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Educational success depends to a large extent on developing a detailed understanding of the current landscape so that strategies for improvement can be planned and implemented. This is as important for improving the quality of teaching as it is for improving student achievement.

In this edition of Research Developments, Philip McKenzie reports on the findings of the second Staff in Australia’s Schools survey. He describes the characteristics of the current teaching workforce and how it has changed over time. The information gathered by this survey will play an important role in informing ongoing teacher workforce planning, including assessing current teacher shortages and future career intentions.

Wolfram Schulz reports on a national survey of student knowledge and understanding of civics and citizenship. The third cycle of the National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship provides valuable monitoring information about the degree to which Australian schooling is successful in supporting students to become informed and active citizens.

In another article, Michelle Anderson reports on the outcomes of the first year of the Leading Learning in Education and Philanthropy project, a national study of schools, philanthropics and not-for-profits. The findings identify better ways for the philanthropy and education sectors to connect and collaborate, so that the full potential of support available from philanthropy to Australian schools can be achieved.

Also in this edition, Catherine Underwood reports on research into children’s independent mobility and active transport. She examines the perceived barriers and enablers to children’s ability to walk and ride through their neighbourhood without adult supervision and discusses the positive influence that such physical activity may have at school.
Dr Phillip McKenzie is the Research Director of ACER’s Teaching, Learning and Transitions research program.
Painting a picture of the teaching workforce

The latest *Staff in Australia’s Schools* survey has captured a detailed image of the current teaching workforce and has highlighted issues for future workforce planning. **Phillip McKenzie** describes the survey and its results.

ACER conducted the *Staff in Australia’s Schools* survey in late 2010. The work was commissioned by DEEWR and overseen by an Advisory Committee of stakeholder groups. More than 17 000 teachers and school leaders (principals and deputies) working in Australian primary and secondary schools in all sectors provided information about their background and qualifications, their work, their career intentions, and school staffing issues. The survey builds upon the data collected in the previous *Staff in Australia’s Schools* project undertaken in 2006-07. The results of the latest survey were published in two reports released in January 2012.

Final survey responses were received from 4599 primary teachers, 10 876 secondary teachers, 741 primary leaders and 838 secondary leaders from a representative sample of schools. While the number of responding teachers and leaders across Australia is very substantial, the overall response rates equate to 34 per cent of primary teachers, 32 per cent of secondary teachers, 44 per cent of primary leaders and 39 per cent of secondary leaders.

The average age of teachers and school leaders responding to the survey is shown in the table on the next page. The most common age band for both teachers and school leaders is 51-55 years. The average age of primary teachers has decreased slightly since 2007, while the average age of secondary teachers has increased. The average age of school leaders has remained at a similar level to 2007.

The age distribution of the teacher workforce is important information for planning. For over a decade concern has been expressed about the ageing teacher workforce in Australia, as the higher the proportion of teachers in their 50s, the greater the likely demand for replacement teachers in the near future as teachers retire. The age profile can also have budgetary implications, since there is a broad link between pay and years of teaching experience, although teacher salary scales in Australia do peak relatively early. It can also provide an indication of the range of teachers working in schools, the recency of their pre-service education and the likely demands for professional learning.

Teaching has a high proportion of females. The gender composition of teachers remains similar to 2007 across the sectors, although in both primary and secondary schools the independent sector has increased its share of male teachers slightly, while the Catholic and government sectors have both decreased their percentages. Women,
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however, are under-represented in leadership positions. At the primary level, 81 per cent of teachers are female but only 57 per cent of school leaders are female. In secondary schools, males occupy 61 per cent of leadership roles but only 43 per cent of teaching positions.

The overall job satisfaction of Australia’s school teachers has increased slightly over the past four years, to the point that almost nine out of every ten teachers is either satisfied or very satisfied with their job. There was little variation in the results when separated according to school sector and location—in all cases over 80 per cent of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with their current job. The aspects of the job that teachers were most satisfied with were their working relationships with their colleagues and with parents/guardians, while the areas of least satisfaction were the value society places on teachers’ work, and the amount of administrative and clerical work.

Yet despite such high overall job satisfaction, around a third of all teachers surveyed are unsure how much longer they intend to continue working in schools. Seven per cent of primary teachers and almost 10 per cent of secondary teachers indicated that they are certain to leave teaching permanently prior to retirement. The top two reasons for leaving prior to retirement were ‘better opportunities outside schools’ and ‘the workload is too heavy’. However, the large numbers who report they are uncertain about how much longer they intend to keep working in schools indicate that career intentions are fluid, and difficult to predict with certainty.

