



# Grapevine

## ALL CHANGE?

Can the education sector expect privileged attention from our new Prime Minister and former Commonwealth Minister for Education Julia Gillard? The PM in June appointed Simon Crean as her new Minister for Education, Employment, Workplace Relations and Social Inclusion. Luckily, Crean, who inherits Gillard's \$16 billion Building the Education Revolution (BER) program – usually described these days as the troubled BER program – has prior experience in the portfolio from 1993 to 1996 in the Commonwealth government of Paul Keating. Some commentators have observed that the PM is the first in 35 years to step up directly from the education portfolio. Keep in mind, Brendan Nelson was also Minister for Education before becoming Leader of the Opposition. John Gorton was in the job before taking over as PM, as was Malcolm Fraser, who held the education portfolio, twice, before the dismissal of Gough Whitlam when Fraser became PM. Speaking of which, Whitlam held the education portfolio in his first year as PM in 1972. Crean was Minister for Education before becoming Leader of the Opposition, as was Kim Beazley. Crean inherits a slew of Gillard reforms – the national curriculum; national assessment; transparency and accountability measures like My School; and national professional standards for teachers – as well as a very big BER program. Will she keep her shoulder to the wheel? Will she watch over Crean's shoulder? It's worth keeping in mind, as *Campus Review's* John Ross and Julie Hare observed in June, that the PM does now have other fish to fry. As Australian Catholic University vice-chancellor Professor Greg Craven told Ross and Hare, 'The workload of the PM is five times the workload of the Education Minister. You have to think about how long it takes their thought cycle to come back to an issue once they have looked at it. It would be unreasonable of the sector to expect too much.'

## ACCOUNTABILITY

'Efforts to "hold teachers accountable" and "hold schools accountable" have pro-

duced perverse consequences. Instead of better education, we are getting cheating scandals, teaching to bad tests, a narrowed curriculum, lowered standards and gaming of the system. Even if it produces higher test scores (of dubious validity), high-stakes accountability does not produce better education.... The more that test scores are used to measure teacher effectiveness and to determine the fate of schools, the more we will see such desperate efforts by teachers and principals to save their jobs and their schools.' An Australian educator had the courage to say this in public? Afraid not. This was posted in June by American education historian Diane Ravitch on the Bridging Differences blog that she co-authors with Deborah Meier on the *Education Week* website – at <http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/Bridging-Differences>

## TEACHER SUMMARILY EXECUTED

Farzad Kamangar, a 35-year-old Iranian Kurdish teacher and member of the Teachers' Union of Kurdistan who was found guilty by Islamic Revolutionary Court of 'endangering national security' and 'enmity against God' was summarily executed in secret in May despite the fact that his Supreme Court appeal was yet to be heard. According to Education International, Kamangar's lawyer, Khalil Bahramian, was told that his file had been lost. 'I have seen absolutely zero evidence presented against Kamangar,' Bahramian told the New York-based International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran. 'In my 40 years in the legal profession, I have never witnessed such a prosecution,' he said.

## RACE TO THE TEST

The United States federal education program, Race to the Top, is now divvying up US\$4.35 billion as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act 2009 to states and districts that are 'creating the conditions for education innovation and reform.' Creating the conditions for edu-

cation innovation and reform includes the evaluation of the performance of teachers in terms of student achievement, with 51 per cent of a teacher's evaluation to be based on students' standardised test scores – and other student assessments yet to be determined. In Colorado, the conditions for education innovation and reform include permanent employment for new teachers when they've taught effectively for three years and the sack for teachers who haven't taught effectively for two years in a row. In Rhode Island, according to Jennifer Jordan in the *Providence Journal*, the conditions for education innovation and reform copy the Colorado measure to sack ineffective teachers after two years. The US\$4.35 billion question? How is effective teaching best measured? Teachers say the reforms unfairly penalise those who teach students from low socioeconomic backgrounds or with special needs.

## THE END OF RUBBER ROOMS

Back in March, we reported on the New York City Department of Education's 13 temporary reassignment centres, commonly called rubber rooms by teachers. According to Steven Brill in the *New Yorker*, about 600 teachers – 0.2 per cent of New York City's teachers – attend temporary reassignment centres while allegations of their misconduct or incompetence are investigated. NY Mayor Michael Bloomberg and the local branch of the United Federation of Teachers have agreed that Department of Education officials must file charges against teachers accused of incompetence within 10 days, and must file charges against teachers accused of misconduct within 60 days. Those charged will report to their schools to undertake administrative work while allegations against them are investigated. If accused teachers are not charged within 10 or 60 days, they'll return to their classrooms. The rubber rooms were closed last month.

*The Grapevine is written by Steve Holden, Editor of Teacher.*