

FEEDBACK

Journal of the ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations Inc.
Linking Parents & Education

Issue 1, February 2010

Parents "C" Average Ministers

Federal Education Minister Julia Gillard and ACT Education Minister Andrew Barr have both received 'C' grades from P&C Council.

At its recent Annual General Meeting, parent representatives were polled about their attitudes towards Government schools in 2009 and to grade the Ministers' performance in their portfolios.

Council President Elizabeth Singer said that given our children are given grades A-E it's only appropriate we do the same for the Ministers of our education system.

"The federal government and Minister Gillard received "C" grades from the majority of parents for both funding and the recent *Building the Education Revolution* capital works initiative," she said.

"Despite the Federal Government's claim that it's on the right track in relation to education, parents expect a high standard of appropriately



Commonwealth Education Minister Julia Gillard (l) and ACT Minister for Education Andrew Barr (r)

directed funding," she said.

"The majority of parents polled believe that too much funding has been misdirected to a wealthier non-government school sector, robbing public schools of much needed building and classroom resources," she said.

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Bushfires & Schools

FIRE DANGER RATING	
CATASTROPHIC: FDI 100+	Red background with black diagonal stripes
EXTREME: FDI 75 - 99	Red background
SEVERE: FDI 50 - 74	Orange background
VERY HIGH: FDI 25 - 49	Yellow background
HIGH: FDI 12 - 24	Green background
LOW-MODERATE: FDI 0 - 11	Dark green background

This summer, a new system of fire danger ratings is being implemented across Australia (see left).

In the event of a 'Catastrophic' rating, 33 schools across the ACT will be closed. Parents need to know if their child's school is among them.

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From the President



Elizabeth Singer

Hello everyone, and welcome back to the start of another school year.

I would like to extend a particularly warm welcome to parents whose children are starting school in 2010, or who have become involved with a P&C for the first time, and are therefore reading their first edition of *Feedback*. I hope that your association with your P&C will be a long and fruitful one. Study after study has shown that parental involvement in schooling directly benefits children's education.

Council has been unusually busy over the summer school holidays. The end of 2009 went by in a flurry of announcements. On the second-last day of school Council received the news that not only will the ACT government not reopen the closed schools at Hall and Tharwa, but may allow a private school to operate at the Hall site. Council spoke out against this development in a media release, available from our website (see below). The same day, the long-awaited *Review of Special Education* was released. Council has reviewed it,

and our submission to the current Legislative Assembly inquiry into the *Needs of ACT Students with Disabilities* will be modified accordingly.

Late in the term Denis O'Dea (Treasurer), Tina Anderson (Assistant Secretary), Steve Crilly (Communications Officer) and I met with the ACT Auditor-General to discuss her office's performance audit of ACTION bus services. We relayed parents' concerns about both general issues with ACTION's service and specific problems.

I have also fielded many media inquiries, as education issues have had a high profile in the last few months. NAPLAN looms large over Council business with the full results out on the last day of school and the launch of the *My School* website. I have been snowed under with media inquiries as debate about the site has dominated the national press. Council is aware that many parents' experience with the site has been frustrating, and hopes technical issues can be quickly resolved. We are keen to hear parents' comments on the site, so please send them to parents@canberra.net.au

And finally, if Council can help you in any way, please email us or call our office on 6241 5759! ●

Like to receive *FEEDBACK* by email?

You can elect to receive *FEEDBACK* via email rather than in hard copy, thereby reducing our need to produce paper publications. To do so, simply email: parents@canberra.net.au

To view previous *FEEDBACK* publications, visit the publications section of our website at:

www.schoolparents.canberra.net.au/Publications (you will need Adobe Reader to view these.)

Council is aware not everyone has access to the Internet. If you see a website reference in *FEEDBACK*, but do not have access to the internet, please contact the Council Office and we can send you a printed copy of the information. *FEEDBACK* is printed on 100 per cent recycled paper by Instant Colour Press.

