



Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of New South Wales

e-Bulletin

Tuesday, 29th September 2009 – Edition 42

THIS WEEK'S THOUGHT – Di Giblin

Welcome to the last week of Term 3. This week has indeed been a busy one for us.

Say Yes! to Pilot an Ethics-based Complement to Scripture

www.specialethicseducation.com.au

At this year's Annual Conference, delegates voted overwhelmingly in favour of a motion stating there should be an ethics-based complement to scripture in NSW primary schools. Current education policy, however, prohibits children who opt out of scripture from receiving any form of instruction during this period, and specifically not in the area of 'ethics, values, civics and general religious education'. A 2004 survey conducted by the Federation revealed that parents views were not aligned with current policy. A clear majority of respondents felt it was important or very important that their child be given the option of attending a secular, ethics-based course.

We now have a means of moving forward. Minister Verity Firth is currently considering a proposal, jointly submitted by St James Ethics Centre and the Federation, to pilot a 10-week, ethics-based course targeted to years 5 and 6. Already, seven schools have signed up to take part: Bungendore, Baulkham Hills North, Darlinghurst, Ferncourt, Hurstville, Neutral Bay and Rozelle.

The issue has received a great deal of attention in the media recently. The response has been overwhelmingly supportive. The vast majority see this as a social justice issue: all children ought to be entitled to ethical exploration, regardless of whether it's tied to a particular religious tradition.

Detailed information is provided on the website: www.specialethicseducation.com.au. Could you please review and circulate to all members of your P&C community. The Minister will require a show of support to approve the Pilot. I encourage you all to sign the Petition and inspire others to do the same.

The new Canteen Employee's wage rates shop employees (State) award

The new Canteen Employee's wage rates are now available on our website at [http://www.pandc.org.au/files/uploads/28July%202009%20Shop%20Employees%20\(State\)%20Award%20wage%20rates%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.pandc.org.au/files/uploads/28July%202009%20Shop%20Employees%20(State)%20Award%20wage%20rates%20(2).pdf)

Please take the time to ensure that you check out the website and your employees are paid at the correct rate.

The national parent organisation ACSSO (Australian Council of State School Organisations) will be meeting in Hobart during the second week of term. We wish you and your families a safe holiday break.

Take care
Di Giblin 2009.

LOCAL NEWS

SCRAP HSC FOR NATIONAL TEST: NEW BOSS

The nation's new curriculum chief says a national secondary school certificate is needed to replace the HSC and other state-based leaving certificates.

In an interview with the *Herald*, Peter Hill, who begins work as chief executive of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority on Monday, said a national certificate would not come about in the next few years. "But we can start laying the foundations for it," he said.

"In the short-term, it's not appropriate. In the longer-term, yes, I believe that we need a national certificate."

Dr Hill said a national certificate could be achieved while maintaining important differences between state and territory schools systems, but it should wait until the national curriculum was complete. The first stage of the curriculum, covering English, history, maths and the sciences from kindergarten to year 12, will be introduced in schools in 2011. Geography, the arts and languages come in stage two.

"[A national certificate] is a much bigger task, with very high-stakes consequences, and in any case it logically comes after you've sorted out the issues with the compulsory years," he said.

In April, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development urged Australia to consider a national certificate, arguing that it would bring national consistency to education standards and allow easier movement of students between states because of common standards.

A spokeswoman for the federal Education Minister, Julia Gillard, said the Government was not considering changes to existing state and territory arrangements, but that the curriculum authority would advise on "the best way to ensure world-class curriculum and assessment outcomes".

The Victorian Education Minister, Bronwyn Pike, said: "The introduction of a national certificate is the next most obvious question that will need to be considered once the national curriculum is fully implemented. Victoria's VCE is of a very high standard and we are committed to maintaining that standard." The NSW Education Minister, Verity Firth, declined to comment.

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/scrap-hsc-for-national-test-new-boss-20090925-g6a3.html>

ALMIGHTY ROW OVER ETHICS CLASS IN SCHOOLS

The State Government's religious education advisory panel will fight a pilot program that offers ethics classes to primary school students who opt out of scripture.

Instead, it will continue its support for a policy that prevents students who opt out from having any instruction, and specifically no ethical instruction, during the time set aside for scripture each week.

In some schools, that leaves as many as 80 per cent of students excluded from education for an hour each week - despite reviews dating back to 1980 recommending the policy be amended.

