



NEWSWORTHY?

When a story broke in the *Daily Mercury* about Year 11 girls from St Patrick's College, a coeducational Year 11 and 12 school in Mackay, central Queensland, ranking themselves according to looks, weight and popularity, few could've predicted it would make national and even international headlines. St Patrick's College principal Eamon Hannan issued a statement responding to the media feeding frenzy. 'The school community was devastated by the media coverage of alleged inappropriate behaviour by some students of the college,' he said. 'I am grateful that every youthful mistake that I made was not shared with the community through the media.' A report on the storm in a teacup in Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* called it, um, a storm in a teacup. 'The students of St Patrick's College are an outstanding group of young women and men and to see them upset and distressed at the public airing of their alleged failings is heart-breaking,' Hannan told the *Daily Tele*. It's arguable that this wasn't even a small-town big-news story, let alone a national one, but was it really news for readers in India?

2020

We need to overcome the public-private divide in education by funding students according to need and encouraging more private investment, according to the initial report from April's Australia 2020 Summit. The 'productivity agenda' group, which addressed education, skills, training, science and innovation, also recommended rewards for 'excellence in teaching' – although the initial report provides no detail on how excellence in teaching might be measured or rewarded. The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), which also met in April, agreed to research effective ways of rewarding the nation's best teachers, with the Commonwealth government to foot the research bill to the tune of \$400,000. MCEETYA agreed to take proposals for rewards, incentives and career structures to attract and retain quality teachers to

the productivity agenda working group of the Council of Australian Governments. Other recommendations to come out of the Australia 2020 Summit two-day meeting of the 'productivity agenda' group, according to the initial report, include: a national program to attract talented graduates and career-switchers into teaching, and to reward teachers for working in national priority areas, including disadvantaged communities, remote areas and subjects where there's a teacher shortage; extending higher education loans to all post-secondary students; and merit-based scholarships in areas where there are skills shortages. The 'creative' group, by the way, which addressed the arts, film and design, recommended: 'practitioners in residence' in schools via a national mentoring plan bankrolled by philanthropy and tax breaks; mandated creative, visual and performing arts subjects in national curricula with appropriate reporting requirements for schools; and 'creativity summer schools' for pre-service and in-service teachers. The Commonwealth government is expected to produce a response to the report by the end of the year.

LINKS: *For the Australia 2020 Summit initial report, visit http://www.australia2020.gov.au/docs/2020_Summit_initial_report.pdf*

LIKE SANDS THROUGH THE HOURGLASS

Negotiations between the Victorian branch of the Australian Education Union and Victoria's Minister for Education Bronwyn Pike on a new three-year agreement on teacher pay, workload, class sizes and contract employment finally reached resolution last month. According to Victorian Premier John Brumby, 'A graduate teacher in Victoria currently earns \$46,127 and under this agreement will become the highest-paid graduate teacher in the country, earning \$51,184.' Who that graduate teacher will be remains unclear. 'An experienced classroom teacher will receive a \$10,000 pay rise to \$75,500,' Brumby added. Pike

had insisted in April that student-free professional development days would 'have to go,' as though the negotiations needed pepping up. The eventual deal includes three statewide planning and professional development days before the start of the school year. With strikes, rolling stoppages and plot twists like this, the negotiations would've made a terrific series. Like sands through the hourglass, so are the days of our lives. *Days of Our Lives*, as it turns out, is unlikely to continue past 2009, according to NBC Universal Television president Jeff Zucker.

CHEAP-AS-CHIPS LAPTOPS

The XO-1 laptop, developed by international charity One Laptop per Child (OLPC) and manufactured by Taiwan's Quanta Computer, has finally reached the magic US\$100 price tag. Aimed at the schools market for students in developing countries, these heavy-duty, low-power laptops use flash memory instead of a hard drive, relying on open source software, with Linux as their operating system. Cheap-as-chips laptop copycats are also hitting the British market. The RM Asus miniBook is selling like hotcakes for \$350, while Elonex has its 'one laptop,' which sounds like one laptop per child, for \$206 – in British currency that's a magic price tag of £99. OLPC is none too happy with the OLPC-mimic, saying Elonex has gone too far. If that looks like a spat between, well, spats, consider the big fish: sales of these cheap-as-chips models could mean that Linux becomes the operating system of choice for most schools, rather than Microsoft's Windows. Maybe that's why Microsoft agreed in May to put Windows XP on the laptop. The new generation of bargain-basement models still have an interesting advantage for schools: they use software that allows students to use the internet and even play music, but the memory size means they can't install huge files – like computer games.

This month's Grapevine is by Steve Holden, Editor of Teacher.