represent".

The AEU is fighting for our kids, our schools and our education system, fighting against the ranking of schools that leads not so much to the assisting of underperforming schools so much as the naming and shaming of schools, schools with tough challenges doing a great job in bad circumstances. Stigmatising students who belong to those schools.

It is the responsibility of a peak body representing public school parents that also shuns the publication of league tables and ranking of schools to show support for the AEU's actions on this matter.

Read more at <http://www.parentsvictoria.asn.au/index.html>

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My School: The Sum of All Fears?

Trevor Cobbold, Save our Schools, 15 April 2010

The imminent teacher boycott of national literacy and numeracy tests gives cause to assess how well the My School website informs comparisons of school quality.

Apart from creating incentives to narrow school curriculum and manipulate school test results, a major flaw is that its so-called "like school" comparisons are systematically biased in favour of private schools.

My School purports to compare the test results of schools with similar socio-economic status (SES) student populations.

However, it makes private school results look better than their "like" government schools by comparing higher SES private schools with lower SES government schools.

This bias exists because the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) used to measure school SES is based on the average SES of geographical areas in which students live rather than their family SES. Studies by the Australian Bureau of Statistics show that some high income families live in low SES areas and vice versa.

However, there is a greater leakage of higher income families into private schools. For example, 55% of higher income families in Australia choose private secondary schools compared to 26% of low income families.

Read entire article: <http://www.saveourschools.com.au/>

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NAPLAN tests help champion equality in the classroom

Ben Jensen, National Times, 15 April 2010

THE Australian Education Union needs to rethink its opposition to NAPLAN, the national testing program being introduced by the federal government. The union has confused the value of the tests with the problems that need to be addressed on the 'My School' web site.

NAPLAN and 'My School' are different. Instead of outright opposition, the AEU should work to address the problems with the 'My School' website, and allow students to sit these important assessments. In doing so, they will ensure the best outcome for students. By throwing assessment and the 'My School' website into the same basket and opposing them both, the union is in danger of being portrayed as anti-reform.

More importantly, this opposition will hurt students. Opposition to student assessment and transparency runs against best practice in education policy and harms Australian students, particularly those most in need. Parents are also hungry for this information.

Read entire article: <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/politics/naplan-tests-help-champion-equality-in-the-classroom-20100414-sclo.html>

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Why? – An open letter to Professor Barry McGaw, Chair, ACARA

Jason and Mayrah Dreise, Gamilaraay / Yeeralaraay nations, The Gap, Queensland

Firstly, as parents of an Aboriginal girl in year 9 at The Gap SHS (and a boy in year 12) we would like to express our support of the Queensland Teachers Union in response to them raising the debate and push for the ceasing of the mandatory national testing in our school.

We support this notion as parents who feel that we receive from our school appropriate feedback, communication and understanding of what our children are doing, where they are struggling and where they need assistance.

This feedback shows us a full picture of our children. It is not limited to a 'small' point in time based on numeracy and literacy skills in a particular area.

We do not see the need, like many parents that we have talked to in publishing our schools results in such a way that might undermine this local good work that teachers do.

What parents are the ones the Deputy Prime Minister is talking about when she says this is what parents want? When were we ever asked? We want to know who represented Indigenous parents in this. Are they even parents of children undergoing the testing?

Secondly, in working in considering our own circumstances and from our work in many Aboriginal communities and schools, we have some questions.

Read entire letter at: <http://www.acsso.org.au/dreise1004.pdf>

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Public Policy Forum

My School? Whose School?

What's on the table for public education in Australia?

7-8 May 2010
Melbourne Campus
Burwood VIC

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THE EDUCATION REVOLUTION

Communiqué of third MCEECDYA meeting

15 April 2010

Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers were joined during the meeting by the Chairs of the three national bodies that have been established as part of a major restructure of the national education architecture to ensure the delivery of the substantial reforms underway in school education.

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) and Education Services Australia Ltd (ESA) are working under the direction of the Council to deliver national priority outcomes in curriculum development, assessment and transparent reporting, quality teaching and learning and educational leadership and program and service support. Ministers emphasised the importance of the three organisations working closely together to deliver the reform agenda.

The Chair of ACARA, Professor Barry McGaw, provided Ministers with an update on progress for the next stages of the My School website. Ministers noted the overwhelming response to the website following the launch and that work is progressing on publishing new information on school income and resources, and parental satisfaction with their school, and improvements being made in literacy/numeracy over time....

Ministers discussed the implementation and role of the new Building the Education Revolution Implementation Taskforce. All Ministers noted the importance of the new taskforce and agreed to work constructively with it to investigate issues and ensure value for money in all projects.

Ministers endorsed a revised draft Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan for 2010–2014. In July 2009, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) asked that MCEECDYA prepare the plan for its endorsement early in 2010. The Plan will be publicly released following final endorsement by COAG...

Ministers noted the substantial progress being made in the implementation of the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care that was agreed by COAG in December 2009, Ministers agreed to the governance arrangements for and name of the new statutory authority -the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) - as the new national body to provide oversight of the National Quality Standard...