The pilot, developed by the St James Ethics Centre, is fully funded and was endorsed unanimously by the Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of NSW in July. But it must still be approved by the Minister for Education in consultation with a religious advisory panel.

"It doesn't have the support of the religious community, that's just a pragmatic reality," the acting chairman of the Inter-Church Commission on Religious Education in Schools, Reverend Mark Hillis, told the *Herald*. "I don't see how having a small interest group coming into a school and ramping up things helps."

The pilot would begin as a 10-part discussion-based program, covering issues such as truth and fairness, offered to students in years 5 and 6. It was taken, in various form, to two previous education ministers but was rejected both times.

The present minister, Verity Firth, was first approached last November and was given a formal proposal on Wednesday. She would not comment on the proposal, other than to say it was being considered.

Philip Cam, a University of NSW philosophy professor involved in developing the pilot, said it would allow children "twiddling their thumbs" to think critically about ethical issues that may otherwise be discussed in scripture. "The question is about giving kids a chance to reflect on values - to think them through," he said. "They don't get as much opportunity to do that day-to-day as they ought."

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/almighty-row-over-ethics-class-in-schools-20090925-g6a0.html>

SCHOOLS TELLING DISABLED CHILDREN TO STAY AT HOME

Schools are turning children with disabilities into part-time students by restricting their attendance hours in breach of anti-discrimination laws.

Some school principals are limiting the time disabled students are in class to match the hours a teacher's aide or other assistance is available, Macquarie and Sydney university researchers have found.

The study, based on surveys with principals in mainstream schools in city and rural areas of NSW, identified several practices that breach education and anti-discrimination laws.

The breaches included negotiating with parents to limit a child's attendance, sending children directly to doctors to obtain a diagnosis without parental approval and pressuring parents to enrol their children in other schools or support classes.

The study also highlights the subjective nature of labelling children with behavioural problems - - responsible for a rise in the number of students with disabilities. One principal was quoted as saying: "Well, a behaviour problem at (this school) would be a child who just doesn't do what he's told."

Disability Discrimination Commissioner Graham Innes said the practice -- which advocacy workers confirmed occurred routinely in schools -- was in breach of the act.

Mr Innes said he had received similar complaints and the Disability Discrimination Act required schools to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate students with disabilities, ranging from technology or ramps to teachers aides and sign language interpreters.

"The availability of time of a teacher's aide shouldn't determine whether or not a kid is at school," he said. "A child should be at school and receiving an education unless there's a valid educational reason not to be there, such as going to another facility or school. On the face of it, it's a breach of the law."

<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,25982712-5013404,00.html>

GILLARD TO MEET FINANCIALLY STRAPPED STUDENTS

Jess O'Callaghan, 18, is working four jobs but still does not qualify as financially independent under federal budget changes that have turned her university plans upside down.

A government decision to make it tougher to qualify for the youth allowance based on work history has left the high school graduate from Port Macquarie, on the NSW mid-north coast, with a place at the University of Melbourne next year but without funds to support her there.

"I was pretty disappointed in the lack of faith the government had in my generation, that they'd be able to slip it through without us noticing," Ms O'Callaghan said. "There's a tiny group of us who have been really harshly affected by the change."

She and other students who took a gap year to push their working hours and earnings to the levels required for youth allowance eligibility will meet Employment Minister Julia Gillard in Canberra today to lobby for a deferral of the January 2010 start date for the new criteria.

Her local federal MP, Rob Oakeshott, the independent member for Lyne, said it was unfair to suddenly set the bar higher, especially in regional areas with high unemployment where students struggled to meet the youth allowance work test but had to leave the family home to attend university.

"We don't have a level playing field around Australia where people can prove their financial independence," he said.

The Senate standing committee on rural and regional affairs is inquiring into the budget measure, with the Coalition, minor parties and independents expressing concern.

Labor MPs in marginal regional seats such as Eden-Monaro in NSW and Braddon in Tasmania will attend Ms Gillard's meeting, along with representatives of Universities Australia, the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations and the National Union of Students.

NUS national president David Barrow said he did not want to see the rest of the government's student income support package undermined by a failure to address the problems of current gap-year students.

"The recent admission that there is a problem is a big step, and we hope we'll be able to discuss what's happening to students on the ground and demonstrate that change is necessary," Mr Barrow said.

