

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF STATE SCHOOL ORGANISATIONS (ACSSO)

The national voice of parents of children in Australia's public schools and their communities

MEDIA RELEASE

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LANGUAGES EDUCATION: A TIME TO SPEAK - AND A TIME TO ACT

"Learning a language in Australia should be like learning Maths or English" said one teacher respondent to a national Research Survey conducted by the peak parent organisations in late 2006 "It is a normal part of the curriculum in which every student should participate. It is part of an education for life!"

The final Report of that research, "**Attitudes towards the Study of Languages in Australian Schools**" was being launched today in Canberra by ACSSO in conjunction with the Australian Parents Council (APC).

The Report shows that parents and students across the country have a similarly strong expectation that languages learning should be an essential element in a balanced curriculum, and that all students should have access to an appropriate range of language study opportunities:

- 90% of parents and 70% of students said language learning helps students understand their world
- 74% of parents and 66% of students said it improves their future employment prospects
- 63% said the best way to learn about another culture is via language
- 50% of parents expressed real concern about the continuing low numbers of Year 12 students studying languages
- 70% of parents and most students were strongly against reducing the number of languages on offer or of watering down the standards of languages courses
- Nearly 90% of parents and 60% of students strongly felt that language study should start in early Primary
- Some 70% of parents and 40% of students said languages should be compulsory from early Primary school through to Year 10

Sadly, the results of the research graphically illustrate the extent to which those high expectations of parents and students - despite the strongly evident commitment, passion and dedication of Languages Teachers in schools across the country - are not being met.

Instead, parents and students are telling us loud and clear that their experience is that continuity, co-ordination and consistency of languages programs is at an appalling level of disarray both within schools and between the various levels of schooling – that they do not have confidence in the level of commitment and leadership to change things.

It is a sad indictment that 92% of parents and families lack confidence in either Commonwealth or State systems providing the resources to turn this situation around. That lack of confidence is strongly shared by 90% of language teachers, 90% of Principals and 85% of Education Department people!

While Education Ministers from all jurisdictions endorsed a National Statement and Plan on Languages Education in 2005, the Survey shows only about 60% of Principals and other education planners and administrators seem to be aware of its existence – not surprisingly then, if the Principals know nothing about it, only about 20% of parents have heard of it either.

The Education Ministers also tell us proudly (2005) that there are "approximately 50% of students learning a language in mainstream schools." That being so, why from year to year are only some 13% of Year 12 students still studying a language, given the highly positive expectations of parents and students recorded above?

"So long as we continue to do the same things in the same way we have always done them, we will continue to get the same mediocre results we have always got" said ACSSO President Jennifer Branch in launching the Report. ***"So we need to ask and answer the critical question - what are the things we need to do differently?"***

Noting that in May 2007 the United Nations proclaimed 2008 as the International Year of Languages, Ms Branch posed the further question: ***"How can we use the opportunities of the International Year of Languages as leverage to start doing those things differently?"***

"This is a time for everyone with an interest in languages education to talk together – work together – plan together. And to act together!"

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