Professor Barry McGaw also provided Ministers with advice from the ACARA Board in relation to the scope of the Australian *K–10 curriculum, its development and implementation timelines and associated achievement standards and reporting of students' achievement. The Board also provided advice in relation to the development of senior secondary curriculum development....

Read entire document:

http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Releases/Pages/Article_100415_174514.aspx

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Under examination: the education revolution

Kevin Donnelly, ABC The Drum Unleashed, 19 April 2010

Is there a federal election in the air? Judged by the Minister for Education, Julia Gillard's recent actions in announcing a review of school funding and setting up a task force to evaluate the Building the Education Revolution program, it's obvious that the ALP Government is clearing the decks for an early election.

It's also the case, similar to the lead up to the 2007 federal election, the Rudd Government is seeking to nullify education as an electoral disadvantage by presenting itself as conservative educationally - in the best tradition of the previous Howard government.

Past Howard education ministers introduced national testing, a back to basics approach to the curriculum and guaranteed funding to non-government schools. Rudd and Gillard occupy the same ground, evidenced by the current Prime Minister's statement that parents should vote with their feet if unhappy with the local school and his refusal to bow to the Australian Education Union.

Sounding even more right-of-centre than previous conservative ministers, Gillard argues that Australia was not invaded, that schools are accountable for results, English must involve correct spelling, punctuation, grammar and phonics and that Catholic and independent schools must be properly funded.

The rhetoric sounds appealing but, can the ALP Government be trusted and how successful has its education revolution been?

In terms of success, looking at the Government's record over the last two years, it's obvious that the education revolution is more spin than substance and that the Government has an appalling record in relation to implementation.

Read more at: <http://www.abc.net.au/unleashed/stories/s2876271.htm>

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RELIGION & ETHICS

You can't teach ethics without referring to Christianity

Jim Wallace, Sydney Morning Herald, April 9, 2010

With our nation having just played host to a big atheist convention trumpeting the intellectual superiority of unbelief, many may well be wondering why we still bother gazetting an extended long weekend to celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

For future generations this perplexity will grow if the NSW Government, dancing to the tune of intolerant secularists, has its way in our schools.

For more than 100 years, Scripture classes in schools have provided an avenue for children to learn about the Bible, the person of Jesus and the ethic that has underpinned societies such as Australia's.

This is entirely appropriate. No serious historian – regardless of whether or not they are religious — doubts the formative influence of Christianity, its ethics and values on the legal, cultural and political development of Western civilisation. Indeed it is the Judeo-Christian ethic that sets the way we live apart from the way other cultures live.

Now there will always be some parents who conscientiously object to their children being taught the Bible. This is their right.

And it was supposedly with these students in mind that former premier Nathan Rees announced late last year the introduction of "ethics" classes in primary schools.

Reeling from a number of high profile ministerial ethics scandals itself, it was reported that the ethics classes to be rolled out for kids were a chance for the government to show its moral compass still pointed north.

At the time it was made clear that these new, supposedly religion-free, ethics classes would not compete with traditional Scripture classes.

However, with the pilot trial due to start next term in 10 public primary schools, it has emerged they are being pitched with the obvious aim to draw students away from Scripture classes, despite the Government's assurances they would not.

Read entire article: <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/politics/you-cant-teach-ethics-without-referring-to-christianity-20100409-rxai.html>

Jim Wallace is the managing director of the Australian Christian Lobby.

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Find these kids an alternative, for god's sake

Leslie Cannold, National Times, April 11, 2010

A mother writes to me, torn with guilt about a decision she made about the education of her daughter, who began kindergarten this year. The family doesn't believe in "structured religion", preferring instead to raise their children as "tolerant of all religions but followers of none".

For this reason, she refused her child's participation in scripture instruction offered by the school. But the five-year-old was the only child in her year to be excused from the lesson and so was forced to sit alone outside the classroom while it proceeded. The little girl was so distressed that her mother - let's call her Karen - reluctantly gave permission for her to attend Anglican scripture. But the decision doesn't feel right and she's still not sure that it is. What should she do?

I'm not sure what part of this dilemma astounded or offended me more. That, in 2010, supposedly secular schools are teaching religion - or that parents who see such tutelage as inappropriate or inconsistent with their personal values or minority religion beliefs must choose between raising their kids as they see fit or being party to their symbolic casting out.

At first I thought this story, however sad, must be one out of the box: a one-off predicament that bore no relationship to the parenting experience of the divinely challenged raising kids in NSW. But I was wrong. The basic elements of Karen's story, and the ethical dilemma to which they give rise, is one facing about one in four families with school-age kids (the Education Department does not keep statistics on the exact number of kids who refuse religious education).

Read entire article: <http://www.nationaltimes.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/find-these-kids-an-alternative-for-gods-sake-20100411-s0c7.html>

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Bishop enters battle against secular ethics classes

Jacqueline Maley, Canberra Times 14 April 2010

THE Bishop of North Sydney has urged Anglican priests to collect information from principals of public schools to stop the spread of the secular ethics classes the Sydney Anglicans believe may threaten religious education.

In an email seen by the Herald, Bishop Glenn Davies urged ministers to contact the principals of public schools in their parishes to ascertain the exact numbers of children enrolled in religious education. This was even though most schools were not involved in the trial, which is being piloted at just 10 schools under the guidance of the St James Ethics Centre.