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Contributions, advertising and feedback are always being sought. Contributions can be emailed directly to the Editor - comms.parents@canberra.net.au

Views expressed in this journal are not necessarily those of the ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations.

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AEU National Conference

By Steve Crilly

Between 18 and 20 January 2010, the Australian Education Union (AEU) held its annual federal conference in Melbourne. Around 150 delegates attended to hear addresses from several keynote speakers and to debate current issues in public education.

On the first day of the conference, AEU Federal President Angelo Gavrielatos released a research paper by Dr Jim McMorrow that examines the Rudd government's priorities in education funding. As the AEU stated in the accompanying media release, when the current funding period ends, private schools that educate less than 40% of Australians will have received \$12 billion more than public schools from federal funds.

Dr McMorrow's paper credits the Rudd government with reversing some of the inequities in federal funding that became most pronounced under the previous Howard Liberal government. However, he concludes that the government's budget projections are 'haunted by the funding policies and programs put in place during the Howard years', and that the share of funding directed to public schools under the Rudd government will in fact be lower than under Howard (J F McMorrow, *The Rudd Government's Budget priorities for government and non-government schools: the latest evidence*, January 2010, hosted by the AEU: www.aeufederal.org.au/Publications/2010/JMcMorrowreport2010.pdf, p. 31).

These are staggering figures at a time when public education budgets are being slashed. Here in the ACT, the Stanhope Government proposes to cut education funding by 1% (approximately \$4 million) in the 2010-2011 Budget. Meanwhile, many wealthy private schools are funded above their entitlements to federal funds because of guarantees that they would not be disadvantaged when changes were made to funding formulae. Given this breathtaking inequity, last year's call by retired High Court Justice Michael Kirby for public education advocates to 'blog, twitter, text, lobby and argue' take on a new urgency (see page 10).

Unfortunately, drawing attention to this and other vital issues raised by the conference will

be difficult for the foreseeable future. The media's attention has been focussed squarely elsewhere, as coverage of the conference has been dominated by the dramatic announcement that if the federal government does not legislate to prevent the creation of 'league tables' from national testing results, AEU members will not administer the examinations.

The dispute has arisen due to the possible misuse of the federal government's *My School* website (www.myschool.edu.au), launched on 28 January 2010. The site presents a range of statistics about each school in the country based on the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) test data. The data can be used to generate comparisons with 'statistically similar' schools.

The website contains a range of in-depth data about school performance, and in Council's experience parents are grateful for any information that they can get about their child's school. What the AEU takes issue with is the possibility that newspapers will trawl the website and turn complex data into a simpler story by creating 'league tables'. Such tables rank schools on their bare results without any regard for their location, circumstances, student demographics or levels of funding.

One would hope that editors would exercise restraint and desist from turning scores designed to assist schools into a more marketable but essentially meaningless competition. It seems obvious that there is little point comparing schools in less wealthy areas or with a high proportion of disadvantaged students to those in affluent suburbs where most students are native speakers with highly educated parents. The latter will perform better in national testing for obvious reasons.

Despite this common sense, the AEU's fears are not unfounded. The media do not have a good record in understanding or conveying such subtleties. Both the *Courier Mail* and the *Mercury* created league tables last year. The latter ranked high schools by raw literacy and numeracy scores (which they also averaged) and attendance – without any explanation of what the fig-

(Continued on page 8)

P&C Corner



Vicki Wood
Council P&C Liaison Officer

The beginning of the school year is the optimal time to invite parent participation.

Welcoming your new parents!

The P&C is the obvious driver of any activities that are aimed at parents, and the leadership team (i.e. principal, deputy principal, school board, etc.) will, I am sure, encourage any P&C initiatives to welcome new parents.

It is worth taking time to carefully plan out the first P&C meeting of the year. Some P&Cs choose to host casual events such as wine and cheese evenings in the first few weeks of term. This allows for an informal meeting of parents and teachers. The main purpose of such a gathering is to familiarise parents with some of the key people in the school.

