The case against
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Comparing and reporting school performances

In April, the Australian education ministers agreed to provide parents, teachers and school communities with access to nationally consistent information about each school’s results, its workforce, its financial resources and the student population it serves. This decision sparked considerable debate, including in the NSW parliament which voted to ban the publication of ‘league tables’ of school results, for example in newspapers.

Fundamental to the governments’ transparency agenda is the belief that parents and members of the public should be able to compare schools. However, schools operate in different contexts with students from very different backgrounds. If test results of all schools are reported in a simple league table, it is difficult for readers to know to what extent differences between schools are due to differences in the quality of teaching or in the populations they serve.

Some countries construct league tables which compare all schools not on their actual test results, but on how much better or worse their results are than expected. The more disadvantaged the students in a school, the lower the expectation of their performance. But this approach also can be misleading. It lowers expectations of some students and can lead to the conclusion that a school is performing well, even when its students are performing relatively poorly.

The recent debate around the publication of information about schools highlights that transparency is not simply a matter of gathering information and putting it into the public domain. Consideration also must be given to who will use and benefit from that information, and the best forms in which to deliver it.

An alternative to comparing all schools in a single league table is to restrict comparisons to ‘like-schools’ – those in similar circumstances and with similar student intakes. Real transparency means reporting schools’ results as they are, without adjustment, and making every effort to compare like with like and to understand the circumstances under which individual schools are operating.

Methods for reporting and comparing school performance data are explored further by Dr Glenn Rowley in this edition of Research Developments. Other articles include Dr Nola Purdie’s report of her research into strategies for strengthening the quality of Indigenous languages programs in schools and a report on the effectiveness of middle schooling by Professor Stephen Dinham and the late Dr Ken Rowe. This is one of the last research papers Ken completed before his tragic loss in the Victorian bushfires in February. A tribute to Ken and his work also is included in this edition of Research Developments.
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Indigenous languages

Should Aboriginal students be taught in their own languages? Nola Purdie considers strategies for strengthening the quality of Indigenous languages programs in schools.
More than a year on from the Australian Government’s apology to the Stolen Generations, literacy and numeracy results for Indigenous students remain consistently below the national average.

As the government noted in its *Closing the Gap on Indigenous Disadvantage* report of February 2009, ‘the gulf that exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in these critical areas remains significant.’

For many students who speak an Indigenous language, the language used in school plays a role in their educational outcomes. Addressing the state of Indigenous languages in schools may go some way towards addressing the gap in educational achievement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

The Australian Government has shown strong support for Indigenous language education. The government’s recent statement of support for the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* reaffirms the right of Indigenous peoples to have access to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.

Individual states and territories continue to debate over the implementation of bilingual education, however, with the recent furore over enforced English-language teaching in Northern Territory schools one timely example.

An ACER report, *Indigenous Language Programs in Australian Schools — A Way Forward*, aims to provide a snapshot of the current national situation in Indigenous languages education in Australian schools as a basis from which national projects can work to strengthen the quality of Indigenous languages programs in schools.

In our report, we make a range of recommendations, including that federal, state and territory education departments support the maintenance, revitalisation, and rebuilding of Australian Indigenous languages by creating opportunities for students to learn an Indigenous language as part of the Australian Government’s School Languages Program.

We urge that students who have an Indigenous language as their first language be supported to learn that language either as part of the school’s language program or as part of a bilingual education program.

**Indigenous languages in schools**

Before European settlement, as many as 250 distinct languages flourished across Australia. Today, less than 20 are considered to be strong. Several of these languages, however, are in danger of also being lost because they are spoken only by small groups of people, most of whom were more than 40 years of age.

Currently, many Indigenous communities are working hard to maintain or revive their languages. Within schools, also, there is increasing activity related to the teaching of Indigenous languages. These efforts urgently require support to ensure the survival of those languages still considered strong, and to revive those languages in danger of being lost with the passing of older generations.

So, what is the current state of Indigenous languages in Australian schools?

Our report reveals that more than 16,000 Indigenous students and 13,000 non-Indigenous students located in 260 Australian schools are involved in an Indigenous language program.

Most of these students are located in government schools in the Northern Territory, Western Australia, New South Wales and South Australia.

More than 80 different Indigenous languages are taught in schools, but most of these languages are not spoken by students at home.

Only 28 per cent of the programs are first-language maintenance programs,
and include bilingual programs undertaken by students in the early years of schooling and throughout their schooling.

About 12 per cent of programs are second-language learning programs, whereby a language is taught to learners in the languages area of the school curriculum. In this type of program, students have little or no assumed knowledge of the target language.

The remaining 60 per cent of programs are language revival programs or language awareness programs.

