



Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of New South Wales

e-Bulletin

Tuesday, 10 February 2009 – Edition 31

THIS WEEK'S THOUGHT – Di Giblin

We live in rather interesting and often exciting times

BONUS FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

In last week's announcement by the Federal Government, Public Education in NSW looks to benefit a sum of around \$3.5 billion. In a package announced to stimulate the Australian economy and create jobs for Australians one of the key benefactors is education.

The key stakeholders in Public Education (Primary Principals Association; Secondary Principals council; Public School Principals Forum; NSW Teachers Federation and NSW P&C Federation) met with the Minister and the Director General yesterday to discuss the process that would be taken in order to distribute this money.

The key message to all is that this money is to be injected into the economy in a short timeframe - it is about creating jobs and stimulating the economy – education is the winner of this.

The Minister and the Director –General were firm on the fact that community will be consulted but my message to you is that it needs to be done expediently. Projects that are unable to reach milestones in a specified time will not be funded – money will be withdrawn and distributed elsewhere where it can be demonstrated that timelines can be met

The DET is currently designing the application process and materials, in conjunction with all of the stakeholder groups. Application forms and detailed information will be schools by late next week.

Each school will be provided with a list of major and minor capital works and repair projects that the school community has previously identified as priorities not included in the current work schedule.

School communities will then be asked to either affirm these priorities or submit a revised list.

The Director –General's memorandum can be found at: <http://www.pandc.org.au/> under the Political Alerts and Latest News section.

SCHOOL LEAVING AGE

The first day of school for students was met with the announcement from Premier Rees that legislation was to be drafted to raise the school leaving age to 17.

Federation reiterated this time that research clearly acknowledges that the longer a young person stays at school the better opportunities they are afforded in later life. But in order for this to be successful there needs to be commitment by governments to not only raise the leaving age but to ensure that education remains current, well resourced, relevant and engaging and that there are plenty of options, pathways and equity of access for all . This is clearly something that needs to be addressed beginning at support for pre-schoolers and access to pre-school right through the learning continuum.

The Premier's release can be found: <http://www.pandc.org.au/political-alerts.seo>

P&C DAY

Don't forget to take the opportunity to celebrate the work of your P&C Day on March 4th. P&C Associations not only support schools by raising much needed additional funds but continue to be partners in education delivery and support.

Take the time to reflect on the work of P&C Associations and the value contribution they make in building communities

Take care
Di Giblin 2009.

EDUCATIONAL TAX REFUND

The Educational Tax Refund allows families to claim for certain costs of educating their primary and secondary school children where eligibility requirements are met. The first claim under the ETR can be made for the income year 1 July 2008 to 30 June 2009. This claim can be made from 1 July 2009. The refund can only be claimed through the Tax Office. Claimants are expected to retain receipts for the purchases of items for which they intend to claim the ETR.

Eligibility:

If you care for a child:

You can claim under the Education Tax Refund (ETR) if during the income year you had eligible education expenses and:

- You received family tax benefit (FTB) Part A for the child
Or
- A payment was made for the child which stopped you from receiving FTB Part A
Or
- Your child stopped full-time school during the year and received income from the cut-out amount which stopped you from receiving FTB Part A
And
- The child was in primary and/or secondary school

You do not need to be eligible for the entire year. You can claim the refund for any periods that you were eligible.

Eligible education expenses:

You can claim the cost of buying, establishing, repairing and running any of the following items:

- Laptop computers and home computers
- Computer-related equipment such as printers, USB flash drives, as well as disability aids to assist in the use of computer equipment for students with special needs
- Home internet connections
- Computer software for education use including word processing, spreadsheet, database and presentation software; and internet filters and antivirus software
- School textbooks and other paper based school learning material, including prescribed textbooks, associated learning materials, study guides and stationery, and
- Prescribed trade tools.

For more information please see <http://www.educationtaxrefund.gov.au/>

TV, VIDEO GAMES INCREASE RISK OF DEPRESSION IN TEENS

Teenagers who spend a lot of time watching TV or playing video games are at higher risk of developing depression as young adults, a study has found.

American researchers looked at the viewing habits of 4142 healthy adolescents and followed them up seven years later, by which time 308 had developed depression.

When the study began in 1995, DVDs and the internet were not widely available and the teenagers used different electronic media for about 5.7 hours a day on average.

This included 2.3 hours of television, 2.3 hours of radio, 0.6 hours of video cassettes and 0.4 hours of computer games.

The study, published in the journal *Archives of General Psychiatry*, found that each additional hour of daily television viewing significantly increased the risk of depression.

The team leader, Professor Brian Primack, of the University of Pittsburgh, said the results did not prove TV viewing caused depression.