One possible reason that some teachers feel there are better opportunities outside schools could be the apparent unattractiveness of leadership positions. Many current leaders feel that way too: over one-third of school leaders agreed that school leadership positions are unattractive to qualified applicants. Only 11 per cent of primary teachers and nine per cent of secondary teachers intend to apply for either a Principal or Deputy Principal position within the next three years. The large majority of teachers did not intend to apply for a leadership position within the next three years. As in 2007, the three most important factors for not applying for a leadership position were ‘I want to remain working mainly in the classroom’, ‘the time demands of the job are too high’ and ‘I would have difficulty maintaining a satisfactory work/life balance’.

Similarly, 44 per cent of primary leaders and 30 per cent of secondary leaders are unsure how much longer they intend to continue working in schools. The strategies that were most strongly supported to retain school leaders were more support staff, a more
positive public image of the leadership position, reduced workload, and fewer changes imposed on schools. About 70-80 per cent also considered fewer student management issues, greater autonomy, and higher pay for leaders who demonstrate advanced competence would help retain leaders. More than half of the leaders felt that higher pay for extra qualifications and amendments to superannuation arrangements would help to retain leaders, while around one-third of primary and secondary leaders agreed or strongly agreed that providing higher pay for leaders whose students achieve specified goals would help to retain leaders in the profession.

Despite this ‘wish list’ of improvements, most of Australia’s school leaders are satisfied with their jobs. Over 92 per cent of primary leaders and 95 per cent of secondary leaders report that they are either satisfied or very satisfied with their current job, representing an increase since 2007 of 4 percentage points for primary leaders and 3 percentage points for secondary leaders. Working relationships with colleagues and parents/guardians were once again the most satisfying aspects of the job, while ‘the balance between working time and private life’ and ‘the staffing resources at your school’ were the areas of least satisfaction.

National workforce surveys such as the Staff in Australia’s Schools project provide data to inform ongoing teacher workforce planning, including assessing current teacher shortages, future career intentions and the impact of significant events like the global financial crisis on teacher labour markets. Staff in Australia’s Schools 2010 was commissioned in response to the Smarter Schools National Partnership for Improving Teacher Quality. In effect since January 2009, the partnership represents an agreement among the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to ‘attract, train, place, develop and retain quality teachers and leaders in our schools and classrooms’. One of the reform strategies linked to this agreement focuses on improving the quality and availability of teacher workforce data.

The Staff in Australia’s Schools reports are available online:


Educating for informed and active citizenship

One of the goals of Australian schooling is to prepare young people to participate in a democratic society. Wolfram Schulz describes the latest findings of the National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship, in light of this goal.

Dr Wolfram Schulz is the Research Director of ACER’s International Surveys research program and was co-director of the National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship 2010.
Under Australia’s National Assessment Program, every three years nationally representative samples of students are selected to undertake assessments of civics and citizenship. In October 2010, more than 7200 Year 6 students from 335 schools and around 6400 Year 10 students from 312 schools completed a test of students’ skills, knowledge and understandings of Australia’s system of government. This was the third cycle of the national assessment program, following surveys in 2004 and 2007.

ACER has conducted each of these assessment cycles on behalf of the Ministerial Council on Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA, formerly MCEETYA). ACER’s work involved preparing the assessment framework, developing and trialling test and questionnaire items, implementing the assessment and the marking of test items, as well as writing the public report. The results were published by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) in September 2011.

Assessing civics and citizenship education

Civics and citizenship education aims to provide young people with the tools required to participate responsibly in a democratic society. Civic education focuses on knowledge and understanding of formal institutions and processes of civic life, such as voting in elections, while citizenship education focuses on participation and engagement in both civic and civil society.

There are a number of different approaches to civics and citizenship education internationally. These approaches include providing a specific subject, integrating relevant content into other subjects and including content as a cross-curricular theme. At the time the National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship was introduced, no state or territory in Australia had a dedicated key learning area for the subject matter, and curricula varied significantly across its jurisdictions.

The purpose of civic and citizenship education in Australia was expressed in the 2008 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, which states that ‘all young Australians should become successful learners, creative and confident individuals and active and informed citizens’.

Student knowledge and understanding

Civics and citizenship knowledge and understanding were assessed through a test that included multiple-choice, true/false and constructed response items. Two Proficient Standards were established to denote the point that represents a ‘challenging but
reasonable’ expectation of student achievement at each year level.

Around half of the participating students met or exceeded the relevant Proficient Standard appropriate to their year level. At Year 10, 49 per cent of students performed at or above the Proficient Standard. This represented an improvement on the previous assessment cycle, as in 2007 only 42 per cent of students achieved at or above the Proficient Standard.