**Bilingual education**

There is a strong movement among many linguists, educators and Indigenous people to preserve Indigenous languages through actively promoting them in educational settings, including through bilingual, or two-way learning, programs.

Bilingual programs attract both proponents and detractors. Bilingual programs are often promoted as a route to the mastery of English as a second language. Children are taught literacy and numeracy skills and concepts first in their mother tongue (first language) so that they are able to use and understand them without conceptual interference from another language. The concepts learned in the mother tongue are later applied to the second language.

As we explore in our report, a growing body of research evidence shows that well-designed bilingual programs are academically effective and do not hold back students’ acquisition of English. Research suggests that if literacy is established in children’s first language, it is easier to switch to another language. Research also suggests that childhood bilingualism enhances cognitive ability by promoting classification skills, concept formation, analogical reasoning, visual-spatial skills, and creativity gains.

In addition to the academic and cognitive benefits associated with bilingualism, there appears to be a consensus among those actively working in the area that bilingual education can assist in providing a sense of identity to speakers of Indigenous languages and their descendants. It is regularly asserted that the alienation felt by many Indigenous people can be ameliorated by connection to their heritage via language programs of various kinds. Positive effects such as increased motivation and self-esteem, and participation in school have also been reported.

Most teachers of Indigenous languages in schools believe that, in addition to building Indigenous students’ cultural identity and self-esteem, the positive experience of learning about their traditional language and culture flows through into students’ overall learning. Having Indigenous language programs in schools goes a small step towards raising the profile of, and maintaining, Australia’s Indigenous languages. The benefits may also flow through to non-Indigenous students as they learn to value the languages and cultures of Australia’s first people, thereby aiding the process of healing and reconciliation.

**Effective language programs**

The development of successful programs in schools begins with careful negotiation with Indigenous people. It is essential to recognise protocols related to language ownership, maintenance, and revival. The recruiting and training of Indigenous teachers and the provision of ongoing support to them, the development of appropriate curriculum materials, the use of new technologies, and the funding and resourcing of school programs are all matters to be tackled with energy and sensitivity.

The *Indigenous Language Programs in Australian Schools* report suggests strategies for the strengthening of language projects, expressed through a set of key principles, recommendations and case studies. Large-scale projects such as the Digital Education Revolution, the National Curriculum and the School Languages Program could provide funding and opportunities to support school Indigenous languages programs.

Languages programs are not sustainable unless they are developed in partnership between the school and the owners of the language being taught. The most successful school language programs will flow from a collaborative approach involving Indigenous communities, Indigenous Language Centres, linguists, schools and teachers.

Our report emphasises that learning an Indigenous language and becoming proficient in the English language are complementary rather than mutually exclusive activities.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the first people of this country and their languages are unique to it. The capacity to learn these languages and support their reclamation and long term maintenance as strong and viable languages is of great significance to all Australians, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike.

*Indigenous Language Programs in Australian Schools — A Way Forward* was prepared by ACER researchers including myself, Tracey Frigo, and Clare Ozolins, as well as Geoff Noblett, Nick Thieberger and Janet Sharp. The report was funded by the Australian Government’s School Languages Program.

The Interactive Whiteboard (IWB) is transforming teaching and learning globally according to the authors of a new book published by ACER Press, which provides teachers with useful information on teaching with interactive whiteboards.

Chris Betcher and Mal Lee, authors of *The Interactive Whiteboard Revolution* say 'teachers and students are embracing interactive whiteboard technology like no other.'

Virtually overnight, many schools are succeeding in getting all of their teachers to use the boards and the complementary digital technologies to enrich their teaching and excite students.

As teaching continues to move from traditional paper and pen to the digital world of today, teachers now have an immensely powerful technology designed for them that can be used within their teaching room, to stimulate and teach students from Kindergarten to Year 12. While laptop programs have in the main failed to achieve this whole school teacher acceptance, Australia’s teachers and students are clamouring to have their own interactive whiteboard.

*The Interactive Whiteboard Revolution* was published by ACER Press in June 2009. The book contains eight case studies of leading educators talking about how they use interactive whiteboards. Above all the book makes the point that interactive whiteboards are great tools to help great teachers do what they do best. It includes information on:

- getting your school started with IWBs;
- selecting the right IWB technology;
- principles and strategies for effective IWB teaching;
- lesson design and software tools; and
- professional development, training and support.

*The Interactive Whiteboard Revolution* is available from ACER Press for $34.95. For further information visit [http://shop.acer.edu.au/](http://shop.acer.edu.au/) or contact ACER Press Customer Service on 1800 338 402 (Toll Free) or (03) 9277 5447 and by email to sales@acer.edu.au.
Middle schooling: What’s the evidence?

Is middle schooling more effective than the traditional primary to secondary school structure? What happens in schools is more important than how they are arranged, according to Stephen Dinham and Ken Rowe.