Good ideas

On the night, our P&C also plans to collect contact information from parents who wish to be informed of P&C activities. If parents agree to provide this contact information, the P&C can use it to communicate directly. Email addresses and telephone numbers are particularly useful. This information should only be used by P&C Office Bearers to contact parents on legitimate P&C business, and not passed on to any third party.

Hint

If your P&C is putting on something like this, don't forget to provide sticky labels for first names. This takes the pressure off people to remember lots of names. The teachers will have their own official name tags, but all parents should wear a name tag, even if they think they are well known. Be as inclusive as possible, and avoid giving new parents the impression that there is an "inner circle": everyone is welcome!

Whatever you do, make sure it is interesting and enjoyable. You only have one chance to convince parents that spending time with the P&C is time well spent, because, as one politician and mother once said, "education is an investment, not a cost." And that applies to giving your time

to your child's school, and as research has shown, can result in improved educational outcomes. Go for it!

Welcome to preschool parents

In 2008, preschools were officially integrated into their local primary schools. Increasingly, Preschool Parent Associations (PPAs) are merging into P&Cs, or ceasing to exist altogether. Preschool parents are members of P&C Associations in primary schools, so the same principles apply: please make them very welcome!

P&C Manuals

This year, Council will be doing something slightly different from previous years. Instead of sending out a P&C handover manual, we will be creating four separate documents - one each for Presidents, Secretaries, Treasurers and Delegates. These will go out to schools through the DET carrier bag system sometime soon - we will let you know!

Information sheets

These are one of Council's most frequently requested sources of information. The information sheets are individually available from Council's website, and can be found at www.schoolparents.canberra.net.au/Information%20Sheets.htm.

Finally

P&C Council is keen to assist P&C Associations! Please contact us with any enquiries – 6241 5759 or via email, parents@canberra.net.au. •

At Council



Steve Crilly
Council Communications Officer

Council finished 2009 in a flurry of activity, and 2010 promises more of the same.

At the very end of last year, Council was asked to comment on a number of draft Department of Education (DET) Policies.

Colour Codes and Dress Standards

Generally parents were pleased with the draft policy on colour codes and dress standards. Each school will have to have a dress standard, but how prescriptive it is will be up to the school. Standards may simply require clothing to meet safety requirements (e.g. closed shoes in workshops), or at the other end of the spectrum it may require a colour code or uniform.

Council expressed three main concerns about the document. The first was of the cost of meeting colour code or dress standards, with Council stating that uniform items should not be much more expensive than store-bought equivalents. Council was also concerned that P&Cs may not be able to run second-hand uniform shops, and that the DET or schools must step in if they cannot.

Council's two other concerns addressed the consequences of failure to follow a dress standard. The second issue was that the policy allows students not meeting the dress standard to be excluded from 'non essential' curriculum activities. Except for safety issues, students should not be excluded from any curriculum activities.

The final concern was with a paragraph stating that in resolving issues regarding the dress standard, the principal 'may' consider factors such as a student's disability, health issues and conscientious objections. Council feels the language 'may consider' is inappropriate - principals *must grant exemptions* on these grounds.

English as a Second Language

Council raised several concerns about this draft policy and procedural manual. The major concern was that schools will have to pay for interpretive services. Council noted that this disad-

vantages schools with a higher proportion of students who are not native English speakers. We commented that this structure would require a corresponding increase in School-Based Management funding to be equitable.

Council also expressed some concern that the detailed responsibilities of the parties concerned at both the school and DET level have been moved to the procedural manual, which, unlike the policy, is not available from the DET website..

Overseas Excursions

In general, Council approves of the new policy and procedural manual for overseas excursions. In particular, we were pleased to note that it largely addresses questions that have arisen at Canberra high schools regarding how to provide support for students with special needs. Council's only comment was to note that the possibility or otherwise of Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) accompanying a trip was not addressed.