At Year 6, 52 per cent of students were able to demonstrate the knowledge and understanding required to meet the Proficient Standard. This was consistent with the findings of the 2007 assessment, when 53 per cent met or exceeded the Proficient Standard. However, although students’ performance did not increase at the national level, both Western Australia and the Northern Territory showed statistically significant improvements in average performance.

Nationally, girls performed better than boys on the 2010 assessment, both at Year 6 and Year 10. Fifty-five percent of Year 6 girls performed at or above the Proficient Standard compared to 49 per cent of boys. At Year 10, 53 per cent of girls performed at or above the Proficient Standard compared to 44 per cent of boys. A similar gender difference was present in the 2004 and 2007 assessments.

With regard to student background, it was found that there was no significant difference between those students who mainly speak English at home and those who speak another language at home. However, at both grade levels Indigenous students had much lower levels of civic knowledge than non-Indigenous students.

**Student engagement and behaviours**

Student engagement and participation were assessed with a student questionnaire. The questionnaire sought to uncover the attitudes, values, dispositions, behaviours and intentions of students in relation to civic issues. Specific questions determined the frequency and nature of current involvement in civic-related activities at school and in the community. It also collected information about students’ trust in civic institutions and processes, attitudes towards Australian Indigenous cultures and Australian diversity, and prospective engagement as an adult citizen.

The findings of the 2010 assessment for the first time provide insight into young Australians’ perceptions of civic society and their notions of citizenship. In the 2007 assessment, only information about student participation in civic-related activities inside and outside school was collected through the student questionnaire.

The responses to the student questionnaire revealed that at both year levels, the majority of students had participated in class elections, school-based community activities and had represented the school away from the classroom. However, the results also revealed a decline in active engagement at school from Year 6 to Year 10. There was a general tendency among Year 10 students to report lower participation than Year 6 students in activities such as participation in student parliaments, voting for class representatives and participation in peer support programs. Girls were more likely than boys to have participated in some of these activities.

There was also a noticeable decrease between Year 6 and Year 10 in the amount of trust placed in civic institutions. Girls expressed somewhat more trust than boys in civic groups and institutions. The civic institutions most trusted by students were the police (85 per cent in Year 6; 72 per cent in Year 10) and law courts (69 per cent in Year 6; 65 per cent in Year 10). These were followed by state or territory parliament (72 per cent in Year 6; 51 per cent in Year 10), federal parliament (69 per cent in Year 6; 51 per cent in Year 10), political parties (57 per cent in Year 6; 32 per cent in Year 10) and the media (45 per cent in Year 6; 27 per cent in Year 10).

Only about one third of students at both year levels were found to be interested in Australian politics. Similarly, just 37 per cent of Year 10 students and 54 per cent of Year 6 students rated discussing politics as very important or quite important for being a good citizen in Australia. This suggests that aspects of political debate in Australia do not reach the attention of young people and also that ‘politics’ may have negative connotations for young people in general.

However, many students expressed interest in environmental issues (69 per cent in Year 6 and 68 per cent in Year 10 rated themselves as quite or very interested); what is happening in other countries (66 per cent in both Year 6 and 10); and global issues (64 per cent in Year 6 and 68 per cent in Year 10).

In order for individuals to actively engage in society, they need to believe that their engagement has value. Large majorities of Australian students at both year levels were in agreement with positive statements about the value of student participation at school. Among Year 10 students, 80 per cent agreed that citizens can influence government policies in Australia. Girls were found to express more positive attitudes regarding the value of civic engagement than boys.

Most Year 10 students held positive attitudes towards Australian diversity. Eighty per cent of students agreed that Australia benefits greatly from having people from many cultures and backgrounds. However, there were also relatively large percentages expressing agreement with some negatively worded statements. For example, almost half of the students agreed that immigration should be cut when there are not many jobs available and that Australia would become less peaceful as more people from different backgrounds came to live here.
The data from this national assessment program also suggest that students in their majority demonstrate positive attitudes towards Australian diversity and Australian Indigenous cultures, which are characteristics the Melbourne Declaration defined as goals for the education of active and informed citizens in this country.

Conclusions

The National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship seeks to determine whether the education system is successful in its endeavour to develop informed and active citizens. The results show that, although gains have been made at Year 10 level, it still appears that there is work to be done in ensuring that students develop a more complete depth of content knowledge that should be expected of ‘informed citizens’.

With regard to ‘active citizens’, the questionnaire responses showed interesting differences in behaviour between year levels and genders. Further collections of this kind of information about student engagement and values may help to elaborate further the degree to which the aspirations currently described in the Melbourne Declaration regarding student citizenship can be achieved in the near future.