The middle years are a critical period when young people experience substantial physical and emotional change. During this time, some students disengage or are alienated from learning, and growth in academic attainment can plateau or even fall. Some students struggle with literacy and numeracy, and some disengage from or fail to continue studies in mathematics and science.

These are also the years where attitudinal, behavioural and social problems can escalate. Absenteeism, suspension and expulsion from school are most common, especially for boys. It is a period when matters such as body image and sexual orientation can become critical issues for some.

Middle schooling is based on the idea that these problems are due, at least in part, to ‘traditional schooling’, and can be avoided by taking a different approach to school organisation, curriculum, assessment and pedagogy.

Since the mid-1980s, middle schooling has been considered a key educational reform initiative in English-speaking countries, including Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, although it needs to be noted there are numerous models and approaches to middle school organisation. Many educators have seen middle schools as a panacea for the problems of upper primary-lower secondary schooling and adolescence in general.

While there has been a large volume of published work about middle schooling, there has been little evidence-based research. There is no shortage of strong views on the subject, both pro and con – but the available literature requires careful critique.

A recent review, conducted by ACER for the New Zealand Ministry of Education, aimed to examine the research on middle schooling, undertaken in order to inform policy.
Research Developments and practice relating to middle schooling in New Zealand.

Responses to the issues of middle schooling have ranged from the adoption of single strategies or interventions to totally integrated approaches, although the latter is more challenging and less common. It is relatively easy to examine data on student achievement, as well as on rates of suspension and absenteeism. It is more difficult to link these conclusively to school organisation, curriculum, assessment and pedagogy.

As noted, there is a serious lack of quantitative, evidence-based studies into the effects of middle schooling. Writings from advocates for middle schooling tend to be little more than aspirational, frequently bordering on rhetoric and ideology. As a result, other educators have voiced concerns as to whether middle schools actually deliver in terms of improved student achievement and engagement.

It is often difficult to gauge the impact of middle schooling because school staff frequently lack the skills, time and resources to accomplish these tasks. Teachers need time, space and external assistance if a strategy is to have a realistic chance of success. Reluctance of teachers (and schools) to change, poor preparation for and ‘selling’ of the change, together with imposition of extra responsibilities, can all put a brake on the success of new programs and approaches.

Longitudinal data on student achievement and how these relate to any initiative are also difficult to obtain and measure. As a result, judgements of success and failure are often based largely on teachers’ perceptions, rather than on evidence linking interventions to measurable student achievement outcomes.

In education, too frequently, too much attention is paid to the conditions of teaching — ‘fiddling around the edges’ with matters such as school and class organisation, rather than building evidence-based pedagogical capacity in a school’s most valuable resource, its teachers. Middle schools are neither a good thing nor a bad thing, although it should be noted that middle schools are in serious decline in the US and UK, the two ‘heartlands’ of middle schooling.

As Professor Linda Darling-Hammond wrote in her 2000 review of student outcomes in the US, ‘The effects of quality teaching on educational outcomes are greater than those that arise from students’ backgrounds. …

The quality of teacher education and teaching appear to be more strongly related to student achievement than class sizes, overall spending levels or teacher salaries.’

What is actually done within classrooms and schools is the most important thing, not structures. Quality teaching and quality teachers are central to student achievement. On this, the research literature is powerful and unequivocal.

What matters most? The most important factors for high-quality education are quality teaching and learning provision; teaching standards; and ongoing teacher professional learning focused on evidence-based teaching practices that are demonstrably effective in maximising students’ engagement, learning outcomes and achievement progress.

The full review, Teaching and Learning in Middle Schooling: A Review of the Literature, by Steve Dinham and Ken Rowe, is available for download from the New Zealand Ministry of Education website at <www.educationcounts.govt.nz>

Reference
ACER and the wider education community have been mourning the loss of Dr Ken Rowe who died in Victoria’s bushfires in February. Ken was alone at his family’s property in Marysville when the town was devastated by fire.

Ken’s career included time as a teacher and principal in Victorian government schools (1967-83), Commonwealth Relations Trust Fellow at the University of London Institute of Education (1984-85), senior research officer in the Department of Education, Victoria (1986-92), and Principal Research Fellow and Associate Professor in the Centre for Applied Educational Research at the University of Melbourne (1993-99). Ken joined ACER in 2000 as a Principal Research Fellow before becoming the Director of the Learning Processes and Contexts Research Program.

He authored more than 250 books, book chapters, monographs, journal articles and research reports, and made a similar number of presentations of his work.

Ken believed strongly in the importance of quality teachers and teaching. Throughout his time with ACER, Ken delivered many conference presentations in which he argued that nothing was more important to children’s educational outcomes than the quality of their teacher.