<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,25971538-12332,00.html>

NATIONAL SCHEME TO ASSESS TEACHERS

Better teachers should receive higher pay, a report into teaching quality commissioned by the state and federal governments has found.

The report, which was initiated under the Howard government but released by Education Minister Julia Gillard yesterday, calls for "differential remuneration for teachers who are assessed as high performers".

It stresses that the quality of the teacher assessment process will be decisive in "determining the integrity" of any "reward for performance" pay system.

It suggests a system of national standards, recommending that assessments have "a similar meaning across jurisdictions, systems and amongst employers".

The report says there is "considerable convergence" on what should be covered by such a scheme but warns that developing a workable model will be time-consuming and expensive.

It also warns against teacher rewards based solely on student results, saying such a system would be open to manipulation.

Ms Gillard said that nothing was more important to learning than the quality of the teacher standing in front of the classroom.

She said the government was investing in several initiatives to attract, train, place, develop and retain quality teachers, pointing to the \$550 million allocated to maintaining and improving the quality of teaching as part of its so-called Education Revolution.

But she has not committed the government to acting on the recommendations of the report.

Instead, she says it will "inform" the development and implementation of new teacher pay arrangements.

<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,25939141-5013871,00.html>

HUNTER MUMS, DADS PROSECUTED OVER ABSENTEE SCHOOLCHILDREN

Fifty-eight Hunter and Central Coast parents have been prosecuted during a State Government crackdown on parents who do not send their children to school.

NSW Education Department figures show the department successfully prosecuted 420 parents in NSW in 2008 for not enrolling or sending their child to school.

The Hunter and Central Coast region accounted for 13.9 percent of cases successfully prosecuted by the department lawyers, which was just under the region's proportion of students statewide. A NSW Education Department spokesman said truancy, when students wag school without their parents knowing, accounted for a very small percentage of inappropriate absences and the vast majority were parent-condoned absences.

"When patterns of poor attendance emerge they can have long-term implications for a student," he said.

"Parents have a responsibility to ensure that their children attend school regularly.

"The stronger action against parents who fail to meet their obligations is aimed at getting students meaningfully engaged in school more quickly and thus minimising the negative consequences."

Under the Education Act children aged from between six and 15 must be enrolled and attend school or be registered for home schooling.

The NSW Education Department in May last year strengthened its system for enforcing the law.

Of prosecutions started, 41.7 per cent were withdrawn, 43 per cent ended in a conviction and fine of up to \$1100, 11 per cent of those found guilty were given a good behaviour bond, 4 per cent were given a conviction that was not recorded and 0.3 per cent were found not guilty.

The department spokesman said parents struggling to get children to school were offered help via the Home School Liaison Program but those who did not make use of the program within 20 days were referred for possible prosecution.

<http://www.theherald.com.au/news/local/news/general/hunter-mums-dads-prosecuted-over-absentee-schoolchildren/1603507.aspx>

NSW STUDENTS PIONEER WINDOWS 7

NSW secondary school students last week became the first school children in the world to use Microsoft's new operating system, Windows 7. The NSW government was distributing about 5000 Lenovo netbooks each week, NSW Department of Education chief information officer Stephen Wilson said, and about 200 netbooks running Windows 7 "release to manufacturing" were being used at Arthur Phillip High School in western Sydney.

The school was one of three that began testing Windows 7 in May. More than 200 Arthur Phillip High School students were given their Lenovo IdeaPad netbooks, and the set-up process was "seamless", Mr Wilson said.

"We got the machines shipped in from China, we opened the (netbook) boxes on site and asked the students to log in wirelessly.

"They weren't configured to the wired network at all.

"The computer was configured on the spot.

"When they logged in, it bound their user ID to the network and the Active Directory system and we allocated that device to students wirelessly."

More than 9000 teachers had already received netbooks with the Windows 7 release candidate version, but those machines would be easily upgraded, he said.

The process was well planned. Before the Lenovo machines were shipped their serial numbers were already known to the department.

"The process of allocating a device to a student is just amazing," Mr Wilson said.

"They unpack the box, we know the serial numbers, we know the student has got their permission slip from their parent. When they type in their user ID and password, it associates the serial number, MAC (Media Access Control) address, user ID and password all to that user, and verifies it.