In 2011 ACARA began developing the civics and citizenship education component of the national curriculum. It is envisaged that the next cycle of the National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship, due in 2013, will incorporate the desired learning outcomes of the national curriculum. Future assessments of this learning area should continue to provide valuable monitoring information about the degree to which Australian schooling is successful in supporting students to become informed and active citizens.

The National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship Year 6 and 10 Report 2010, published by ACARA, is available from <research.acer.edu.au/civics/11>
Philanthropy and education: working together

Michelle Anderson reports on a national study of schools, philanthropics and not-for-profits that reveals a gap between those ‘in the know’ and those not, but also identifies better ways to build, share and exchange knowledge.
Improving outcomes for learners is the primary aim of education, but there is common agreement that this is not the responsibility of education alone. That is why schools today increasingly work with the support of external partners, from parents and friends in the local community to philanthropic grant making foundations and trusts, as well as businesses and not-for-profit organisations. It is also why those external partners increasingly seek to work with schools by providing grants, sponsorship, awards, bursaries or scholarships, prizes or donations, as well as in-kind and volunteer support, and support in terms of relationship building within the community.

According to new research, however, those most in need of philanthropic grants and support are often the ones least equipped to seek them. The Leading Learning in Education and Philanthropy (LLEAP) study shows schools have limited knowledge about philanthropic grant making and support, and do not always have access to, or the capacity to leverage, the additional support required to develop and implement projects or programs to address their local needs.

A three-year study of the impact of philanthropy in education, LLEAP was launched in March 2011 as an initiative of ACER’s Tender Bridge. The project is in partnership with, and with funding from, The Ian Potter Foundation and the Origin Foundation. The research is exploring whether the full potential of support available from philanthropy to Australian schools is being realised. The project aims to find ways to improve the quality of grant seeking and grant making in Australia, with a focus on identifying better ways for the philanthropy and education sectors to connect and collaborate. Findings from the first year surveys were published in late 2011.

Funding and other resources

The study found that philanthropic foundations and trusts provide resources other than funds to grantees, including general professional expertise and guidance, brokering or facilitating introductions and publicity or promotion. However, most schools have limited knowledge about philanthropics and the support they offer, and typically seek funding through community fundraising activities of the school fête variety rather than grant seeking. Philanthropy tends to fly under the radar in Australia: 9 out of every 10 schools surveyed reported that they are inexperienced in the area of philanthropic grant seeking.

Legal and tax issues

One reason for this is that, in many cases, schools may not be eligible to apply directly to a philanthropic foundation or trust for a grant because the legal and tax status of foundations
Target audiences and priority areas

Findings from the first year of the study reveal some commonalities but also some notable differences in the target audiences and priority areas of schools, not-for-profits and philanthropics.

In terms of commonalities, programs or projects addressing students of secondary school age ranked as the number one target audience for not-for-profits and philanthropics, and third for schools. Programs or projects addressing literacy and numeracy, and student engagement ranked as the number one and two priority areas respectively for schools and philanthropics; not-for-profits ranked student engagement equal-second, and literacy and numeracy equal-third.

In terms of differences, teacher quality was rated as a high priority area by schools, who ranked it third, but was ranked 16th by not-for-profits and 12th by philanthropics. Schools ranked digital/online learning fourth, while not-for-profits ranked it 12th and philanthropics ranked it 10th.

Three key areas for change

The study identified three key areas of change for philanthropics, not-for-profits and schools to improve the impact of philanthropy in education:

- for philanthropics – improving knowledge in terms of developments in education, priority areas to focus on, and how to better collaborate with other philanthropics and those in the education sector
- for schools – overcoming access issues in terms of tax laws that prevent philanthropic grant making to schools, and knowledge of philanthropic priority areas and processes, and
- for not-for-profits – overcoming sustainability issues in terms of the duration of grants made.

10 success factors

The study also identified 10 success factors from 250 ‘critical ingredients’ that respondents from schools, philanthropics and not-for-profits thought would reflect the highly effective engagement of philanthropy in education, these being:

- building capacity, for example, by improving the knowledge and capabilities of grant seekers
- making informed decisions through the evidence-based identification of a local need to be addressed
- improving knowledge in education and philanthropy contexts, for example, about the philanthropic foundations and trusts interested in funding education
- establishing a ‘good fit,’ by making sure that what you are seeking support for aligns with the values and objectives of the grant maker
- committing appropriate resourcing, for example, by providing longer-term grants relevant to the needs of the project or program
- improving the effectiveness of communications by creating simple and clear grant processes
- improving role clarity so that everyone knows who is doing what and why
- building relationships based on trust by following through and doing what you said you will do
- reciprocating so that partners bring their strengths to the relationship, and
- being impact focused by having some form of evaluation.