He was passionate about the importance of basing educational policies and practices on sound scientific evidence (for example, the need to base the teaching of reading on proven teaching methods); the promotion and use of quantitative methods in social science research; the need for closer integration of education and health (especially in early childhood); the fundamental importance of quality teaching to improving learning; and the education of boys.

In 2004 Ken was appointed by the then Federal Minister for Education, Dr Brendan Nelson, to head the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy. The inquiry handed down its much anticipated report in December 2005. It stressed again that teachers are the most valuable resource available to schools and urged that they be equipped with evidence-based teaching practices that are demonstrably effective in meeting the developmental and learning needs of all children.

With his wife Dr Kathy Rowe, a consultant physician in the Department of General Medicine at Melbourne’s Royal Children’s Hospital, Ken investigated the overlap between education and health. They studied, for example, the link between children’s auditory processing (the ability to hold, sequence and process accurately what is heard) and learning and found it to be linked strongly to literacy development and attentive behaviours in the classroom. Along with their colleague Jan Pollard, an audiologist, Ken and Kathy received the Rue Wright Memorial Award from the Royal Australasian College of Physicians in 2005.

Among his many other achievements, Ken was a member of the Board of Directors for the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, a national training consultant and instructor (since 1991) for the summer and winter programs conducted by the Australian Consortium for Social and Political Research Incorporated (ACSPRI) and a leading exponent of multilevel, structural equation modelling.

Ken was an outstanding leader, researcher and educational thinker. He took an active interest in the professional development of colleagues and had been a highly valued mentor to more junior researchers.

Although he had officially retired from ACER during 2008 for health reasons, Ken continued to work with ACER on a consulting basis and maintained strong links with his colleagues. At the time of his death he was busy conducting workshops on measurement and multilevel modelling in a number of universities and for Graduate Careers Australia (GCA), and had begun work on a book.

He is sadly missed by all of his friends and colleagues at ACER.
Raising standards:  
A shared challenge

Geoff Masters outlines his recommendations to improve literacy, numeracy and science learning in Queensland primary schools.

Following the release of results for the 2008 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and the 2007 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), the Queensland Premier, Anna Bligh, asked ACER to undertake an independent review of literacy, numeracy and science standards in Queensland primary schools.

The report of my review, A Shared Challenge: Improving Literacy, Numeracy and Science Learning in Queensland Primary Schools, made five recommendations which were endorsed by the Queensland Government on 30 June.

My review included an analysis of the test performances of Queensland students, consultations with a range of stakeholders and visits to a number of selected primary schools. A general conclusion of the review was that improved outcomes in primary literacy, numeracy and science are likely to be facilitated by providing schools with:

• access to a workforce that is very well prepared through pre-service teacher education programs

The quality of literacy, numeracy and science learning in primary schools depends in part on how well teachers are prepared through pre-service teacher education programs to teach these subjects.

Beginning teachers should be familiar with, and be beginning to develop, a repertoire of evidence-based teaching strategies (e.g., for the teaching of reading). They also require sound levels of literacy, numeracy and science knowledge themselves, strong interpersonal and communication skills, a willingness to learn and a strong motivation to teach.

• access to high quality professional learning for teachers

Opportunities for professional learning need to be available in a range of areas relevant to the work of schools. If primary schools are to lift achievement levels in literacy, numeracy and science, then they require access to high quality professional development focused on the teaching of these subjects. Professional development must be firmly grounded in evidence-based research and practice, and be designed to build teachers’ levels of expertise, including their own content knowledge and their knowledge of effective ways to teach these subjects.

• access to ongoing expert advice and support for the teaching of literacy, numeracy and science

Within education systems, this support sometimes is provided by
specialist staff working from district offices. Schools of sufficient size also sometimes have specialist literacy, numeracy and science teachers on staff. The roles of these ‘specialist’ teachers include coaching other teachers, team teaching and the provision of curriculum leadership and advice on teaching methods and resources within their areas of specialisation. Ensuring that all schools have access to specialist advice and support in the teaching of literacy, numeracy and science is likely to be a key to raising achievement levels across a system.

- **clarity about what teachers are expected to teach and students are expected to learn by particular stages of schooling and support in monitoring the extent to which this is occurring**

Classroom curriculum and assessment resources aligned with teaching and learning expectations assist teachers in developing teaching programs and monitoring student achievement and progress. NAPLAN makes explicit the levels of reading, writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation and numeracy that all students are expected to reach as a minimum by Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 and provides schools with a basis for monitoring individual growth across these years of school, identifying areas in which the school is performing well or poorly and monitoring trends in school performance over time. No such classroom resource is available in science.