<http://www.australianit.news.com.au/story/0,24897,25910722-5013040,00.html>

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

GAP STUDENTS WIN NEW DEAL FROM JULIA GILLARD

Federal Education Minister Julia Gillard has caved in to pressure and delayed changes to the youth allowance that would have caught out students now working a gap year, but about 61,000 of those on support and working part-time will pay for the concession.

About 5000 students will benefit from the decision to be announced today to delay by six months tougher eligibility criteria for those working a gap year to qualify as independents, and who can show they would have to move to attend university.

For these mostly regional students the changes that were to come into effect from January 1 will not now apply until June 30.

That will cost the budget \$150million. With the government determined to keep its youth allowance changes cost-neutral, it has been forced to delay more generous earnings thresholds by 18 months.

From next year the earnings thresholds at which youth allowance is reduced was to rise from \$236 a fortnight to \$400 a fortnight, but that now will not happen until July 2012.

In total there are 272,840 students receiving youth allowance, of whom about 61,000 are estimated to earn above the threshold.

"Working students are being punished to benefit a small amount of students taking a year off," said Matthew McGirr, 23, a full-time history student at Sydney University.

"They are penalising people trying to make ends meet."

Mr McGirr earns between \$220 and \$350 a fortnight as an organist playing at weddings and christenings. If not for a \$100 a week scholarship, he would be left with just \$100 a week to live on after paying rent, he said.

<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,25982795-2702,00.html>

UPCOMING EVENTS

GLOBAL SCHOOLS INITIATIVE

On October 24 schools are invited to join a global creative effort around the issue of climate change. It's a day devoted to, of all things, a scientific number – the number many scientist view as the parts per million carbon dioxide in the atmosphere which represent a 'safe' limit in terms of global warming. But it's also a day for students to get a better understanding of international relations, global communications, and the role of arts and creativity in public life.

The idea is that communities create their own individualised response to the number 350. Schools can organise a fun, simple activity that students can participate in and send a photo of the activity to the '350' global team who are collating actions from all over the world.

People in more than 1000 communities around the globe have already announced plans— there will be school children planting 350 trees in Bangladesh, scientists hanging banners saying 350 on the statues on Easter Island, 350 scuba divers diving underwater at the Great Barrier Reef, and a thousand more creative actions like these. You can find plenty of ideas for schools at the international and local 350 sites www.350schools.com/ and www.350.org/people/schools

ANTI-POVERTY WEEK – HELP FIGHT POVERTY AND HARDSHIP 11 – 17 OCTOBER 2009

Poverty and severe hardship affect more than a million Australians. Around the world more than a billion people are desperately poor. Participate by:

- Organising a display, stall or award
- A workshop, lecture or forum
- A fundraiser, fact sheet or petition.

For more information please visit www.antipovertyweek.org.au

NUTRITION AUSTRALIA

Nutrition Australia is currently offering free nutrition presentations to parents, carers and teachers of primary school aged children. The presentation called Eating For Education, runs for 30 minutes and would be ideal to run at a P&C meeting or during school hours. Eating For Education covers topics such as healthy lunchboxes, breakfast and healthy eating guidelines for children. Nutrition Australia has nutritionists ready to present to schools in Western Sydney

and the Blue Mountains regions now, with other areas in Sydney and Greater Sydney commencing soon. If you would like to receive more information about the presentations please contact the Eating For Education Project Officer on 0419 970 865 or na.alex@gmail.com.

POSITIVE PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM

The *Positive Partnerships* program is a series of free workshops which build partnerships between families living with autism and their school so these students' school years are as productive as possible. Teachers too – in all states - are invited to attend professional development programs as part of the Federal Government's *Helping children with autism* initiative. The program is being run nationally by a consortium - Australian Autism Education & Training Consortium (AAETC) – which competitively won the \$11.3 million contract last year. The workshops began in February and will continue until November. We have had some amazing feedback from the workshops so far. Many parents saying they now feel less isolated and more equipped to cope with the challenges autism presents. There was a lovely story in Melbourne where three parents met each other at the workshop and discovered that their children were at the same school! Since the workshop they have formed their own support group which has made a tremendous impact on their lives.

For information, dates, venues and to register a few weeks ahead of dates, see www.autismtraining.com.au Please call 1300 881 971 with other queries.

THE HUMAN BRAIN ADAPTS VERY SENSITIVELY TO THE ENVIRONMENT. IF THAT ENVIRONMENT IS CHANGING, WHAT MIGHT ACTUALLY BE IN JEOPARDY?