"It could be argued that people with the predilection for later development of depression also happen to have a predilection for watching lots of TV."

But the circumstantial evidence suggesting TV was the culprit was strong, he said.

Less time spent on school work or sport could lead to lower achievement, which could result in lower self-esteem.

But parents "should not just immediately turn off the power", Professor McDermott said.

They could plan family activities that involved exercise, encourage their teenager to see friends or join in with them. "Watching shows on TV as part of a family could lead to a discourse."

An adolescent psychologist, Michael Carr-Gregg, said that one of the first signs of depression was withdrawal.

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/lifematters/tv-video-games-warning-for-teens/2009/02/03/1233423223262.html>

STUDENTS TOLD TO CUT PART-TIME JOB HOURS

Some secondary students are too tired to turn up to school after working a late shift the night before.

Others are not managing the stress associated with juggling a part-time job with their Higher School Certificate studies.

In response to the growing concern, the NSW Minister for Education, Verity Firth, will today encourage students to strike a better work-life balance to avoid unnecessary stress.

Higher School Certificate students in particular would be urged to sit down with their parents and employers to plan a sustainable schedule to ensure they were not at risk of being overwhelmed by their part-time job and study commitments.

Teachers will be referred to a new 24-page document on the Department of Education website for advice on detecting signs of stress, depression and excessive tiredness in students.

More than 103,000 NSW students aged 15 to 19 participate in full-time work while undertaking full-time study, according to Australian Bureau of Statistics figures cited by the NSW Government.

"With the start of the new school year, students should take the time now to set out a roster that balances time for their schooling and studies and their responsibilities with their part-time work," Ms Firth said.

"We know more and more young people are taking on part-time work in addition to their studies, which is a fulfilling commitment, but we've seen some cases where students have taken on too much at once.

The minister's office has also received reports from schools that some students are not balancing their work commitments and study, creating unnecessary pressure and stress.

"The message we want to get to kids and parents is planning now will save on stress later on. The HSC is already a stressful period for students, especially year 12, and if you can roster your work and plan your study you will reduce the stress," a spokesman for Ms Firth said.

The minister said she did not want to discourage students from participating in part-time work because it helped them develop a work ethic.

However, it should not come at too great a cost.

"We know a part-time job is important for students to develop a sense of responsibility and earn an income, but it shouldn't come at the expense of their studies," she said.

Signs of fatigue and stress that parents and teachers are being encouraged to look out for in students include extreme irritability or sensitivity, change in friendship patterns and withdrawal from contact with others, difficulty with concentrating and being consistently late for school.

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/students-told-to-cut-parttime-job-hours/2009/02/03/1233423223155.html>

FAMILIES TO RECEIVE BACK-TO-SCHOOL BONUS

Low- and middle-income families will receive a \$950 back-to-school bonus for each child to help pay for books, bags, uniforms and other education costs.

Available for children aged four to 18, the \$2.6 billion package is aimed at cushioning the blow for parents hit by the global financial crisis.

It will assist about 1.2 million families who receive Family Tax Benefit Part A.

The Government hopes the money will be spent quickly to provide a much-needed jolt to the economy.

It is one of five \$950 one-off payments for low- and middle-income earners.

Coming on top of the \$10.4 billion stimulus package announced last year, the bonuses would help those groups most affected by the flow-on effects of the global recession, Mr. Rudd said.

The support will come on top of payments already provided through the Education Tax Refund, which has allowed families since July last year to claim a 50 per cent refund for education expenses, up to \$750 for primary school students and \$1500 for high school students.

Australian Parents Council executive director Ian Dalton, who represents parents of children at independent schools, welcomed the back-to-school bonus.

He said there was evidence many families were already struggling to meet education costs as a result of the economic downturn.

"We would greatly support any move to assist parents in these hard economic times just as they're getting their children back to school," he said.

"A number of non-government schools in particular have said they are setting aside additional sums this year to enable some parents, who need fee reductions, to be supported."

"Clearly, eligible parents will benefit from this," the spokesman said.

"We welcome the inclusive nature -- the fact that government and non-government school parents are eligible for this bonus.

"That's a positive for us."

<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,25005469-5013871,00.html>

CHILD SERVICES 'SHOULD ACT ON EXTREME OBESITY CASES'

Professor Collins says the controversial idea of taxing fattening foods is still the best option in fighting obesity.

A group of paediatric specialists is calling for child protective services to become involved in cases of severely overweight children.

Dr Shirley Alexander from Westmead Children's Hospital has co-authored a report for the Australian Medical Journal, connecting child obesity to child abuse.