"The St James Ethics Centre claims that there are large numbers of students not enrolled in SRE [special religious education]," the email from Bishop Davies read. "We need to gather some accurate information to challenge this claim." Bishop Davies added that "there is an urgency to this request" and asked for results by the following week.

The Herald has learnt that even rectors whose local schools are not involved in the trial have turned up at P&C meetings to protest about the secular ethics classes.

Groups of religious education teachers including Anglicans have also lobbied the principals of schools where the trial will occur, to make sure the trial did not affect their class numbers.

The NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations and the St James Ethics Centre yesterday renewed their invitation to the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, Peter Jensen, to meet to discuss the trial.

The president of the NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations, Di Giblin, said there was "enormous interest" in the secular ethics trial among parents, "with more schools hoping to take part in the pilot than we can accommodate".

The NSW Teachers Federation said it was "highly inappropriate" that religious organisations should seek to interfere in a course designed to provide an alternative to religious education.

Read entire article: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/bishop-enters-battle-against-secular-ethics-classes-20100413-s7pp.html>

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Trouble with school ethics classes

Neil Ormerod, Eureka Street, 16 April 2010

It is difficult to see how anyone could object to the teaching of ethics in schools. Everyone could benefit from a better understanding of ethics after all. However, the recent emerging brawl in NSW over the teaching of ethics in public schools is making for some interesting bedfellows as the Atheist Foundation and the Sydney Anglican diocese trade blows over the proposal by the St James Ethics Centre.

The Centre is proposing that students who do not sign up for scripture classes in the public school system should be offered ethics courses as an attractive alternative to 'twiddling their fingers' while scripture classes take place.

One of the ironies of the fight is that the Centre itself was originally established by the Anglican parish of St James, King Street, Sydney. This is one of the few tolerated 'non-evangelical' Anglican parishes in a diocese otherwise dominated by the evangelical approach of the Jensens.

Still the Centre is now less formally related to the parish and has moved towards a greater independence from any particular religion. Nonetheless their website home page prominently features a quote from St Augustine. And they can now count the Atheist Foundation as an ally in their efforts to promote ethics education in schools. The Foundation argues that one can be ethical without religious faith and that secular values 'can be appreciated regardless of one's religion or lack thereof'.

The concerns of the Anglican diocese seem to move in two directions. The first is that the ethics programs might attract students away from existing scripture classes and diminish their effectiveness. This looks more like a matter of turf wars, of seeking to maintain numbers and so justify their continuance.

However the more substantive issue is the Anglicans' concerns over a 'secular' ethics displacing traditional Judeo-Christian ethics based on the Bible.

Read entire article: <http://www.eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?aeid=20694>

Neil Ormerod is Professor of Theology at the Australian Catholic University

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Firth must honour promise on ethics class trial

John Kaye MP, Media release: 17 April 2010

The Greens are calling on NSW Education Minister Verity Firth to resist pressure from the organised religions to break her undertaking to trial ethics classes for children who do not enrol in the scripture classes in public schools.

"The minister and many other politicians are being subjected to an orchestrated backlash.

"For more than a 130 year a select group of religions has held a monopoly over one hour a week in public schools. Children whose parents did not subscribe to one of the creeds on offer were forced to squander an hour a week on non-educational activities.

"The ferocious response from the Sydney Anglican Church and other groups is out of all proportion to the impact the trial will have. What happens to the students who opt out of the organised religion classes should be none of their business.

"NSW should have moved beyond the days when the Anglican Church or any other faith can dictate what the rest of society can and cannot do.

Read entire release: <http://www.johnkaye.org.au>

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What lies beneath - a question of ethics

Ainslie MacGibbon, Sydney Morning Herald, 19 April 2010

You have already accepted an invitation to a birthday party from a classmate when your best friend hands you an invitation to their party, to be held on the same day. What do you do?

This will be the introductory scenario faced by year 5 and 6 students electing to do a 10-week ethics class trial in 10 state primary schools, scheduled to start this week.

Volunteers who will run the ethics course, and were selected from within the pilot school communities, assembled for training for two days in March.

The 33 volunteers include a goat farmer, a music therapist, lawyers, a former principal, nurses, a stand-up comedian, and a film producer.

The most common characteristic is they have a child at one of the pilot schools - and they each have a story about the competitive process involved to secure a place at training.

Read more at <http://www.smh.com.au/national/what-lies-beneath--a-question-of-ethics-20100418-smnq.html>

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State ethics classes face delay...

Sydney Morning Herald, April 19, 2010

ETHICS classes might not start in state primary schools this week, with the curriculum yet to receive the approval of the Minister for Education, Verity Firth, despite the first classes scheduled for 9am tomorrow.

A spokesman said yesterday: "The minister will consider the advice from the Board of Studies and the Education Department on the trial curriculum to ensure that all of the conditions ... have been met.

"We expect the trial to commence this week."

Source: <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/state-ethics-classes-face-delay-20100418-smon.html>

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FUNDING

A future fair for all - School funding in Australia

Hon Julia Gillard MP, Minister for Education, Address to Sydney Institute, 15 April 2010

Tonight I want to address a subject that excites interest and passion in Australia and in many other countries – the funding of our schools.