Assisted Eating and Drinking

The only comment that Council received on this policy was from a parent concerned that it did not cover non-oral eating and drinking. Council has learnt from its representative on the consultative committee that helped develop the policy that a separate policy is to be developed for non-oral eating and drinking.

Access to Student Records

Generally Council was very impressed with the policy and internal procedure documents that the DET has produced. They are clear, thorough and a great improvement on current documents.

Council's only major concern was that the final document should be clear that parents cannot access teenagers' medical information held by the school, as it is covered by standard medical confidentiality. Besides this, Council asked that replacement certificates and transcripts for Year 10 and 12 records be free, as are Australian Apprenticeships documentation.

Students with Disabilities

Council is finalising its submission for the *Needs of Students with Disabilities* inquiry being conducted by the Legislative Assembly's education committee. Details of the submission will be available in the next edition of *Feedback*. ●

Council Rolls Out Hints & Tips for P&Cs

To help our P&Cs to work more efficiently and to maximise their opportunities, this year P&C Council will be rolling out its advice and helpful service to interested associations across the ACT.

This campaign is part of the SCIP - *Schools and Communities in Partnership* sub-committee, which works hard to ensure our P&Cs remain active and viable for future generations.

SCIP Chair Viv Pearce says this roll out is also about the Council giving back to our P&Cs.

'It's important that our P&Cs are nurtured and this committee wants to come out to any P&C interested in taking on board hints and tips on all things P&C including:

- How to make meetings more efficient;
- How to work an agenda effectively, including informed decision making;
- Issues management;
- How to develop and maintain a low maintenance website; and
- Fundraising ideas, just to name a few'

Roll out co-ordinator Karen Warner says this is not about preaching to the converted, but about tailoring the information needs of P&Cs that may be struggling in some areas.

"Fortunately most of our P&Cs are working beautifully but for some, it's a struggle," she said.

"To get this help, which comes with additional support for a period of time after the initial consultation, could be the injection needed to keep a critically important parent body going," she said.

"In this time poor age, finding the right formula that keeps your P&C active, harmonious and productive could be found in the help and advice your Council is offering, for free!" she said.

If you're interested in applying or you would like further information about the *Roll Out* session, contact the ACT P&C Council's office on **6241 5759** or by email on parents@canberra.net.au. Alternatively, you can complete the tear-off slip on page 12 and send it to Council's office. •

young people, parents, and teachers in tackling the challenge of the misuse of alcohol and other drugs.

"Binge drinking is not a right of passage – it's a serious problem with alcohol among the top five killers of our young people under 30," says ADCA CEO David Templeman, "Drug Action Week is a chance for the whole community to debate, inform, educate and inspire a change in the way we handle alcohol issues."

Drug Action Week gives communities a platform to raise awareness of the problem and work towards solutions to improve health and wellbeing. In 2009 some 700 activities were registered across the nation, involving remote, rural, regional and metropolitan communities.

"The only way we will see a turn around in our dangerous drinking culture is by whole communities getting proactively involved in this issue," said Mr Templeman. Participants are encouraged to organise an activity in their local school community such as a forum, BBQ, sporting event, debate, concert or a competition to highlight how important it is to be **'Looking after YOUR Mind.'** •

Drug Action Week

From Alcohol & other Drugs Council of Australia

With more than 42 million occasions of binge drinking in our nation each year, long term change to address Australia's drinking culture needs to be a high priority for every community.

The Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia's (ADCA) **Drug Action Week** will run from June 20-26 allowing communities the opportunity to educate and debate the issues surrounding drugs and alcohol, with the focus this year of **'Looking after YOUR Mind.'**

ADCA encourages schools to get involved in making a difference by registering an event now on the Drug Action Week website www.drugactionweek.org.au. The website has suggestions for activities, tips on organising and also access to a range of free promotional materials and factsheets to use during your event.