She says there are cases of children who are extremely obese for their age group, sometimes up to three times the normal weight range.

"We are not advocating involving child protection services in every single child that is mildly or moderately overweight," she said.

"These are rare extreme cases and I would just like to say also that when you involve child protection services, it doesn't automatically mean immediately that the child is going to be taken away from the family.

"What we are saying is that we need to start having some options, because we get to a stage where our options are running out and we are not able to help these families for whatever reasons. Either the parents are unable or unwilling to follow the advice from the weight management program."

But with overstretched childcare protection services and reports of child abuse cases going under the radar until a tragedy happens, the chances of welfare workers agreeing to take on an even bigger workload are slim.

Dr Alexander concedes there are child abuse cases that would be considered more urgent than obesity, but she told ABC Radio's AM program it is something that cannot be ignored.

"Obviously there are cases where very urgent and immediate intervention is often required and therefore these are felt to be more important, but we are saying it is also important to look at some of the other, more later chronic effects," she said.

"Some of these children in other countries have been known to actually die because of their obesity and the complications of their obesity, so it can be also an urgent issue as well."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/02/02/2480100.htm?section=features>

ENROLMENTS ON THE RISE TO BUCK THE TREND

Some universities are even predicting a boom year ahead as the world slips further into recession.

The latest 2009 enrolment figures, compiled by a group of university directors of international education and obtained by the HES, suggest that the global economic crisis will trigger a flight to higher education.

Information shared by 20 international directors comparing the number of places accepted by international students in the last week of January with the corresponding number last year reveals a rise in student numbers.

Three universities are reporting static commencements compared with last year, and one a slight decline. But 16 universities report increases of between 10 per cent and 15 per cent, while some are seeing much larger rises.

Growth in postgraduate coursework is understood to be running at about 10 per cent, while research intensive universities are reporting double digit growth in new international research students.

Two factors, however, caution against over-reliance on the information gathered by international directors. First, a number of universities declined to share enrolment figures with the group. Second, international students appear to be taking advantage of the downturn in the value of the dollar by paying the first instalment of their fees earlier.

Despite these caveats the international director of a big metropolitan university, who declined to be named, told the HES: "The magnitude of the increase at this point is a clear indicator that the growth in international enrolments in the higher education sector in Australia is not slowing. We may well be looking at a continuation of the same strong level of growth that the sector experienced in 2008."

He added that education in Asia was an essential expenditure not unlike a household staple, and a high proportion of families would continue to make sacrifices to give their children a university degree from an English-speaking country.

The university sector's bullish predictions come in the week that Navitas, the global education services provider, announced a record interim profit for the half year ended December 31, 2008, on the back of strong revenue increases across all group operations.

Net profit after tax increased by 15 per cent to \$19 million, underpinned by a 34 per cent rise in total group revenue to \$217.4million. .

"We are seeing increases from the majority of our source markets," Professor Smart said.

The University of South Australia's director international, Rob Greig, said the outlook for international student enrolments was encouraging.

<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,25004192-12332,00.html>



STEWART HOUSE DAY

STEWART HOUSE est. 1931

Friday 8th May 2009

STEWART HOUSE
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www.stewarhouse.org.au

P & C and school community groups get behind school fundraising for Stewart House

Your organisation's chance to win a \$4,000 Teachers Credit Union account. Tally up all monies collected by your school for Stewart House before Friday 29th May 2009 and submit your entry. The winner will be based on the most money collected per student (using 2008 school census enrolment figures and funds received by Stewart House as at 29th May 2009).

Raising money for Stewart House is easy! Your school can purchase Stewart House merchandise, participate in the donation drive or organise a Stewart House Day unique fundraiser. Visit www.stewarhouse.org.au for further information.

To enter the Stewart House Day Promotion for your organisation's chance to win a \$4,000 Teachers Credit Union account, please complete the following:

SCHOOL NAME:	_____
SUPPORTING BODY:	_____
	(name to appear on TCU account)

School enrolment (as at 2008 census):		Stewart House use
TOTAL amount raised for Stewart House : (from 27 January – 31 May 2009)	\$	Checked by:
		Date:

We confirm these figures are accurate and agree for the above organisation to participate in the Stewart House competition.

Principal's name: _____ signature: _____

President/Chairperson's name _____ signature _____

The principal of the winning school (based on the most money collected per student over the specified period) will be contacted by 19 June 2009.

Please return by fax to Stewart House: 02 9907 1638

Closing date:

Friday 5 June 2009



SCHOOLS RAKE IN FUNDS WINDFALL

A \$14.7BILLION education blueprint that upgrades the nation's 9540 schools will seek to address the funding neglect of the past decade and remove the "bureaucratic roadblocks" that have stalled much-needed improvements to education facilities.