We know that outcomes for learners do not occur in a vacuum, but as the result of the interrelationship of education with mental health and wellbeing, obesity, economic disadvantage, access to products and services, and other factors. It is because of this interrelationship that school leaders actively engage with others in their communities, but philanthropy remains an under-recognised source of support and funding.

The LLEAP study reveals that there is a gap between those ‘in the know’ and those not. To bridge the gap, a practical guide on grant making and grant seeking in education has been developed. The LLEAP Dialogue Series Guide provides practical tips for effective grant writing and cases of effective engagement of philanthropy in education, as well as other useful tools and information. Available from the LLEAP website, the guide aims to help schools, philanthropics and not-for-profits to build, share and exchange knowledge in better ways.

For more on the Leading Learning in Education and Philanthropy study, visit <www.acer.edu.au/lleap>
Walking and cycling to school can increase children’s physical activity and ability to move through their neighbourhood without adult supervision, also known as independent mobility.

Research has shown that physical activity such as walking and cycling has a positive life-long impact on children, including greater cognitive, intellectual and social skills. More specifically, studies have found physical activity increases students’ ability to pay attention, be alert and concentrate in class which in turn enhances academic performance.

Despite such evidence of the benefits walking and cycling can provide, a survey of over 800 primary school students living in six Victorian municipalities revealed only 26 per cent of children regularly walk to school and only five per cent rode their bike to school at least three days in the preceding week. Similarly, a survey of over 500 parents of students aged 5 to 12 years living in the same six Victorian municipalities has revealed that, despite the fact that 56 per cent of children live less than 20 minutes walking distance from their school, over half of them travel by car.

As Australian school children and parents were encouraged to literally join hands in May and participate in Walk Safely to School Day, Catherine Underwood examines some of the perceived barriers and enablers to children’s independent mobility.
Barriers to independent mobility

Concerns about safety are a key factor in whether children travel to school independently. Only 40 per cent of parents living in metropolitan areas and 36 per cent of parents living in regional areas who participated in the survey believe it is safe for children to walk or ride to school on their own.

The research also examined survey responses from over 800 residents aged 60 years and over living in the same areas, revealing that older residents believe it is safer for children to walk or cycle to school independently than the parents of primary school-aged children believe to be the case.

In contrast to parents, 79 per cent of older residents living in metropolitan areas and 69 per cent of those living in regional areas believe it is safe for children to walk or ride to school on their own.

The disparity between parents’ and older residents’ views on whether it is safe for children to independently walk or ride through their neighbourhood appears to be reflected in their perceptions of the danger presented to children by strangers.

‘Stranger danger’ was seen as a barrier to children’s independent outdoor activity by 44 per cent of metropolitan older residents and 51 per cent of regional older residents.

In contrast, 76 per cent of parents living in metropolitan areas and 71 per cent of parents living in regional areas indicated that ‘stranger danger’ is the most significant barrier to their child’s physical activity in the neighbourhood.

Children are far less concerned about ‘stranger danger’ than parents. Out of around 800 primary school students surveyed, 59 per cent reported they were worried about strangers. Despite these concerns, the majority of children surveyed reported that they would prefer to walk to school rather than be driven.

Parents identified road safety as the second most significant barrier to their child’s physical activity in the neighbourhood. Around half of the parents surveyed (44 per cent of metropolitan parents and 51 per cent of regional parents) agreed that there is a lot of traffic along most nearby streets, making it difficult or unpleasant to go for walks. Here, older residents’ responses were closer to parents’; with 31 per cent of metropolitan older residents and 38 per cent of regional older residents agreeing that heavy traffic makes it difficult or unpleasant to walk.
Knowledge of road safety rules are equally important for children who walk in their neighbourhood as they are for children who ride bicycles. Children who walked or rode their bike to school reported a similarly high level of understanding of the road safety rules irrespective of age. Ninety-one per cent of 8 to 12 year-olds surveyed reported that they own a bike and know how to ride it. Of those that said they know how to ride a bike, 92 per cent of boys and 89 per cent of girls reported that they know the road safety rules.

However, knowing the road safety rules and obeying them are two separate matters. The survey revealed that while boys have slightly greater awareness of road safety rules, girls are more likely to actually obey them. Girls were more likely than boys to report that they wear a helmet while riding (85 per cent of girls vs. 76 per cent of boys), look right and left before crossing the road (88 per cent vs. 72 per cent) and stop before crossing the road (88 per cent vs. 72 per cent). Girls were less likely than boys to report taking risks such as crossing the road away from the school crossing in order to save time (27 per cent of girls vs. 32 per cent of boys).