ADCA CEO David Templeman says school communities are an ideal place for these issues to be raised to harness the participation and input of

Bushfires & Schools

(Continued from page 1)

The Department of Education and Training (DET) and Emergency Services Agency ACT (ESA) have reviewed all ACT government schools and given them a rating of low, medium and high bushfire risk. A decision has been made to close 33 schools on days when the fire danger rating is Catastrophic (see right for full list).

The onus will be on parents to be aware that a Catastrophic fire danger rating has been declared. It is expected that these days will be announced at approximately 5 pm on the evening prior. A Catastrophic fire danger rating will be announced through mainstream TV and radio channels and the *Canberra Times*. Parents will have to come to alternate arrangements for their children since their schools will be closed. Some families will already have their own bushfire plans and have arrangements for leaving their homes if their home is also in a high risk area.

Parents will not be notified by their child's school that it is being closed. Schools will have a minimal number of staff arrive at school, to deal with students arriving at school in the event that some families miss the announcement. Parents will be contacted using the school's emergency contact list and asked to collect their student as soon as possible.

On days of Catastrophic Fire Danger Rating, information will be available through Canberra Connect (13 22 81, www.canberraconnect.act.gov.au). Further information about bushfire preparation and the Fire Danger Rating system is available at the ESA website, www.esa.act.gov.au.

School staff will monitor radio broadcasts and the internet to keep up to date with fire danger ratings and to monitor conditions. Schools will be informed by the ESA or ACT Fire Brigade if there is a fire in their vicinity. If necessary, schools will evacuate to an appropriate location, and parents will be notified as appropriate.

The ACT also has a phone and mobile phone emergency alert system. However, as many students are not allowed access to mobile phones at school they will not receive any of these

Schools identified for temporary closure:

Alfred Deakin High School
Amaroo School
Aranda Primary and Preschool
Black Mountain School
Bonython Primary and Preschool
Calwell High School
Campbell High School
Canberra High School
Caroline Chisholm School (senior site)
Duffy Primary and Preschool
Fraser Primary and Preschool
Giralang Primary and Preschool
Gold Creek School
Gowrie Primary and Preschool
Hall Preschool
Harrison School
Hawker College
Hawker Primary and Preschool
Isabella Plains early Childhood School
Jervis Bay Primary School
Kaleen High School
Kaleen Primary and Preschool
Lake Ginninderra College
Lake Tuggeranong College
Macgregor Primary and Preschool
Malkara School
Maribyrnong Primary and Preschool
Melba Copland Secondary School (both campuses)
Mt. Rogers School and Melba Preschool
Richardson Primary and Preschool
Tharwa Preschool (Charles Conder Primary)
The Woden School

warnings. All schools have their own mobile phone policies and if parents want this policy to change they need to lobby their school board and Principal.

Students will be notified during the day by school staff if any areas of the ACT are closed by the ESA. This will allow students who may live in those areas to activate their family's personal plans and not attempt to return home from school to a hazardous Bush fire situation. ●

AEU National Conference

(Continued from page 3)

ures actually meant or *why* some schools' students performed better than others ('Tassie high school rankings', *The Mercury*, 6 May 2009). Adding the amount of funding or number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds per school might have painted a very different picture of why some schools appear 'better' than others.

The AEU is demanding laws that would prevent such misuse of the *My Schools* information. Currently, such laws exist in NSW, which bans the publication of material that ranks schools and imposes substantial fines. The AEU national executive will meet in mid-April to decide whether the government has taken adequate measures to prevent the abuse of NAPLAN data. If not, its members will not administer the tests, which are scheduled for May.

The rallying cry of media commentators in favour of ranking schools has been the call for transparency in school performance. The *Australian* recently speculated that the AEU was opposed to league tables because of selfish cronyism in protecting under-performing teachers from scrutiny (Editorial, 'Top of the class for selfishness', *The Australian*, 18 January 2010). However, flying the banner of accountability and questioning teachers' motives is largely a smoke-screen. Commentators and editors relying on catchcries of 'transparency' and 'accountability' have to face up to their peers' record, which inspires no confidence. In their zeal to improve schools through competition and transparency, they have done more harm than good.

