



Grapevine

A NEW ERA OF TRANSPARENCY

'We will have access to a comprehensive, accurate and balanced picture of how different schools in different communities perform.' So said Deputy Prime Minister and Commonwealth Minister for Education Julia Gillard in her address to the fourth annual Australian National Schools Network Forum in Canberra last November. 'Parents, teachers and the whole community will for the first time be able to access information on Australian schools, which shows achievement in national testing, Year 12 attainment, attendance and numbers of staff.' Information about school income and resourcing will be added later. 'I understand this new era of transparency is going to lead to some uncomfortable moments,' Gillard admitted. 'It's going to lead to uncomfortable moments for all of us.' A week earlier, Gillard had hosted a forum for 150 principals, where she unveiled the My School website. For some of the 150 it was an uncomfortable moment. Critics say the My School website is a de facto league table. According to the website, 'My School enables school...comparisons..., predominantly in relation to the performance of students on national literacy and numeracy tests, taking their contexts into consideration' with reference to an 'index of community socioeducational advantage' – and, yes, you really did just read 'socioeducational.' The heads of the Australian Council of State School Organisations, the Australian Education Union, the Australian Government Primary Principals Association, the Australian Secondary Principals Association and the Independent Education Union of Australia wrote to Minister Gillard to point out that the once-a-year literacy and numeracy test undertaken by students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 on which the My School website relies was 'not designed for the purpose of measuring school performance and certainly is not able to reliably measure overall year-to-year student improvement.'

LINKS: For more information about My School, visit www.myschool.edu.au

SPORT AND FUNDING, AND PE, AND THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

Maybe we should replace Norman May's cry of 'Gold, gold, gold'* with 'Participate, participate, participate.' *The Future of Sport in Australia* report, released late last year by the Independent Sport Panel chaired by David Crawford, questioned 'the funding imbalance between Olympic and non-Olympic sports,' recommending that 'more emphasis should be given to sports that are popular with many Australians' – which you'd guess includes chasey, four square and hacky sack. If that recommendation was a strategy to stir the possum, it worked. Useful debate ensued about a clearly-articulated national plan for sport and funding performance measures. 'Sports that are popular' might be a good measure, but it's worth noting the provenance of the panel before you buy that one. Crawford is the chairman of Foster's, which has been linked with Australian Rules Football since 1877, and was commissioned by the Australian Football League (AFL) in 1993 to review the structure, development and expansion of the code and by the Commonwealth government in 2003 to conduct a review into soccer. Mark Bouris is a board member of the Sydney Roosters Rugby League Club, Sam Mostyn was the AFL's first female commissioner and Colin Carter is the chairman of the AFL Foundation. Hockey Australia President Pamela Tye looks like the odd one out as a past board member of the Australian Sports Commission. Sadly lost in the Olympic *versus* non-Olympic funding stoush was the report's call for more attention to participation in sport as a mechanism to address health and wellbeing issues. 'Sport has potential to contribute in a major way to improving the health and wellbeing of the community,' Crawford and colleagues noted. They also recommended that Physical Education 'be a stand-alone key learning area in the national curriculum' and that 'the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority should ensure that the national curriculum for sport and Physical Education be considered

as soon as possible and no later than the second phase of the national curriculum, to be developed in 2011 and implemented in 2012.' Commonwealth Minister for Sport Kate Ellis welcomed the release of the report, but insisted the Commonwealth government was committed to the funding of elite sports. 'We want to remain a leader in international elite sport,' she said. Shadow Minister for Education Christopher Pyne urged the Commonwealth government to include Physical Education in the national curriculum.

* *Okay, okay. In Norman May's famous call of the 4x100 metres men's swimming final at the 1980 Moscow Olympics he said, 'Gold, gold to Australia. Gold.'*

OUT-EDUCATED TODAY, OUT-COMPETED TOMORROW

American Year 8 students ranked 25th out of 30 countries in mathematics in the 2006 Program for International Student Assessment, a bit better on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, and that appears to be driving the policy of United States President Barack Obama. As he explained in a speech at Wright Middle School in Madison, Wisconsin, in November, 'Countries that out-educate us today will out-compete us tomorrow.... The US...is now being outpaced in math and science education.' The solution? A Race to the Top award with US\$4 billion for state systems that set high standards, improve assessment and evaluate teachers in terms of students' performance. There's a fourth measure. 'We'll look at whether they're willing to remake a school from top to bottom with new leaders and a new way of teaching, replacing a school's principal if it's not working, and at least half its staff, close a school for a time and then reopen it under new management, even shut down the school entirely and send its...students to a better school nearby.'

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