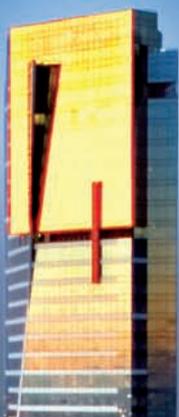


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ET highlights

Education Revolution in our Schools?

The Rudd Government has launched the next chapter in its Education Revolution. The key points of the plan are: improving the quality of teaching; measuring school performance; and helping disadvantages school communities. By appealing directly to parents, the PM is aiming to sidestep entrenched power groups. Educators can look forward to some determined armwrestling in the months to come.

School enrolment and attendance legislation

Legislation has been introduced to Parliament that will link welfare payments to school enrolment and attendance.

Introducing the legislation, federal Education Minister, Julia Gillard, said that it will give the Government power in eight trial communities to suspend welfare payments if students aren't going to school, as a last resort

But she says it is "a long way before we get to that stick".

"What we're saying is, first off, if you are an income support beneficiary, if you get a welfare payment from the Government, you will need to show Centrelink that your child is enrolled at school," she said.

"Now that's not going to be a hard thing to do. I mean, at the end of the day it's a legal obligation to make sure kids are enrolled at school."

The evidence shows that there are around 20 000 Australian kids who aren't enrolled or aren't regularly attending school.

The program will initially be trialled in eight sites affecting around 3300 children and if these are successful the legislation will allow for the national roll out of the policy.

Jenny Macklin, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, has already announced a number of sites where this measure will be trialled. Six of these sites will be in the Northern Territory, and two will be metropolitan sites including Cannington in Western Australia.

Gillard says: "School choice is guesswork"

Federal Education Minister, Julia Gillard, says parents have no guarantee their child's school meets a minimum standard of education, acknowledging that choosing the best school is little more than guesswork.

In an interview with *The Weekend Australian*, she said parents choosing a school for their child were forced to rely on rumour and prejudice, rather than being able to make a decision based on facts. "A lot of guessing goes into the

decision and there should be more objective information," she said.

"Giving full information to people would mean that they can know what's going on and, rather than judging individual schools or school systems on the basis of myths, rumour, prejudice or perception, people would have the facts."

Education unions ads ask for more public school funds

The NSW Teachers Federation has placed a half page advertisement on page 2 of *The Sydney Morning Herald* and the Australian Education Union has placed a full page advertisement on page 7 of *The Australian*, calling on the federal Government to invest more in public education.

The ad is headed "An Education Revolution that cuts public school funding? Australia can't afford it, Mr Rudd."

The AEU has also released a new report by Dr Jim McMorrow, *Reviewing the evidence: Issues in Commonwealth funding of government and non-government schools in the Howard and Rudd years*. The report finds that, without urgent action, Federal Government public school funding will be cut in real terms within three years based on current budget projections.

\$40 million promised for literacy and numeracy

The Prime Minister and the Minister for Education officially launched National Literacy and Numeracy Week 2008 by announcing a \$40 million literacy and numeracy initiative.

The Rudd Government will invest \$40.2 million in 29 literacy and numeracy pilot projects in schools across Australia.

These pilots will trial or expand initiatives that exemplify strategies to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for those students most in need of support, in government and non-government schools.

More school time for NT trainee teachers

The Department of Education and Training is working with Charles Darwin University to

establish teaching schools that deliver quality classroom-based learning for preservice teachers.

A significant increase to the number of days spent in the classroom will mean prospective teachers spend more time in schools, from as early as the sixth week of their teaching degree.

Better learning environments needed for the 21st century

The NSW Teachers Federation says that many of the ideas announced by the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, in his recent National Press Club speech drew on policies from the previous Federal Government or failed ideas from the United States and the United Kingdom.

The announcements will not make any systematic or system-wide difference. While there will be some extra money for certain designated schools, there will not be enough to provide public schools with the infrastructure and learning environments necessary for the 21st century, the Federation says.

Too much testing makes Jack a dull boy?

Do Australian students need an additional round of tests?

The question arises after Geoff Masters, the head of the Australian Council for Education Research, received widespread coverage for his call for increased nationwide testing and Education Minister Julia Gillard created more headlines by arguing that school performance data should be made public.

Given Ms Gillard's intention to hold schools accountable for improving learning outcomes, it is also not surprising that Professor Masters wants all Australian students to demonstrate "minimally acceptable levels of proficiency across a range of essential skills and understandings" by the time they leave school.

Phone a friend – welcome to the new face of exams

Educators have backed a NSW school's controversial decision to allow students to use the internet and iPods during an English exam.

Year 9 students at Presbyterian Ladies' College in Sydney used the technology – and were even permitted to phone a friend for help – as part of a series of 40-minute tasks. To discourage plagiarism, they were required to cite all their sources.

English teacher Dierdre Coleman, who coordinated the school's pilot program, believes

the use of technology has the potential to change the way examinations for the NSW Higher School Certificate are run.

Authors awarded for excellence in language and literacy development

Speech Pathology Australia has awarded four authors for excellence in the development of children's speech, language and literacy skills.

Pamela Allen (*Is your Grandmother a Goanna?*), Nadia Wheatley and illustrator, Ken Searle (*Going Bush*), and Jenni Overend (*Stride's Summer*) received one of Speech Pathology Australia's 2008 Book of the Year Awards.

Research makes maths breakthrough

Basic mathematical ability appears to be innate, or hard-wired into the human brain, according to an international study.

The research found that outback Aboriginal children with only a few number words in their language can still "count" just as well as children that speak English as their native language.

The results of the joint study by University College London and Melbourne University, challenges notions that we need language in order to think and count.

It also suggests that mathematical disabilities such as dyscalculia, the little known maths version of dyslexia, is a genetic or neurological disorder rather than a memory or language deficiency. The results have been published in the Washington-based journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

The secret to higher exam scores – homework!

Children of Asian parents, particularly Chinese, have long stood out in Australia with their high scores in the VCE and other final-year examinations. Now a new study has found the secret to their success: it begins in the home and the way their parents teach them good study habits from an early age.

In the first investigation of its kind, researchers at the University of Western Sydney looked at how children from different ethnic groups in their fourth year at primary school reacted in class and how much homework they did after school. Among students aged eight and nine, Chinese children spent more time on their homework and did more of it more regularly than Anglo-Australians or pupils from Pacific island families.

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