P&C Council has always opposed the creation of simplistic league tables. They do not tell parents anything useful. Rather, they humiliate students and schools, drive students from low-ranking schools and thus worsen the situation there, and narrow the curriculum by prompting teachers to 'teach to the test'. They have failed to improve education in England and the USA. In this respect, the AEU's stance is, at least in principle, to be admired.

At the same time, NAPLAN results have been an additional aid to parents, both in trying to understand their child's individual progress and in encouraging constructive conversations with

their child's teacher. The additional data that was provided last year with individual students' results was extremely well-received by ACT parents. Parents whose children sat NAPLAN in 2008 want to see how their children's growth is reflected in their 2010 individual NAPLAN results

For these reasons, P&C Council takes no issue with NAPLAN testing, which parents wish to continue. *My School* provides valuable information about schools for parents. Council's objection is to the possibility that the data could be abused. It is official Council policy that:

Where governments make information on the performance of individual schools publicly available, then they should then put in place legislative protections to ensure that this information cannot be used in a way that could do harm to individual students or school communities. Protections would cover, for example, use of the information by the media, companies or schools themselves to create league tables or 'rank and rate' websites for media sensationalism or for commercial gain (Council Policy Document, Policy G4).

We have reiterated many times that Andrew Barr and Julia Gillard, the territory and federal Ministers for Education (pictured, p. 1) need to take measures to prevent third parties from re-arranging complex data and creating simple, harmful league tables.

If either NAPLAN does not go ahead or there is no legal protection to prevent abuse of the results, the much-hyped stoush between the AEU and the federal government will have no real winner, only victims: the students whose best interests all parties claim to have at heart.

At the same time, the highly marketable and polarising conflict between a union and a Labor government cannot be allowed to obscure other issues that the AEU has raised. The federal government is currently presiding over an unfair distribution of federal funds that is completely without precedent, and which, for the sake of public education across Australia, cannot continue. ●

Parents "C" Average Ministers

(Continued from page 1)

"Likewise, the ACT Education Minister received an overwhelming C-grade. Not one parent responded with an A-grade. Parents are simply not impressed with any aspect of the ACT Government's performance," she said

"In relation to how well our schools are preparing our children to participate in a 21st century workforce, most parents rated a "B" or a "C". This grade should alert schools and Department of Education and Training Chief Executive Dr Jim Watterston that parents consider schools need to change what and how they are teaching their students, in order to make their education more relevant to the skills our children will need in the future," she said.

The following issues were identified as important factors for the future of public education:

- Improved parent partnerships;
- Increased funding;
- The media image of public education;
- Schools as communities;
- Setting a maximum class size;
- Better teachers;
- Increased opportunities to use technology;
- More choice in the curriculum; and
- More choice of schools.

This supports Council's assertion that schools that do not have in place a plan to improve the parent-school partnership are less attractive to parents. Parents believe that research in education shows students' grades and outcomes can be greatly improved when these partnerships are improved. Council is hopeful that the research and publications of the Family - School Partnership Bureau (www.familyschool.org.au) will influence the directions that school principals, boards and communities take.

In 2009, our P&Cs were involved in School canteens (in future this will change as many P&Cs withdraw from canteen management due to onerous new accreditation standards), fundraising activities, breakfast clubs and improving school-parent partnerships. However, only a few P&Cs were involved in decisions about school values, school-based curriculum decisions, and subject choice.

Parents continually emphasise to Council that they want to be more active participants in decisions the school makes concerning their child's education. Less than half the P&Cs polled stated they were involved in this way! This appears as the only split in the complete set of questions on the poll and it is very disappointing to see. It will be an important issue for Council to address in 2010.

Out of a list of commonly cited problems and issues that our schools faced in 2009, the highest polled were:

- Lack of funding;
- Lack of resources;
- Lack of subject specific trained teachers;
- Poor school/parent communication;
- Lack of academic standards;
- Too much emphasis on NAPLAN results; and
- Bullying/cyberbullying;

The problems that appeared at the bottom of this list are:

- Violence;
- Racism;
- Drug abuse amongst children; and
- Religious intolerance.