It ignites such passion because how we resource schools goes directly to the aspirations that Australians have for the future – for their children, for their communities, for their sense of potential and fairness in Australian society.

In the past, the question of school funding has been used to divide the Australian community, to pit school against school and school system against school system.

My intention is not to follow this path, but to seek a constructive and open approach to the questions of school funding.

Since I became Education Minister two and half years ago, I have argued that Australia's educational future is too important to allow it to be dominated by ideological questions that exercise only a small minority, or to use it instrumentally as a vehicle for a broader political agenda.

Instead, we should be building community consensus around the educational needs of our community – of today's school students and tomorrow's.

Why it matters: the need to review school funding
The new politics of education
Needs are changing
Asking the right questions
How should school funding respond to these factors?
How the Review will work
Our assurance to schools today
Confronting vested interests

Read the entire address:

http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Speeches/Pages/Article_100416_113412.aspx

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Non-Government schools funding will go the way of private health insurance rebate

Christopher Pyne, Shadow Minister for Education, 16 April 2010

Parents of students in non-government schools should be very worried about the cost of their children's education after 2012, Christopher Pyne, Shadow Minister for Education said today.

"Ms Gillard says 'trust me' when it comes to the funding of non-government schools, but has a record of opposition," Mr Pyne said.

"Before the 2007 election Labor promised it would maintain the existing SES Funding model, even though Ms Gillard described it in 2001 as a 'flawed index' that 'does not deliver'," he said.

"It is well known that Julia Gillard was one of the central figures in the development of the 2004 Labor Private School Hit List, which would have seen Government funding cut or reduced to hundreds of non-government schools across Australia.

"Now we find out that the review into the SES funding model, which was announced in February 2008, won't report until after the next election.

"The question for parents of students in non-government schools is who do you trust when it comes to maintaining funding of non-government schools."

Read more at: <http://www.liberal.org.au/Latest-News/2010/04/16/Non-Government-schools-funding-will-go-the-way-of-private-health-insurance-rebate.aspx>

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Call to cut funds for school fees

Dan Harrison, The Age, April 19, 2010

AUSTRALIA should consider cutting the funding of private schools which charge high fees to address inequality in the education system, according to a former OECD analyst.

Ben Jensen, who now heads the school education program at the Grattan Institute, an independent experts group, said Australia was unusual in its approach.

Dr Jensen said while many countries provided public money to non-government schools, the funding often came with the condition that fees are not charged, or if they are, a school would lose funding if it rejected a student because they could not afford to attend the school.

"These requirements are put in place because it is widely considered that providing exclusive education only to those who can afford it will increase social inequality," Dr Jensen said.

His comments come just days after Education Minister Julia Gillard launched a national review of school funding.

Read more at: <http://www.theage.com.au/national/education/call-to-cut-funds-for-school-fees-20100418-smma.html>

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DIGITAL EDUCATION REVOLUTION

Developers seek to link iPad with education

Dennis Carter, eSchool News, Apr 5th, 2010

Technology experts say Apple's latest gizmo, the iPad, won't replace students' laptops, but a menu of applications could help teach the periodic table, a range of languages, and a host of other K-12 and higher-education subjects.

More than 300,000 iPads were sold April 3 in Apple Stores and through pre-orders, Apple announced April 5, and education technology enthusiasts finally got to experiment with the device that Apple CEO Steve Jobs describes as a "game changer."

The iPad App Store is stocked with more than 150,000 downloadable programs, including some that might catch educators' attention.

"The Elements: A Visual Exploration" guides students through every part of the periodic table with stunning graphics of each element, presenting an old lesson plan in a captivating platform.

Hello-Hello.com, a language learning web site that launched last year, released its iPad app April 1, offering access to the site's entire Spanish course and allowing access to social networking sites where students can chat with native speakers of the language they are studying.

Read more at: <http://www.eschoolnews.com/2010/04/05/ipad-app-store-has-wide-selection-of-education-options/>

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Nodes: The hyperconnected nervous system and digital literacy

Stephen Collins, school speaking engagement, posted to acidlabs 15 April 2010

We live today in a world of rapidly increasing connectedness. We are connected to each other as individuals and in groups in a way that changes everything.

And I do mean everything — education, families, business, government, causes, empowerment, culture, globalisation. Everything.

This school, indeed any school, or any government, business, organisation or person that remains disconnected for much longer risks an ever-increasing marginalisation in the face of a hyperconnected world.

Set aside for a moment that large parts of the world remain not connected to the Internet. Those parts that are are visibly, measurably different to how they were 15 years ago. They are even markedly different to five years ago.

Of real significance amongst these changes, is the change in the way humans now learn.

It is important to understand that the formal education I went through, and the vast majority of those teaching today went through, bears little or no resemblance to either the way we or our kids themselves learn when left to our own devices nor to the way the real world operates.

The real education revolution that needs to occur is a transformation based on that understanding.