Enablers to independent mobility

The surveys asked parents whether their child’s school encourages students to walk or ride to school. Most parents reported that students are encouraged to walk or cycle to school, however less than half said there is a school policy specifically about walking or cycling to school. More than two-thirds of parents said that road safety skills are taught from an early age at their child’s school and more than half said students are taught ‘Bike Education’ including practical riding skills.

The surveys also revealed that the mobile phone may play a role in getting children active in their neighbourhood. Children who know how to use a mobile phone were more likely to move about their neighbourhood without adult supervision than children who do not know how to use a mobile phone.

The study revealed that 70 per cent of children who know how to use a mobile phone reported that they are allowed to go outside and play with other children, compared to only 51 per cent of children who do not know how to use a mobile phone. Children who know how to use a mobile phone also reported a greater awareness of skills needed to move independently around their neighbourhood, such as road safety rules and how to read street signs and use public transport.

The findings support the idea that mobile phones may be a tool parents use to allow their children greater independent mobility.

Another way for parents to facilitate their children’s physical activity within the neighbourhood is through pet ownership. Sixty per cent of children surveyed reported owning a pet dog, of which 64 per cent regularly go on family walks with their dog and 35 per cent regularly walk their dog on their own.

Children who regularly walked their pet dog reported greater awareness of the skills needed to move independently around in their neighbourhood, such as road safety rules. They were also more likely to say they enjoy walking and cycling outside with family and friends, and were less likely to say they enjoy playing inside.

Around 74 per cent of children who walk their pet dog reported being allowed to go outside and play with friends without adult supervision, compared to only 59 per cent of children who do not own a dog. Similarly, parents of children who walk their pet dog were significantly more likely to say it is safe for their children to independently walk, cycle or skate alone during the day; play in the street and local park; travel to places other than school; and cross main roads.

Even if the family dog is not walked by the children, pet ownership can still have a positive impact on children’s lives. The survey showed children who own a pet dog were more likely than children who do not own a dog to own equipment such as bicycles, scooters, rollerblades and skateboards.

In another aspect of the survey, school principals reported that their teachers observed students who actively commuted to school were more physically active in the playground. In the classroom students were more alert, confident, mature, and had higher levels of concentration which all enhance academic performance.

Active modes of transport such as walking, cycling, skating and scooting have been shown to increase children’s knowledge of their neighbourhood and have a positive influence on their health and academic performance and, as such, should be encouraged.

These surveys were based on data looking at children’s independent mobility and active transport collected in 2010 with funding from VicHealth. Further information is available from <research.acer.edu.au/cimat>.
Educators with an interest in improving outcomes for Indigenous learners are now able to access the latest relevant national and international research all at one destination, following the launch of the Indigenous Education Research Database (IERD).

IERD contains details of over 8000 books, articles, conference papers and reports on various aspects of Indigenous education from publishers in Australia and overseas. IERD also includes links to over 116 journals and newsletters on Indigenous education, as well as links to relevant organisations, publishers and websites.

IERD is created and maintained by staff of ACER’s Cunningham Library, in consultation with ACER’s Indigenous Liaison Officer. Established to provide researchers and educators with a single destination for the latest Indigenous education research, the database is an example of ACER’s commitment to improving outcomes for Indigenous learners.

Material in the database is drawn from the Australian Education Index (also produced by staff of ACER’s Cunningham Library) with additional material sourced from a variety of international organisations and publishers. Updated monthly, articles are selected and indexed by qualified librarians. New additions to the database can be followed on twitter @indedres

Access to IERD is free via <www.acer.edu.au/ierd>
Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

An evaluation of the national Sporting Chance Program has identified a number of critical success factors associated with the program that have contributed to improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

ACER was commissioned to see if the program was achieving its objective of using school-based Sports Academies and Education Engagement Strategies (EES) to improve educational outcomes, particularly in relation to attendance, engagement, learning achievement, staying on at school, and improving the level of parent and community involvement in school.

Feedback from students in the Sports Academies indicated improved levels of confidence and pride from developing new skills, having leadership opportunities, participating in team activities and undertaking other activities in a culturally safe environment. Students participating in the Education Engagement Strategies benefitted from being exposed to a range of role models and activities.

Overwhelmingly, the feedback from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who participated in the evaluation was positive, particularly in relation to their attitudes to school, self-identity and self-pride in being Aboriginal, and self-efficacy as learners.

The full evaluation report by a team of ACER researchers led by Dr Michele Lonsdale is available from <research.acer.edu.au/policy_analysis_misc/14>

Preparation 21st Century Learners: The Case for School-Community Collaborations

Support from those beyond the school gates is an essential part of preparing learners for the twenty-first century. ACER Principal Research Fellow Dr Michele Lonsdale and ACER Senior Research Fellow Dr Michelle Anderson argue in the latest in a series of research-based, expert opinion articles.