- **access to high quality professional learning and support for school leaders**

School leaders are likely to benefit from increased opportunities to share experiences and to learn from best practice in driving school improvement, including in the areas of setting targets and high expectations, analysing and monitoring school performances, building staff capacity and effectively allocating physical and human resources to improve learning. Most principals also would benefit from additional support (e.g. with school administration tasks) to enable them to spend more time leading teaching and learning.

These conclusions were the basis for five recommendations:

1. That all aspiring primary teachers be required to demonstrate through test performances, as a condition of registration, that they meet threshold levels of knowledge about the teaching of literacy, numeracy and science and have sound levels of content knowledge in these areas.
2. That the Queensland Government introduces a new structure and program of advanced professional learning in literacy, numeracy and science for primary school teachers.
3. That additional funding be made available for the advanced training and employment of a number of ‘specialist’ literacy, numeracy and science teachers to work in schools (and/or district offices) most in need of support.
4. That standard science tests be introduced at Years 4, 6, 8 and 10 for school use in identifying students who are not meeting year-level expectations and for monitoring student progress over time.
5. That the Queensland Government initiates an expert review of international best practice in school leadership development with a view to introducing a new structure and program of advanced professional learning for primary school leaders focused on effective strategies for driving improved school performances in literacy, numeracy and science.

The full report is available at <http://education.qld.gov.au/mastersreview>
Glenn Rowley explains why nationally comparable data about school performances should be reported to the public, but should not be used to create league tables.

ACER was recently asked to provide advice to the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) on national schools data collection and reporting for school evaluation, accountability and resource allocation.

The resulting paper, *Reporting and Comparing School Performances*, written by Geoff Masters, John Ainley, Siek Toon Khoo and I advised that comparable data should be collected about schools’ student backgrounds, student outcomes, numbers and qualifications of teachers, sources of funding and amounts of fees paid by parents.

We recommended that education authorities and governments use this data to monitor school performances and to identify schools that are performing unusually well or unusually poorly given their circumstances.

We also advised that this data should be reported publicly, so that parents and the public can make informed judgements about, and meaningful comparisons of, schools.

Parents need a wide range of detailed information about schools’ outcomes so they can choose the right school for their children, and educators need information about outcomes for effective school management – but schools work to promote many different kinds of outcomes for their students.

Simple comparisons of schools, such as league tables, ignore this broader context by restricting the range of information that can be provided. League tables also encourage ‘rank order’ interpretations that have been damaging to schools and students in the past, and focus attention on some aspects of schooling at the expense of other outcomes that are as important but not as easily measurable.

The tabular format requires that exactly the same measures be provided for every school, even though the schools may perform very different roles.

Reporting is not simply a matter of gathering the maximum possible information and putting it into the public domain. We must consider who will use and benefit from information.
about schools, and the best ways to measure and deliver that information. League tables are not the best way to measure and deliver that information. It is popular in some parts of the world to adjust data to fit ‘measures’ of school performance and to report these measures publicly in league tables – but there are very sound technical and educational reasons why school measures of this kind should not be used for public reporting and school comparisons.

Simple comparisons of student outcomes can be made between any schools, or between individual schools and state or national averages. Comparisons of this kind, however, take no account of the different circumstances and challenges faced by different schools. In consultations with teachers and administrators from primary and secondary schools in Victoria, conducted as part of the 2007 development of the Victorian Department’s Blueprint, researchers David Downes and Danh Vindurampulle reported a widely-held view among school staff that it is inappropriate to make simple comparisons of outcomes for schools in very different circumstances.

Based on our advice, MCEETYA has stated that while it aims to develop a school transparency agenda, ‘Ministers agreed that these reforms were not about simplistic league tables which rank schools according to raw test scores.’

Instead, following our advice, MCEETYA will facilitate comparisons of ‘like’ schools to allow parents, the public and education systems to compare outcomes for schools in similar circumstances.

Because the circumstances under which schools work vary so widely across Australia, a challenge under any approach to reporting school performance is to ensure that outcomes in a school are compared with outcomes in schools in similar circumstances. For example, remote Indigenous schools with high proportions of students who do not speak English as their first language perhaps should be compared only with similarly remote schools working in similar circumstances. The number of such schools may be relatively small. Characteristics that have been shown to be correlated with student outcomes include students’ socioeconomic background, and parents’ occupation and level of education; the geographic location of the school; and the percentage of students within the school from Indigenous backgrounds, from non-English speaking backgrounds, and with special education needs.

If schools are to be compared, and particularly if they are to be compared publicly, then it is important that the different circumstances and the different challenges they face are taken into consideration. A ‘like-schools’ methodology is the best way to do this, and we prefer an approach that is not based entirely on predefined categories of schools but that compares each school with the schools most similar to it.

Comparing only like schools would also allow measures of school performance to be reported without adjustment. We believe that data reported publicly should be factual data about a school, and not the results of secondary analyses and interpretations that are open to debate.