Read more at: <http://www.acidlabs.org/2010/04/15/nodes-the-hyperconnected-nervous-system-and-digital-literacy/>

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INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

Australia Invests \$250,000 For Indigenous Education

Government Monitor, 18 April 2010

Minister for Employment Participation Mark Arbib today announced \$250,000 funding for the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation's (AIEF) Post-School Pathways program.

The Post-School Pathways program is designed to assist Indigenous secondary school leavers moving from school into employment.

"The Rudd Government's partnership with the AIEF is aimed at improving the educational and employment outcomes of Indigenous students" Senator Arbib said.

"We know how critical a successful transition from school to work or further education is in ensuring young people have the best opportunities..

"The objective of the Post-School Pathways program is to create, identify, coordinate and assist future pathways and opportunities for Indigenous students after they finish Year 12, be that in the workforce, vocational education and training or university."

Read more at: http://thegovmonitor.com/education_and_skills/australia-invests-250000-for-indigenous-education-28264.html

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EDUCATION & DISABILITY

Rigid rules again hits students with disabilities

Senator Mitch Fifield, Coalition spokesman on Disabilities, 16 April 2010

The Coalition's spokesman on Disabilities, Senator Mitch Fifield and local federal MP for Dunkley, Bruce Billson, have today expressed amazement at a report that a school catering for children with special needs is having to fight for toilets to be built with their new classrooms under the Building the Education Revolution program.

The story, which appeared in The Age today, reported that the Frankston Special Development School in Victoria has been told that the template for new classrooms under the BER doesn't include toilets even though the school has offered to cover the costs associated with their installation.

The school has requested toilet facilities be included in the new classrooms to cater for the specific needs of their students with disabilities, but have been told the new rooms might not even be connected to water.

"Julia Gillard's one-size-fits-all approach has come to a point where a school catering for students with disabilities has to fight for toilet facilities," Senator Fifield said.

"To promise a computer for every high school student but not pay for the installation costs is one thing, but to build new classrooms at a school catering for students with special needs and not provide necessary toilet facilities is quite another."

Read more at: <http://www.liberal.org.au/Latest-News/2010/04/16/Rigid-rules-again-hits-students-with-disabilities.aspx>

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Play improves social skills in kids with autism: study

Sarah Whyte, Sydney Morning Herald, 18 April 2010

CHILDREN with autism who attend weekly playgroups have improved development and social skills, a study has found, supporting the inclusion of children with autism into mainstream education.

The study, by national peak body Playgroup Australia, shows 80 per cent of the families who took part in the groups designed for autistic children reported an improvement in their children's social development. It found a lack of play can aggravate social isolation for children with autism, hindering their transition to school.

The study was funded as part of a federal government grant, announced in 2008, of \$190 million.

Playgroup Australia chief executive Karen Merange said playgroups provided an environment that was autism-friendly and where children were shown how to interact with each other in preparation for school.

"The more exposure these children with autism get to a play environment, the more prepared they are for schools that may or may not be as autism-friendly," Ms Merange said.

Read more at: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/play-improves-social-skills-in-kids-with-autism-study-20100417-sli7.html>

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ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Costa's Garden Odyssey

Are you a fan of Costa's Garden Odyssey? Would you like to meet Costa face to face?

To celebrate the latest series of Costa's Garden Odyssey, one lucky student will win a visit from Costa for their primary school.

All you have to do is tell us, in 100 words or less, why you think Costa should visit your school.

Is your playground in need of a makeover? Does your school have a unique garden? Would your class benefit from some wisdom from our Greek Gardening Guru? Do you think your school needs a lesson in sustainability?

The competition is open to students in Grade 6 and below. You will need to get the approval of your school teacher or your principal to enter. Your entry can be accompanied by up to 5 photos or images.

Five runners up will receive a DVD of the first series of Costa's Garden Odyssey.

Competition closes on Monday, 31 May at 10.00am

Find out more and enter: <http://www.sbs.com.au/shows/costa/about/page/i/2/h/Competition/>

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FINANCIAL EDUCATION

Coinland

Coinland is a virtual world where children can learn about the benefits of earning, saving and investing money by undertaking a series of tasks, designed to help them develop strong financial literacy skills.

Players create an avatar which represents them as they explore and interact in Coinland. The aim is for each player to earn and save coins. They earn coins by completing tasks or 'jobs'. Each job earns them one coin. They can then choose to save their coins by depositing them in the bank, or spend their coins on games and rewards. Players can make friends by adding other players to their buddy list.

Coinland is designed for young children and in particular those aged 5 - 10 years.

Children are able to send pre-defined messages to other players within Coinland but cannot create their own. Children are unable to share any personal details within the Coinland environment.

Coinland is completely free to join, explore and play.

As well as being a fun and safe place for kids to play, Coinland has been designed to teach children the benefits of saving money and to equip them with financial literacy skills that they can use as they get older. Coinland is part of the Commonwealth Bank's determination to bring financial literacy to one millions kids by 2015.

Read more at: <https://coinland.com.au/>

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AROUND THE STATES & TERRITORIES

NT: Push to ban corporal punishment in NT schools

Eleni Roussos, ABC News, 13 April 2010

The Australian Education Union is calling on the Northern Territory Government to explicitly ban corporal punishment in schools.

Although corporal punishment is not used in Territory schools, there is no legislation that specifically bans it.