The poll confirms that ACT parents feel that public schools are under-funded and resourced, and that while they do a good job with what is available to them, they do not get anywhere near the support that they need from the ACT and federal governments. Council hopes that improvements will be made during 2010, and that this is reflected in Council's next poll. ●

Standing Up For Public Education

The High Court of Australia is well-known, and sometimes criticised, for its unusual homogeneity as compared to wider Australian society. Of its 48 justices, only four have been women, and only one has been from either a non-Christian or non-Anglo-Celtic background. Less obviously, most judges have been educated in private schools – only around a quarter attended a public school at some point in their childhood.

For this reason, a former High Court judge is not the first figure that one would expect to see as a vocal champion of public education and a critic of its public denigration and underfunding. However, since his retirement in February 2009, the Hon. Michael Kirby AC CMG has spoken publicly several times about the debt that he owes to Australia's system of public schools and the opportunities that it afforded him. Justice Kirby attended several Sydney public schools before graduating from Fort Street High School, which is Australia's second oldest school.

On 1 December 2009, Mr. Kirby addressed Melbourne High School's speech night, delivering a speech entitled 'In Praise of Excellence in Public Education'. Kirby identified three core ideas inherent in public education: that it would be free, compulsory and secular. Obvious though they may seem now, these were radical ideas in the 19th century Antipodean colonies. Schooling was the sole preserve of the wealthy, and education was largely church-administered. Opponents, Kirby notes, either scoffed at the idea of universal public education, or else tarred it with the brush of 'socialism'.

To these foundational values Mr. Kirby adds two

more that have flourished with time: excellence, and egalitarianism. Far from the microcosm of British, white Australia that Kirby described when he spoke of attending school in the 1940s, public schools across Australia now educate students of all races, religions and backgrounds, regardless of any disadvantage or disability they might have. What is more, it has done so with remarkable success in a variety of fields. Public schools have produced four Nobel laureates, three of the last four Prime Ministers, outstanding sportsmen and women, and indeed, despite the dominance of private schools on the High Court, one Chief Justice of Australia.

Justice Kirby's call for those who enjoyed a public education to speak out on its behalf is timely in the current climate. As he noted, private schools receive over their allotment of funding from the current model of federal, grant-based funding. Mere weeks ago, Dr Jim McMorrow revealed that under the current model, by 2013 a private sector that educates a third of Australian children will receive 64% of federal funding (see page 3).

Given this revelation, Justice Kirby's call for friends of public education to 'blog, twitter, text, lobby and argue' is more urgent than ever. It is obvious that having public school alumni in high places is insufficient. The current and previous Prime Ministers both had a public education, and both have presided over steadily worsening inequity of federal funding. ●

Much of Mr. Kirby's speech was later published as an editorial in the Age, entitled 'Stop bagging public education'. It is available at www.theage.com.au/opinion/politics/stop-bagging-public-education-20091202-k4y4.html



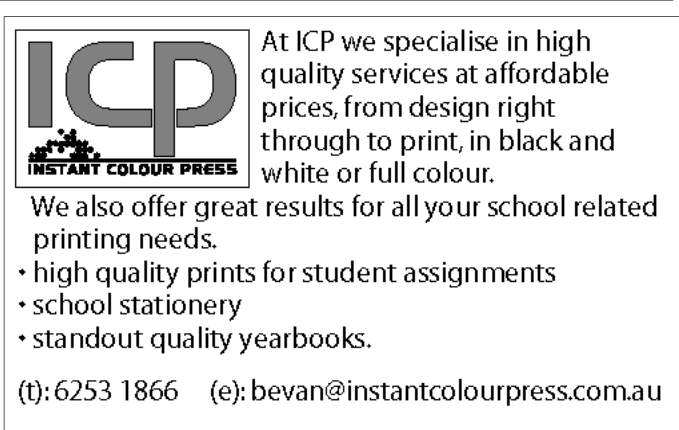
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News from schools

Council wishes the best of luck to everyone starting out at new schools in 2010. Whether you are a student or a parent coming into a new school, a teacher who has transferred or new to the profession, may 2010 be an exciting and rewarding year.