Announcing a new framework for publication of comparable information about school performance based on our advice, a recent MCEETYA communiqué stated that:

*From 2009 the new Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) will be responsible for publishing relevant, nationally comparable information on all schools. This will include publication of the 2008 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data and associated contextual information.*

The information available will enable comparison of each school with other schools serving similar student populations around the nation and with the best-performing school in each cohort of ‘like schools’.

It will also support accountability, school evaluation, collaborative policy development and resource allocation. These same transparency and accountability requirements will apply to both government and non-government schools.

Through better monitoring of performance at the student, school and system level, educational outcomes can be lifted across all schools.

These reforms to the reporting of school performance are important because they recognise that changes over time in the outcomes being achieved by a school do not necessarily reflect changes in the school’s performance; they may simply reflect changes in the student population. And there is some evidence that changes in the student population can be a direct consequence of publishing school outcome data, as more affluent parents withdraw their children from schools with poorer outcomes.

Vigilance is required to ensure that the public reporting of data does not have negative and unintended consequences for schools, such as from the reporting of the socio-economic backgrounds of students in a school, or of the financial circumstances of struggling, small schools.

Overall, however, if information is presented in a way that does not encourage ranking, almost all data could be reported publicly.

AUSSE reveals a third of students consider attrition

According to the latest cycle of the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE), conducted in 2008, a third of Australian and New Zealand tertiary students seriously consider leaving their institutions before graduation. A representative sample of more than 25,000 students from 29 Australian and New Zealand universities participated in what is the largest survey of its kind.

Students are significantly more likely to consider leaving for practical or financial reasons rather than due to the quality of education. Engaging students in the overall educational experience, providing effective individual support, and setting high expectations, however, may inspire students to complete their education.

The AUSSE report reveals that university staff members underestimate the extent of the problem.

The full report, Engaging Students for Success can be found at <www.acer.edu.au/ausse>

Ken Rowe Fund established

Following the tragic death of Dr Ken Rowe in the Victorian bushfires on 7 February 2009, ACER has established the Ken Rowe Fund to commemorate Ken’s significant contribution to ACER and to education nationally and internationally. Funds received will be used to support two activities which were close to Ken’s heart. They will provide support for research training in quantitative methods (for example, through a scholarship managed by ACER for attendance at ACSPRI courses) and practical support to schools, kindergartens and early childhood centres in the Marysville area. Details of the fund are available on ACER’s website at <www.acer.edu.au>

Graduate pathways examined

The Graduate Pathways Survey, conducted by ACER for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, canvassed more than 9,000 bachelor degree graduates five years into their careers.

The survey found that graduates earn significantly more on average than workers without formal qualifications. The median graduate salary five years after graduation is $60,000, comparing favourably with the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimate of average earnings of $46,332 for all workers in Australia.

Men were more likely than women to be participating in the workforce after five years. Graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds have similar employment outcomes as the general university population. The report is available at <www.acer.edu.au/gps>

Brisbane bookshop launched

ACER’s Brisbane bookshop was officially opened by The Honourable Geoff Wilson, MP, Queensland Minister for Education and Training, on 27 May. The bookshop is located at 1/165 Kelvin Grove Road, Kelvin Grove, and is open on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 9.00am to 5.00pm. Phone 07 3238 9011

ACER International Institute hosts Qatari education administrators

The ACER International Institute hosted a group of data administrators from Qatar in February. The group from the Qatar Supreme Education Council’s Evaluation Institute attended a five-day training workshop in the ACER Melbourne office on the topics of data analysis and management and reporting skills. The main purposes of the Evaluation Institute are to evaluate schools, to assess students, to collect and manage data, to prepare and publish reports, and to manage the registration, licensing and accreditation for teaching and leadership. The workshop aimed to enhance the participants’ skills in data analysis and reporting.

Marking of NAPLAN 2009

Testing for the National Assessment Program in Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) took place in May. ACER is conducting some of the marking and the data analysis this year, after doing so in 2008. The National Assessment Program in Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is a central part of the process of monitoring the extent to which young Australians are developing proficiency in the foundation areas of literacy and numeracy. Reports are provided on five domains: Reading, Writing, Spelling, Grammar and punctuation, and Numeracy for all Australian students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9.

Masters awarded Australian College of Educators’ Medal for 2009

ACER Chief Executive Professor Geoff Masters has been awarded the 2009 Australian College of Educators’ Medal. The College awards this medal annually in recognition of sustained contributions to Australian education by an outstanding educator. The College recognised Professor Masters as an international authority on educational measurement and student assessment; noting that he has made a distinctive contribution to education through his leadership of ACER and his active involvement nationally and internationally on many task forces and expert working groups.