The union's Territory branch secretary, Adam Lampe, says the Territory is the only jurisdiction that has not changed its Education Act to ban corporal punishment. "I guess it's about time the Northern Territory moved into the 21st century on this matter as well," he said.

The Education Minister, Chris Burns, says the Education Department does not endorse corporal punishment and there is no need to alter the Act.

Source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/04/13/2871738.htm>

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NT: Remote community's initiatives stops truancy

ABC News, April 14, 2010

The manager of a remote central Australian store says community initiatives are having a bigger impact on school attendance than the Federal Government's welfare truancy trial.

The Federal Indigenous Affairs Minister recently confirmed a small number of Northern Territory parents have had their welfare payments suspended under the trial since it was introduced in January last year.

Selwyn Kloeden from the Finke River Mission store at Hermannsburg says there is still truancy.

He says the community's policy of refusing service in the shop to students during school hours is more effective.

"The benefit of the community initiative is it costs nobody anything. It doesn't cost the government, it doesn't cost the local people and it gets immediate results," he said.

Source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/04/14/2872410.htm>

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NT: A Smart Territory: \$2M for Homeland Learning Centres

Dr Chris Burns, Minister for Education and Training; Malarndirri McCarthy, Minister for Indigenous Development, 19 April 2010

Students from seven Homeland Learning Centres will benefit from \$2 million in school upgrades that will be included in the Budget 2010.

Minister for Education and Training, Chris Burns, and Minister for Indigenous Development, Malarndirri McCarthy, today said the funding was part of a \$10 million four year Closing the Gap/Working Future initiative.

Mr Burns said seven Homeland Learning Centres will receive up to \$300,000 each for upgrades including for new classrooms.

"Ensuring all school students have the right tools to learn, regardless whether they are going to schools in a town or a remote community is critical," Dr Burns said.

Read more at: <http://newsroom.nt.gov.au/index.cfm?fuseaction=viewRelease&id=6792&d=5>

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QLD: National day against bullying

The Gympie Times, 18 April 2010

A NATIONAL Day of Action Against Bullying and Violence will be held on the third Friday in March each year, Education and Training Minister Geoff Wilson announced this week.

Mr Wilson said Australia's education ministers agreed to support Queensland's proposal for an annual community awareness campaign on bullying.

It was the result of discussions at the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) meeting on Thursday.

"The consequences of bullying, including cyber bullying and youth violence, affect schools and communities throughout Australia. This is such an important issue that requires concerted, co-operative action by the whole community to work out a solution," Mr Wilson said.

"Queensland and most other states and territories are working hard to deal with these difficult and complex problems in schools by developing strategies and guidelines.

"A national day of action would showcase the positive work governments, schools and students are doing to combat this type of inappropriate behaviour."

Read more at: <http://www.gympietimes.com.au/story/2010/04/17/national-day-of-action-against-bullying-go-ahead/>

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QLD: USA university adopts Gold Coast anti-bullying scheme

Charmaine Kane, ABC News, 19 April 2010

An anti-bullying initiative developed on Queensland's Gold Coast is sparking international interest.

The community program, devised by business students at Bond University, involves school presentations, public commitments and demonstrations. Opposition to bullying was signified by a gathering of 2,000 people at Varsity College a few days ago.

The Bond University's Dr Amy Kenworthy says an American university already wants to adopt the program.

"We have already had Bentley University in the US who have asked us if they can replicate this to a tee in September this year," she said. "They have an elementary school they are partnering with and they are going to take all our materials and completely replicate what we have done, so the ripple effect has already started."

Source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/04/19/2876466.htm>

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SA: Order teachers to give tests - Opposition

ABC News, Apr 15, 2010

The South Australian Opposition says Education Minister Jay Weatherill has the power to direct SA teachers to give national literacy and numeracy tests to students.

Liberal education spokesman David Pisoni says Mr Weatherill seems incapable of taking on the unions and ordering teachers to give the tests to students is within his power.

"This is not an issue for Canberra, this is a state industrial relations issue," he said.

"[Deputy Prime Minister] Julia Gillard does not employ teachers in SA, the minister for Education employs teachers in South Australia."

Mr Weatherill says he has a range of ways available to ensure the testing is set, but he prefers a constructive solution rather than confrontation.

Read entire article: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/04/15/2873303.htm>

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SA: Minister writes to schools on test boycott

ABC News, 20 April 2010

Education Minister Jay Weatherill is writing to every public school in South Australia to try to convince teachers not to strike over national literacy and numeracy tests. Mr Weatherill says he is outlining to schools why the testing should continue.

"It's an important test for parents and for students and to assist teachers in the better education of children, so it's a test that the Education Union acknowledges has value and it shouldn't be banned because they have some other points to make about the MySchool website," he said.

Union president Correna Haythorpe says she had a constructive meeting with Mr Weatherill on Monday but it failed to change the union's position.

She wants the Federal Government to do more. "We seek provisions which make sure that NAPLAN data is not misused for the creation of league tables and we seek a range of improvements to the MySchool website."

Read entire article: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/04/20/2877279.htm>

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TAS: Labor faces new education battle

Sue Neales, Mercury, 10 April 2010

THE axing of the "Tasmania Tomorrow" school reforms is set to become the first battleground for the new government.