First, attention span. If the young brain is exposed to a world of fast action-reaction, then continued rapid interchange might become the normal time scale of operation. Related to this change might be a second area of potential difference, - a much more marked preference for the here-and-now where the immediacy of the experience trumps regard to any consequences. A third possible change, is one in empathy. Compare a computer game to rescue the princess where the goal is for the personal experience of feeling rewarded, with the aim of reading a book, to find out more about the princess herself! A fourth issue relates to identity. Perhaps with fast-paced, instant screen reactions the next generation will themselves be defined by the responses of others, as evidenced by the increasing popularity of Twitter.

DATE: 4 OCTOBER

TIME: 1pm

PRICES: \$39* (\$29* for Festival Pass holders)

VENUE: Sydney Opera House, Concert Hall

KIDS CARING FOR KIDS – THE EXCITEMENT STARTS!

Throughout the state excitement is building for the 2010 Kids Caring for Kids Fundraising Raffle. In the past weeks all NSW schools have received the Kids Caring for Kids promotional brochure and registration form and registrations are beginning to roll in.

This is an amazing opportunity for your P&C to raise awareness of critically injured children in the community and raise funds for your school at the same time with your P&C receiving 20% of your schools gross ticket sales.

With this fundraising initiative to be driven by state wide advertising campaigns focused on increasing awareness of the Day of Difference Foundation's work with critically injured children and promoting safety around schools this is a fundraising initiative you can't afford to miss.

This fundraiser is packed with amazing prizes including \$500,000 in gold bullion, a luxury car, family holidays and incentive (early bird) raffles for the students. With a per ticket price of only \$2.50 each this raffle is designed to make ticket sales easy and fun for the students and with

one ticket book of twelve tickets being distributed per enrolled student every student has the chance to win a family island holiday.

Register Now!

To download a registration form or find out more about Kids Caring for Kids visit www.pandc.org.au and click on the link.

SUNRICE'S CHILDREN HELPING CHILDREN CAMPAIGN

SunRice is helping to make a difference by joining forces with UNICEF Australia to support a program in the Pacific Islands to help prevent children dying from preventable diseases. We are working together on immunisation programs that cover 900,000 children across 14 economically disadvantaged countries.

By joining SunRice's Children Helping Children schools competition, Australian primary school children and their friends and families can also help make a difference, simply by collecting the blue UNICEF logos from specially marked SunRice packs during September and October 2009.

The competition has a \$100,000 prize pool, which includes a first prize of \$20,000 cash and a swimming clinic with SunRice brand ambassador and triple Olympic gold medallist Stephanie Rice for the winning primary school.

By supporting Children Helping Children, the first 33,000 logos collected by primary school children and their communities will help us fund up to 33,000 vaccine doses for children in the Pacific islands. It's part of SunRice's broader commitment to the region, which includes a substantial donation to fund on-ground training and infrastructure and the distribution and maintenance of vaccine equipment to support UNICEF's work there.

To take part in the competition, primary schools need to register online at www.sunricedifference.com.au and collect blue UNICEF logos from selected SunRice products.

FAQS: SPECIAL MEETINGS

Q: What are special meetings?

A: Special meetings, or extraordinary meetings as they are sometimes called, provide a P&C Association with an opportunity to discuss one of more specific matters which cannot be dealt with at the next general (or ordinary) meeting because of urgency or some other declared reason.

Special meeting can only deal with business of which notice has been given. While apologies can be accepted at a special meeting, no other formal business such as the minutes of the preceding meeting, correspondence, special reports or general business can be transacted.

Q: Who can call a special meeting?

A: The P&C Secretary is constitutionally required to give formal written notice of a special meeting but can only issue a notice of special meeting if a request for such a meeting is received from the Executive Committee or by at least ten financial members of the organization.

Request for special meetings should refer to the specific matters which will be raised and discussed at the meeting.

Q: How much notice of a special meeting is required?

A: The Secretary is expected to ensure that all existing financial members receive at least seven clear days notice of any special meeting. The notice must indicate the time and place of the meeting as well as the specific business which will be transacted at the meeting.

The actual meeting date and time should be designated by the Executive Committee but in any case, it must occur within a month of the request being received by the Secretary.

The President should preside at special meetings. In the President's absence this task can be taken by one of the Vice-Presidents and in the absence of either Vice-President the meeting itself can elect a chairperson.

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.