National teaching standards

National curriculum and national professional teaching standards: Potentially a powerful partnership by ACER’s Dr Lawrence Ingvarson has been published through the seminar series of the Centre for Strategic Education.

Dr Ingvarson discusses the creation of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority and the National Partnership on Quality Teaching, and how a partnership between them would benefit Australian education. He explores the relationship between curriculum standards and standards for teaching; the need for subject-specific and level-specific standards for beginning and accomplished teachers; the roles of the responsible agencies; lessons from past experience about the implementation of curriculum reform; and the need to reform the professional learning system for teachers to match the new context. Ingvarson says it is time to trust the profession to develop its own national system for defining high quality teaching of the curriculum, promoting development toward the related standards and providing recognition to those who reach them. The report is available at <www.cse.edu.au>

Award for Dr Ken Rowe

Dr Ken Rowe was posthumously awarded the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) William J Davis Memorial Award in April 2009.

The award was for the most outstanding article published in Educational Administration Quarterly in 2008, ‘The Impact of Leadership on Student Outcomes’.
The UCEA, based in the United States, is a consortium of higher education institutions committed to advancing the preparation and practice of educational leaders for the benefit of schools and children. UCEA has several award programs to encourage and recognize efforts and excellence within the educational administration community. The William J. Davis Award is given annually to the author of the most outstanding article to appear in Educational Administration Quarterly during the preceding volume year. The article selection is made by a three-member panel chosen from the Editorial Board members who have not published in the volume being reviewed.

Melbourne Press Club Quill Awards

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Editor of ACER’s Teacher magazine, Dr Steve Holden, received the ‘Best columnist: highly commended’ award in the 2008 Melbourne Press Club Quill Awards. For information about Teacher, go to <http://teacher.acer.edu.au>

ACER an Employer of Choice for Women

ACER has been awarded 2009 Employer of Choice for Women status by the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA). ACER is one of 111 Australian employers to receive the citation. The citation is a significant public acknowledgement of ACER’s efforts in the area of equal opportunity for women.

Slight improvement in students’ civic and citizenship knowledge

The latest results from the National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship for Years 6 and 10 reveal a slight improvement in students’ civic knowledge and understanding since the first administration of the assessment in 2004.

Nationally, 54 per cent of Year 6 students achieved or bettered the Year 6 proficient standard and 41 per cent of Year 10 students achieved or bettered the Year 10 proficient standard. This represents a slight improvement on 2004 results when 51 per cent of Year 6 and 39 per cent of Year 10 students met or bettered the proficient standard set for their year.

Further information and additional findings are available in the full report, National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship Years 6 & 10 Report 2007. It is available online from <www.mceetya.edu.au>

Early learning state conferences

ACER’s Centre for Professional Learning joined with Early Childhood Australia and Gowrie Victoria and Gowrie NSW to host early learning state conferences in Sydney and Melbourne in March and April on the theme of ‘Frameworks and Foundations: When only the best will do’. Keynote speakers were Professor Collette Tayler, Chair of Early Childhood Education and Care in the University of Melbourne Graduate School of Education and UK early childhood learning expert Professor Iram Siraj-Blatchford, Professor of Early Childhood Education at the University of London and President of the British Association for Early Childhood Education.

Further information on conferences and seminars available through the ACER Centre for Professional Learning is available from <www.acer.edu.au/proflearn>

Studies of Asia in Australia

Across Australia, very few Year 12 subjects focus on Asia, according to a report completed by ACER for the Asia Education Foundation. The report, Studies of Asia in Year 12, by Jenny Wilkinson and Gina Milgate, found that Year 12 subjects are significantly more likely to contain content on Europe than they are on Asia.

The report found that simply making content or focus on Asia available as an option in courses does not stimulate the study of Asia. Many of the subjects reviewed allow for the possibility of content or focus on Asia, but teachers and students do not often choose these options. The ACER researchers conclude that if the education system aims to increase its focus on Asia, teacher education courses should promote specific training in teaching Asia content.

Training should also be offered to practicing teachers.

The report also suggests that detailed study guides and resources on Asia could be made available to teachers, and teachers could be encouraged to participate in study tours similar to the Endeavour Program for language teachers.

The full report, is available from <www.asiaeducation.edu.au>

University students living on campus more engaged: AUSSE

The latest briefing paper from the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) has found that university students who live on campus are more engaged, feel more supported, and have better general development. According to the briefing paper, Engaging College Communities: the impact of residential colleges in Australian higher education, students who live in residential colleges in Australian universities are more likely to be younger, studying full-time, in their first year, and come from overseas or a non-metropolitan area of Australia than non-residential students.

The AUSSE is conducted by ACER. Support for this briefing paper was provided by The Association of Heads of Australian University Colleges and Halls Inc (AHAUCHI).