Greens leader Nick McKim, who campaigned heavily on reinstating the state's former college and TAFE system, signalled yesterday he would act very quickly after Parliament resumes to unravel the loathed new Academy, Polytechnic and Skills Tasmania system.

Premier David Bartlett also conceded yesterday he might have to give way and drop his unpopular senior secondary reforms if he wanted the minority parliament to work.

The reforms could start to be scrapped from the middle of this year, with the combined college system reinstated for the 2011 school year.

Mr Bartlett also hinted he would not retain the education portfolio in his second spell as Premier.

Read entire article: http://www.themercury.com.au/article/2010/04/10/138995_tasmania-news.html

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VIC: No room for principals in Building the Education Revolution program

Milanda Rout, the Australian, 15 April 2010

VICTORIAN Education Minister Bronwyn Pike says principals have been given too much autonomy over construction work at state schools, and the lesson of the Building the Education Revolution program is that her department should take more responsibility for the work.

In an interview with *The Australian*, Ms Pike yesterday defended her department against complaints by principals that they had been kept in the dark over financial details, progress and even control of their BER projects. She said the schools knew broadly "the amount of money being spent on their project" and the "project they were getting".

But specific costings would not be released due to commercial confidence issues as the tendering process had not ended.

Ms Pike said that although the modus operandi of principals in the past was absolutely hands-on in any construction at their schools, they were not trained architects or builders and should not be "burdened" by it.

"I don't employ principals to stand around and supervise concrete pours," she said. "Not any more. I don't think it's appropriate. I want my department to take greater responsibility and I think this (the BER) has been a very good exercise.

"I think too much time in the past may have been diverted to some of those contract management tasks rather than the reason why we employ principals."

Read entire article: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/in-depth/schools-watch/no-room-for-principals-in-building-the-education-revolution-program/story-fn56ulhe-1225853826738>

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VIC: Education minister triggers principal backlash

Milanda Rout, the Australian, 16 April 2010

PRINCIPALS have reacted angrily to a suggestion they should hand over management of school building projects, saying the federal government's school stimulus program has been plagued by a breakdown in communications between principals and project managers.

The Victorian Principals Association says its members were disappointed with Education Minister Bronwyn Pike's comments that she did not want her principals to "stand around and supervise concrete pours" and her department should take more responsibility for that work.

"There has been a breakdown in communications between project managers and principals and that is significant because, at the end of the day, the principals are responsible for the school," said association president Gabrielle Leigh. "So they are not directly involved in what's happening on their own school site -- they are losing their co-ordination."

Ms Leigh said principals often arranged meetings with project managers to voice their concerns about timelines, progress and planning delays but the project managers did not turn up. "They (principals) are just meeting a brick wall," she said. "A lot of principals are sharing their frustrations with us."

Ms Leigh told *The Australian* that schools in Victoria had been self-governing for 15 years.

Read entire article: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/victorias-education-minister-triggers-teacher-backlash/story-e6frg6n6-1225854298251>

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WA: Teachers to face disciplinary action

ABC News, 13 April 2010

The head of school education in Western Australia says teachers will face disciplinary action if they take part in a boycott of national literacy and numeracy testing.

The Director General of Education Sharyn O'Neill says the literacy and numeracy tests provide useful information for parents. She has told ABC local radio teachers have been warned that if they do boycott the testing, they will be breaking the law.

"We have a range of options under the Public Sector Management Act, you know, stretching I suppose from reprimand to loss of pay et cetera."

[WA Education Minister] Dr Constable says she expects WA teachers to take part in the testing.

Read entire article: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/04/13/2871025.htm>

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WA: School's back for Term Two following huge clean up

Education Minister Liz Constable, 19/04/2010

Education Minister Liz Constable said all 200 public schools damaged in the storm that hit Perth on Monday, March 22 would be open tomorrow for the start of Term Two.

The Minister said the damage - estimated at between \$5million and \$10million to repair - closed 14 schools in the final two weeks of Term One.

"More than 8,000 square metres of carpet, 500 windows and 2,000 square metres of ceiling have been replaced at public schools throughout Perth and regional Western Australia in the aftermath of the storm,' Dr Constable said.

Read more at: <http://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Lists/Statements/DispForm.aspx?ID=133362>

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CONFERENCES & EVENTS

My School? Whose School? What's on the table for public education in Australia?

Public Policy Forum

7-8 May 2010, Deakin University, Burwood, Melbourne, VIC

My School, NAPLAN, ACARA, a new national curriculum – the Federal Government has taken a raft of initiatives that will have a decisive impact on primary and secondary education in Australia. People are calling for an opportunity to publicly debate and reflect on the implications of these changes. Open and vigorous debate will undoubtedly enrich the consultation process that ACARA has initiated with respect to the new national curriculum, which closes on the 23rd May.

The Centre for Research in Educational Futures and Innovation and the School of Education at Deakin University are hosting a forum to enable people to share their views on the changes to education being introduced by the Federal Government. The forum is open to all, and will feature a wide range of viewpoints.