Principals, teachers and unions welcomed Labor's decision to include non-government schools in the massive investment program, predicting it would minimise further delays in improving school infrastructure.

Unions predict government schools will soak up 70 per cent of the funds. A total of \$12.4 billion will be spent on upgrading primary schools, including libraries and multi-purpose halls. A further \$1 billion will be used to build 500 new science laboratories and language learning centres in schools with a demonstrated need and an ability to complete construction by June 30 next year.

An additional \$1.3 billion will be used to refurbish existing buildings. Under this program, all schools will receive up to \$200,000, based on the size of the school, for maintenance and minor building works.

Major facilities in primary schools that are built or upgraded -- such as halls or indoor sporting centers -- will have to be available for community use at no or low-cost. The federal Government will also bring forward up to \$110million to fund proposals in round two of Labor's Trade Training Centers in Schools Program.

Australian Primary Principals Association executive director Terry Kulich said the strategy was a "remarkable investment" that would stimulate jobs and improve education.

He welcomed the decision to make the funding available to primary schools across all sectors. "We think that's fair and we believe the Government is trying to make it an effective program without bureaucratic roadblocks," he said.

"Their aim is to deliver to the schools with minimum fuss and as quickly as possible. And there are areas of the primary system, both in private and the public, where there is a great deal of need and that has been recognised in this package.

"By making it apply to all schools, you are not in a position to pick and choose according to a wide variety of criteria and keeping it simple is the way to go."

The Australian Education Union said the package would provide an important economic stimulus and allow schools to engage in urgent upgrades and develop modern learning

environments. "There is a public school in every single community right across Australia," the union's federal president Angelo Gavrielatos said. "Therefore, the reach of this economic stimulus package will be far and wide."

<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,25005635-5013871,00.html>

OPPOSITION WANTS DRIVER EDUCATION IN ALL HIGH SCHOOLS

The New South Wales Opposition roads spokesman is calling on the State Government to introduce driver education in all high schools to help reduce the road toll.

A Lismore teenager was sentenced last week to four years in jail for killing his four friends in a car crash in 2006 in the state's north.

The driver, who was 17 at the time, lost control of the car when he went faster than his restricted provisional-one licence speed of 90 kilometres an hour.

Andrew Stoner says driver education programs are effective when young people hear directly from victims, families and emergency services.

"I think we need to get inside the heads of some of these young drivers," he said.

"The psychology is extremely important in this.

"Young people have got to understand that there are very serious consequences of driving irresponsibly.

"In many schools we do have programs of this type and they have proven effective."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/02/02/2479993.htm>

NSW TEACHERS WILL BE GIVEN LAPTOPS UNDER \$44 MILLION PLAN

First it was students, now NSW's public high school teachers will receive their own wireless laptop computer as part of the State Government's plan to create "the clever state".

The \$44 million roll-out to 25,000 teachers is funded by both the State and Federal Government and will begin this year and be completed by 2012.

The announcement comes on top of a mini laptop program for NSW's 197,000 senior high school students launched last year.

"This is about helping teachers plan and deliver lessons on the net," Premier Nathan Rees said.

"This means students and teachers will be using the same laptop, giving teachers the tools to electronically plan and deliver lessons and work with the students in the classroom using the same technology.

The computers are being promoted as a useful teaching aid and, as with students; teachers will not be able to access social networking sites Myspace or Facebook – both sites banned by the education department server.

Teachers will use the laptops to compare student results from around the state and tailor lessons according to students' progress.

The \$44 million spend will include \$28 million of federal money to educate the teachers on how to use the technology.

Education Minister Verity Firth played down speculation the take-home laptops would increase an already heavy workload for the state's public high school teachers.

"I don't believe it's going to add any more or any less of what is expected from our teachers already," Ms Firth said.

<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,24992240-26103,00.html>

TEACHERS UNDER PRESSURE TO CHALK UP HIGH ATTENDANCE: UNION

Chief Minister Paul Henderson and Education Minister Marion Scrymgour visit Top End school to make new education announcement.

The Australian Education Union (AEU) says the Northern Territory government's 90 per cent school attendance benchmark is unachievable in many remote areas and puts too much pressure on teachers.

The government wants all public schools in the Northern Territory to have at least 90 per cent student attendance by the end of the year.

Government figures show 26 of 150 Northern Territory public schools recorded 90 per cent or greater attendance last year.

The Northern Territory branch of the AEU says some remote schools won't be able to make the target in such a short time period.