The ACER Occasional Essays series aims to provide thought leadership that can create a positive impact on learners and their needs, on the learning profession and on places of learning, and fosters a learning society in which every learner experiences success and has an opportunity to reach their potential.

The full essay is available from <www.acer.edu.au/media/occasional-essays>

Student understanding of food and fibre origins

The Primary Industries Education Foundation contracted ACER to design and conduct a baseline survey of students and teachers to find out what they know about primary industries in Australia, focusing on where food and fibre products come from.

Most of the students surveyed exhibited positive attitudes towards agriculture and farming, believing that farmers take care of the soil and their animals. The majority of students were able to name wheat and wool products, identify the stages in transferring fruit from an orchard to the home, and identify a product as plant- or animal-based.

All of the responding primary school teachers and 90 per cent of the secondary teachers saw knowledge and understanding of food and fibre production as at least somewhat important for young Australians today.

The full report, Food, Fibre and the Future: Report on surveys of students' and teachers' knowledge and understanding of Primary Industries by ACER Senior Research Fellow Ms Kylie Hillman and ACER Research Fellow Dr Sarah Buckley, is available from <research.acer.edu.au/national_surveys/1/>

Australian higher education international student market

Australia is a key player in international higher education student provision and is now ranked third in the world, behind the US and the UK, according to an ACER Joining the Dots research briefing.

The report found Australia’s international student market is heavily reliant on Asia and the Pacific—accounting for nearly 80 per cent of the cohort—and is currently the most popular destination for Malaysian, Hong Kong, Indonesian, Singaporean, Sri Lankan and New Zealand tertiary education students.

The report advises that while Australia remains one of the ‘big fish’ in the international student scene, the number of host nations is growing, as is their capacity to compete for students.

Joining the Dots is a subscription-based resource provided by ACER to those with an interest in Australian higher education. Details for subscriptions are available at <www.acer.edu.au/jtd>

Girls outperform boys in reading in PISA 2009+

Results from the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) released by ACER late last year reveal that girls tend to be better than boys at reading, understanding, remembering and summarising information.

Ten countries and economies who were unable to participate within the PISA 2009 project timeframe participated in the study on a reduced and delayed timeline in 2010. This is known as the PISA 2009+ project.

The survey found that girls significantly outperformed boys in reading in the PISA 2009+ economies. This was also the case for all 64 countries and economies participating in PISA 2009. The results also showed both girls and boys from the PISA 2009+ nations had overall results in reading, mathematical and scientific literacy that were lower than the OECD average.

The full PISA 2009+ report is available from <mypisa.acer.edu.au>

Future academics need encouragement to stay in Australia

The higher education sector must focus on creating roles for early career academics and retaining research graduates as it risks impeding Australia’s ability to meet its university attainment targets, according to an ACER Joining the Dots research briefing.

It is estimated that there are around 19 000 current research students in Australia under the age of 40 with serious career plans to join the academic
profession over the coming decade. However, more than 43 per cent of these research students plan to pursue this profession outside Australia, reducing the estimated supply of academics to Australian universities to about 11 000. Recent findings from an Australian survey of academics indicate that over 50 000 academics, intend to retire, move to an overseas university, or leave Australian higher education at some time in the next ten years, indicating there may be growth in the availability of academic positions in the medium term.

Joining the Dots is a subscription-based resource provided by ACER to those with an interest in Australian higher education. Details for subscriptions can be found at <www.acer.edu.au/jtd>

Gambling prevalent among young Australians

The first national study of gambling among young people in Australia has revealed that the majority of 10–24-year-olds have participated in a gambling activity at least once in the year just passed. ACER was commissioned to undertake the study by the Victorian Department of Justice on behalf of Gambling Research Australia. More than 5600 young people participated in the study, which found 76 per cent of 10–14-year-olds, 64 per cent of 15–17 year olds, and 85 per cent of 18–24-year-olds gambled at least once in the previous year. Focus group sessions revealed young people generally believed that gambling activities were in some way harmful. However, activities such as the purchase of a lottery ticket and placing a wager on the Melbourne Cup were not viewed negatively, rather they were viewed as culturally accepted and, in some cases, expected. Positive attitudes to gambling and low self-esteem were identified as two factors associated with problem gambling. The report suggests that targeting these factors, as well as young people’s understanding of what constitutes gambling and their perceptions about gamblers, will play an important part in developing intervention procedures aimed at reducing levels of youth gambling in Australia.