Likewise, Council wishes the best of luck to those who finished their schooling in 2009! Whether you are heading off the university, starting an apprenticeship or entering the workforce, we hope that you enjoy the next chapter of your life.

Council was very sorry to hear that the library at **Calwell Primary School** was destroyed by fire on the night of 21 January. The loss of vital school property and the enormous damage bill a mere week before the beginning of the school year is a tragedy. Council wishes Calwell staff and students all the best, and hopes the cause of the fire - which police believe was deliberately lit - can be swiftly determined.

Resources

Council's parent organisation, the **Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO)**, produces a number of email newsletters that may be of interest to parents. These newsletters provide links to articles that people with an interest in education may find useful.

ACSSO's main newsletter is the weekly *Australian Education Digest*, but it also distributes less frequent specialty publications including *Ensemble* (which focuses on music education), *Languages Education in Australia*, *International News Roundup* and *Values in Education*.

Each of these publications is free. Links to subscribe to each of them can be found in the publications section of the ACSSO website, www.acsso.org.au/publications. Each newsletter has its own icon in the bar on the left-hand side of the screen.

The **Family-School & Community Partnerships Bureau**, which is partly run by ACSSO, also publishes its own newsletter, *Family School Partners*. The option to sign up is available from the front page of its website, www.familyschool.org.au. The Family-School & Community Partnerships Bureau was established to 'encourage greater parental engagement and community involvement in schools'.

ParentLink is an ACT government service that aims to promote positive parenting in the ACT. It is 'designed to increase parents' confidence and skills by supporting and linking them with a network of information, ideas and community services'. The ParentLink Website, www.parentlink.act.gov.au, provides links to parenting guides, services, events, courses and activities designed to assist parents.



Skwirk.com.au is an educational website providing syllabus-aligned resources for school students in years 1-10. By logging on to Skwirk, students, teachers and parents can find a wealth of information, including videos, games, animations and activities, relevant to what they are studying at school, all in one safe and engaging online environment.

Skwirk's content focuses on the key learning areas of Maths, English, Science, HSIE, Humanities, Civics & Citizenship, Geography, History and Commerce. It uniquely caters to various learning styles by providing textual, aural and visual content. And because it's a website, it's available whenever you and your children need it, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, for homework, projects, revision and general study.

Parents

Parents can purchase individual subscriptions for \$115 for 12 months.

Teachers

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Noticeboard

'Education is a better safeguard of liberty than a standing army' - Edward Everett



23 February	Council General Meeting Hughes Community Centre, Wisdom Street, Hughes. 7-30-10.30 pm.
8 March	Canberra Day Public Holiday
23 March	Council General Meeting Hughes Community Centre, Wisdom Street, Hughes. 7.30-10.30 pm.
2 April	Good Friday Public Holiday
5 April	Easter Monday Public Holiday
9 April	Last Day of Term 1

Copy deadline for the next edition of
FEEDBACK: 20 January 2010
All contributions welcome.

WANT SOME IDEAS ON HOW TO GET YOUR P&C RUNNING SMOOTHLY?

Get some tips on:

Agenda
Issues management
Getting parents involved
Fundraising ideas
An easy website
Informed decision making
Insurance issues & responsibilities

Schools & Communities in Partnership (SCIP) is a sub-committee of the P&C Council and its representatives can visit your P&C to help you.

- We would like an information session at our P&C
- Yes, we would be willing to have P&C representatives from three other local schools attend our session

School: _____

Contact: _____

Please mail this slip to: **ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations**
PO Box 4741, HIGGINS ACT 2615