The union's NT secretary, Adam Lampe, says educators are being made the scapegoats for the government's failings.

"This is a strategy of government to deflect the blame from where it really belongs," he says.

Mr. Lampe says he's also concerned about the ramifications for school principals who don't achieve the high attendance figures and the morale of their staff.

A group representing parents and teachers says it wasn't consulted about the Territory government's move to make schools accountable for student attendance.

The Council of Government School Organisations' (COGSO) Michael Duffy says they haven't been given details of the policy

"I think the interest in attendance is exaggerated," he says.

"I think there should be a lot more interest paid to reforming the system to make schools to work better."

A spokeswoman for the Education Minister says the government meets with COGSO regularly.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/02/03/2481290.htm>

AN EDUCATION IN SAVING

Start early to ensure you meet the ever-increasing cost of educating your children.

The costs of educating children just keep rising. The most expensive schools charge about \$25,000 a year and continue to increase their fees by up to 8 per cent a year. This year, some have responded to the tough times and limited their increases to less than inflation, but most haven't. And the figures can be daunting.

Parents who elect to send their child to a private high school face a bill of up to \$150,000 for six years. Even public schools are not free. But stumping up education costs does not need to break the bank providing you start a disciplined savings regime early enough.

Which investment options you choose will depend on how long you have before starting to meet those costs. Parents who start a savings plan at the birth of their child will be best off because they are allowing compounding to do its work. And the bigger the initial investment, the better.

But there are strategies for those who need to make up for lost time too. Apart from the time-frame, the other big factor is the level of control parents want.

Education-specific savings plans need the least input from parents. But if they want more control and flexibility they have to be prepared to put in the work needed to manage their investment.

While there are plenty of investment options, most have fees attached, which for managed funds can be as much as 2 per cent a year. And then there is tax.

For many parents, the best product may be the one they already have if they wish to avoid these additional costs and taxes - their mortgage. Making high extra repayments early on and redrawing the money when school fees are needed, might be the simplest, most effective approach.

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/business/money/investment/an-education-in-saving/2009/02/02/1233423134292.html>

International News

EDUCATION REGULATION

The Ministry of Education is concerned with the lack of regulation in the education sector to control standards and quality.

Interim Minister Filipe Bole said the current lack of control offered no protection to the student and the community.

"The ministry embarked on the urgent task to establish the Higher Education Commission (HEC) for the central role of regulating the higher education sector in a Fiji," he said.

Mr. Bole said the Commission would ensure that tertiary institutes contributed to the nation's social, economic, political and cultural progress.

"Our liberal and free approach to the provision of higher education will encourage an over proliferation of higher education institutions, especially from overseas," he said.

"These 'crowd out' the local providers and create a situation of over-supply that will further breed other issues."

The Higher Education Commission will ensure that higher education institutions contribute to the nation's social, economic, political and cultural progress by providing high quality education and training that meet current and future development needs of the nation.

Fiji Teachers Union general secretary Agni Deo Singh said there were a host of higher education providers in the country and there needed to be some standards and quality control.

He said there was also a need to look into the cost of higher education and how education providers advertise their products.

"For example private education providers from Australia and New Zealand advertise as if they were giving a NZ/Australia passport to the students," he said.

Mr. Singh said the Lautoka Teachers College and Fiji College of Advanced Education should also review their courses and provide graduate programs.

<http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=113859>

EDUCATION FOR THE DISABLED NEEDS MORE ATTENTION

Children with disabilities have special education needs but in some HCMC districts they're not getting enough.

Education for the disabled in Ho Chi Minh City is being overlooked by authorities in many districts despite it being a key component of the city's projects to support them, a local official told *Thanh Nien*.

About six out of the city's 24 districts still haven't established schools for disabled children, despite the HCMC People's Committee regulation that every district must have one.

Around 57 percent of 5,219 school-aged disabled children attend school in the southern hub, according to the city's Department of Education and Training.

But many of the schools are below acceptable standards.

For example, District 12 Special School is old and falling apart as it was set up from infrastructure built before 1975, said Pham Thi Tiet Hanh, deputy head of the Steering Committee of Education for the Disabled under HCMC Department of Education and Training.

The site that Hi Vong School in District 8 is located is often waterlogged because of its low position, which affects students getting to and from the school.

Meanwhile, some schools that have good infrastructure cannot cope with demand. Established in 2001, Binh Minh School in Tan Phu District, for instance, is only capable of teaching 140 students, while the need for places is three times that number.

<http://www.thanhniennews.com/features/?catid=10&newsid=45906>

The Federation of Parents and Citizens Association would like to thank the following sponsors for their ongoing support of Parents and citizens and public education in NSW.