A keynote address will be given by Professor Alan Reid from the University of South Australia, who is a well known authority on curriculum. Alan's address will be given on Friday evening, setting a context for the workshops and panels that will be held on Saturday.

The panels will include representatives from several key organisations, including the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, the Catholic Education Office, the Australian Education Union, and other bodies. They will also feature the voices of students, parents/carers, and teachers.

RSVP by 30 April 2010.

Further information – and to register online: <http://www.deakin.edu.au/arts-ed/efi/conferences/public-policy-forum/index.php>

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Parents Victoria Annual Online Conference

16-22 May 2010

All parents of school age children (in Victoria, all other Australian States and Territories and schools in international locations) are warmly invited to take part in the fourth annual online conference to be held by Parents Victoria. The conference will be held non-stop on the internet during Education Week (Sunday 16 May to Saturday 22 May).

No special software is needed just an internet-connected computer and a browser.

The online discussions are very easy to join in, and guidelines about how to participate will be provided. The conference is proudly sponsored by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Join in for all days, just some days, or even a few hours, depending on your lifestyle and other commitments.

To participate you first need to register yourself online at no cost at http://www.cybertext.net.au/pv1_10/pv2010registration.php.

The conference will feature seven 'live' daily online discussions, each of them hosted, for several hours each day, by a member of Parents Victoria and/or experts in the topic, e.g. DEECD, KGFYL. Each 24-hour period will focus on a topic that is currently of concern or interest to parents.

An online 'resource bundle' of information and opinions will also be provided as an optional extra to give you a kick-start on each day's topic.

There will also be one continuous week-long online discussion - My School – What information do parents really want to know about their child's school? This discussion will also have the option of starting new threads if you have an issue you would like to discuss.

Prizes for Participation: Schools with the greatest number of individual participants will be in the running to win great prizes. To be eligible, participants must be correctly registered and leave at least one comment on the discussion boards.

The Parents Victoria Online Conference 2010 website will open from 6am on 16 May at: <http://www.cybertext.net.au/pv/> We look forward to meeting with you online to discuss issues of importance for your children. The more of you who join in, the more successful this e-vent will be. For further information and updates, visit the Parents Victoria website at: www.parentsvictoria.asn.au, email us at: office@parentsvictoria.asn.au or phone (03) 9380 2158.

You are also most welcome to contact the Online Conference Manager, Ms Debra Brydon, at: brydon@cybertext.net.au or 0413 009988.

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6th International Conference on Teacher Education:

Celebrating diversity and transformative innovations in teacher education

29-31 July, Quezon City, Philippines

This biennial event is sponsored by the University of the Philippines – College of Education.

The conference presents an excellent opportunity for teacher educators and practitioners to exchange global views and experiences in addressing diversity and best practice in teacher preparation.

Further details: <http://www.ictedphilippines.org/>

REMINDERS

26-28 April - Canada International Conference on Education - Toronto, Canada - <http://www.ciceducation.org/>

27-29 May - Council of Educational Facility Planners International Conference - Perth, WA - <http://australasia.cefpi.org/>

22 April - 21st Century Learning Spaces Networking Event - Melbourne, VIC - <http://www.educationau.edu.au/21st-century-learning-event>

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

7 May - National Walk Safely to School Day - <http://www.walk.com.au>

7 May - Public consultation closes - draft National Professional Standards for Teachers - http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/mceecdya/npst2010-consultation-call_for_submissions,30532.html

14 May - Modern Language Teachers' Association of Victoria Annual Conference - Melbourne, VIC - <http://www.mltav.asn.au>

17 May - Tackling Underachievement: Engaging Boys and Girls - Sydney, NSW - <http://conferences2010.schoolevent.org>

17 May - The Tender Bridge, ACER - Adelaide, SA - <http://www.acer.edu.au/1/index.php/seminar/the-tender-bridge/>

18 May - Tackling Underachievement: Engaging Boys and Girls - Melbourne, VIC - <http://conferences2010.schoolevent.org>

23 May - Public consultation closes - draft K-10 Australian Curriculum English, mathematics, science and history - <http://www.acara.edu.au/consultation.html>

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

4-5 June - Early Childhood Education Conference - Melbourne, VIC - <http://www.togetherwegrow.com.au/2010registration.html>

17-18 June - National Conference of Australian Special Education Principals' Association & Australian Association of Special Education - Darwin, NT - <http://www.gemsevents.com.au/aase2010/>

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/>

7-9 July - Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference - Melbourne, VIC - <http://www.aifs.gov.au/conference>

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

26-27 August - Annual School Leaders' Conference - Gold Coast, QLD - <http://www.griffith.edu.au/pdn-leadership-conference-2010>

6-8 September - London International Conference on Education - London, UK - <http://www.liceducation.org/>

15-17 September - SPERA Conference, University of Sunshine Coast, Queensland - http://www.spera.asn.au/articles.php?req=list&root_id=13&sub_id=65

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ACSSO EMAIL NEWSLETTERS

- Australian Education Digest : <http://www.acsso.org.au/australian-education-digest/> (weekly)
- International News Roundup : <http://www.acsso.org.au/roundup/> (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/public-education-voice> (quarterly)

Do you know of an event or resource that schools should know about? Email us at 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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