The full report, Gambling and Young People in Australia by ACER researchers Dr Nola Purdie, Dr Gabrielle Matters, Kylie Hillman, Martin Murphy and Clare Ozolins, and Pam Millwood from Wallis Consulting Group, is available from <research.acer.edu.au/ policy_analysis_misc/13>

Post-school destinations: expectation vs. reality

An ACER report on the expected and achieved post-school destinations of NSW secondary students shows that students’ expectations for university study are substantially higher than the actual proportions that pursue university education in the year after leaving school. It also revealed that, while students and their parents share similar expectations for university study, teachers hold lower expectations.

Commissioned by the NSW Board of Vocational Education and Training and facilitated by the NSW Department of Education and Board of Studies, the survey revealed that almost 70 per cent of students expected to study at university after leaving school. In contrast about 42 per cent of young persons who left school in 2009 were at university in 2010. Parents shared similar expectations to their children, with around 65 per cent reporting they expect their child will attend university. Teacher expectations for university study were substantially lower, at around 35 per cent.

The full report, Career Moves: Expectations and Destinations of NSW Senior Secondary Students by ACER Researchers Dr Gary Marks, Catherine Underwood, Dr Sheldon Rothman and Justin Brown, is available from <research.acer.edu.au/ transitions_misc/11>

Principal for a Day

Principal for a Day is a joint partnership between ACER and the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) that sees business and community leaders take the reins of schools across the state. Conducted annually since 2001, the program provides a unique opportunity for business and community leaders to gain a first-hand, behind-the-scenes experience of the strengths and challenges facing schools every day. Research shows that there are benefits from forming partnerships between schools, business and the wider community. The Principal for a Day program can help forge these partnerships. Around 100 schools participated in last year’s program. This year, Principal for a Day takes place on Wednesday 22 August. Further information is available from <www.acer.edu.au/leadership/principal-for-a-day>

Schools First applications open

NAB Schools First enters its fourth year in 2012, with $3 million in funding available to 130 outstanding school-community partnerships across three award categories. This year there will be 55 Impact Awards, 65 Seed Funding Awards and 10 Student Awards. Applications for each of these awards are open now and close on 29 June. The winners will be announced in August.

NAB Schools First is a strong partnership between NAB, ACER and the Foundation for Young Australians. It is Australia’s largest corporate initiative of its kind and is open to all schools around the country. To date, 305 Australian schools have shared in over $15 million award money to support their school-community partnership.

To find out more about NAB Schools First and to download application forms, awards criteria, guidelines, and Terms and Conditions visit <www.schoolsfirst.edu.au>

Research Conference

The ACER Research Conference 2012 on the theme of School Improvement: What does the research tell us about effective practice? will be held in Sydney on 26-28 August. School Improvement is a key objective of all educational systems and school leaders who share a common drive to deliver improved outcomes for students. Research Conference 2012 will highlight recent research and practice that identifies not only what schools can do to improve outcomes for students but also how they can do it most effectively. Early bird registrations close 1 July. For more information visit <www.acer.edu.au/conference>
School Improvement: What does research tell us about effective strategies?

Speakers include:

- Professor Geoff Masters
  ACER
- Professor David Hargreaves
  Cambridge University, UK
- Ms Valerie Hannon
  Innovation Unit, UK
- Dr Michele Bruniges
  Department of Education & Communities, NSW
- Professor Stephen Dinham
  University of Melbourne, VIC
- Professor Brian Caldwell and Dr Tanya Vaughan
  Educational Transformations, VIC
- Professor Helen Timperley
  University of Auckland, NZ
- Professor Kathryn Moyle
  Charles Darwin University, NT
- Professor Mike Askew
  Monash University, VIC
- Professor Helen Wildy
  University of Western Australia, WA
- Professor Patrick Griffin
  University of Melbourne, VIC
- Professor Tania Aspland
  University of Adelaide, SA
- Dr Kathryn Glasswell
  Griffith University, QLD
- Associate Professor John Munro
  University of Melbourne, VIC
- Dr Mike Timms
  ACER
- Dr Michele Lonsdale, Ms Sharon Clerke and
  Dr Michelle Anderson,
  ACER
- Dr Ben Jensen
  Grattan Institute, VIC
- Dr John Ainley
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- Ms Gina Milgate, ACER &
  Mr Brian Giles-Browne, Dare to Lead
- Mr Mark Campling, Mr Stephen Savvakis and
  Ms Jane Sedgman
  Department of Education & Training, QLD
- Ms Lynette Virgona
  Department of Education, WA

Enquiries:
Margaret Taylor T: 03 9277 5403 F: 03 9277 5544 E: taylor@acer.edu.au

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