The paper can be found at <www.acer.edu.au/ausse>

Fair and Flexible Employer recognition

ACER is pleased to announce that it is one of 16 employers to receive a Fair and Flexible Employer Recognition Award 2009–2010, presented by Workforce Victoria and the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, Victorian Minister for Industrial Relations, Martin Pakula, announced the awards on 23 June. The Fair and Flexible Employer Award recognises employers who have developed innovative programs in policy and practice that improve the work and family balance of their employees. ACER has been recognised for its many flexible arrangements including part time work, flexible leave, paid and unpaid parental leave, care’s leave and leave without pay as well as flexible provisions for mothers returning from maternity leave and other family-friendly arrangements. ACER’s case study can be read on <http://ways2work.business.vic.gov.au>
Schools First applications are open from 1 July until 14 August 2009

Schools throughout Australia are invited to apply for a Schools First award and be in the running to share in the $5 million pool of award money. Award applications opened on 1 July and close on 14 August.

Schools First, developed by NAB, ACER and the Foundation for Young Australians, is designed to recognise excellence in school-community partnerships. It is Australia’s largest ever corporate-backed education initiative and is open to all schools around the country.

To be eligible for an award, schools need to successfully demonstrate that they are involved in a highly effective school-community partnership, or are developing a plan to implement a partnership that improves student outcomes.

Sixty local Impact Awards worth $50 000 each are available. The most outstanding state and territory school-community partnerships will receive $100 000, and one outstanding school-community partnership will be judged the national winner and will receive an award valued between $500 000 - $1 million. In addition, a series of 20 Seed Funding Awards, worth $25 000 each, will be available for schools that require initial funding to get their community partnership started.

ACER developed the entry and judging criteria for the awards, will train the judges to ensure consistency in the assessment of schools’ applications, and will provide customised feedback to schools. Applications for the awards will be assessed on a number of evidence-based criteria. In particular, schools must show that their partnership:

- has been set up to address an identified need or opportunity
- is well-planned and genuinely collaborative
- has been managed and implemented effectively
- has led to improved outcomes for students; and
- can be sustained.

As a condition of entry schools will need to indicate how they intend using the award money, if they are successful in their application, in ways consistent with the core purpose of the Schools First Awards.

Submissions will be anonymous and will be assessed by an independent panel of judges from Australia’s education and research sector.

To find out more about Schools First and to download application forms, awards criteria, guidelines and Terms and Conditions visit www.schoolsfirst.edu.au or call 1800 649 141
ACER PRESS NEW RELEASES

Scaffolding Literacy describes an alternative approach to literacy teaching in primary schools based on the principles of explicit teaching of how authors use words to convey meaning. The book provides a detailed description of the Scaffolding Literacy teaching sequence. It explains why this approach enables learners to better understand the reading, language studies and writing tasks asked of them in school.

Beverley Axford, Pam Harders & Fay Wise  |  $39.95

The Fiction Gateway

“What’s a good book for me to read next?” In this new guide, two experienced school librarians answer that question by providing a selection of books for librarians, teachers and parents from which to choose the most appropriate book. The Fiction Gateway is an essential resource that supports individual, group and social reading programs and provides an instant guide to matching children’s interests with suitable reading material.

Suzanne Eberlé & Noelle Williamson  |  $39.95

The Use of Instructional Technology in Schools examines teachers’ use of the major instructional technologies over the last century—from the days of radio and slide shows through to the interactive whiteboard and the Web. It explores reasons why so few teachers have used these technologies and why the most commonly used classroom tools are the pen, paper and teaching board.

Mal Lee & Arthur Winzenried  |  $49.95

Male Voices: Stories of boys learning through making music is filled with stories of boys and men participating in the creation of music. It brings together leading thinkers and practitioners in the field of music from the conductor of the award-winning, Birralee Blokes, through to internationally recognised scholars, who bring research into adolescent participation and Indigenous music-making respectively.

Scott Harrison (ed)  |  $39.95

How to Get Your School Moving and Improving is aimed at professionals at any stage of their career seeking to improve teaching and learning. This book highlights relevant research from educators and students in many schools across a variety of countries, along with short case studies and vignettes to add detail, richness and authenticity.

Steve Dinham  |  $39.95

In Knowing Our Place over 400 young Australians respond to ideas about belonging, identity and social and political power. The book explores the complex mindsets of young people in their search for identity within the broader society. While the fundamental aim of the book is to identify and describe aspects of children’s thinking, there are evident implications for the project of citizenship education.

Judith Gill & Sue Howard  |  $49.95

For a catalogue or further information contact ACER Customer Service
+61 3 9277 5447  |  sales@acer.edu.au  |  <http://shop.acer.edu.au>

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