



# Weekly Briefing For Member Schools

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## [Debate Continues on the Publication of League Tables](#)

Following the publication of comparative school performance information in the *Courier Mail* newspaper, debate has raged in the media about the merits of school league tables.

## [OECD Report Released On Gender Imbalances in Reading and Mathematics Performance](#)

A report from the OECD has found that the gap in reading performance between Australian girls and boys has increased over time.

## [Parliamentary News](#)

Forthcoming sitting dates for the Victorian and Australian Parliaments.

## [Victorian ICT Week](#)

The Victorian Information Technology Teachers' Association is running a series of activities to celebrate Victorian ICT Week.

## [Festival of Ideas](#)

The University of Melbourne is hosting a series of talks looking at climate change and cultural change in Australia.

## [Seminars for the week beginning 1 June 2009](#)

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### Debate Continues on the Publication of League Tables

*Media Release, The Hon Julia Gillard MP, 26/05/09; Speech to the Christian Schools Policy Forum, The Hon Julia Gillard MP, 26/05/09; Courier Mail, Tanya Chilcott, 23/05/09; Courier Mail, Tanya Chilcott & Steven Wardill, 23/05/09; The Age, Farrah Tomazin, 26/05/09; Sydney Morning Herald, Anna Patty, 26/05/09; The West Australian, Bethany Hiatt, 26/05/09; The Age, Farrah Tomazin, 28/05/09; The Australian, Editorial, 28/05/09; Canberra Times, Emma Macdonald, 28/05/09; Courier Mail, Tanya Chilcott, 28/05/09; The Age, Chris Bonnor 29/05/09*

The *Courier Mail* newspaper has released performance data for Queensland primary schools that has re-launched debate about the publication of league tables. The *Courier Mail* published information about the performance of almost every government and non-government primary school in Queensland against 2007 state-based literacy and numeracy benchmarks. Overall, Catholic and independent school students had a higher proportion of students at or above the minimum benchmarks. According to the *Courier Mail*, socioeconomic factors played a major role in schools' performance in 2007, with schools in high-income areas from all sectors among the highest achieving. The Chief Executive of the Australian Council for Educational Research, Professor Geoff Masters, welcomed the publication of the results, arguing that they provided an 'important snapshot' for parents, while the President of the Queensland Teachers' Union, Mr Steve Ryan, claimed that the release of the data was 'bordering on deliberate fraud'. The Acting Executive Director of Independent Schools Queensland, Mr David Robertson, argued that the 'this type of limited reporting...provides little insight into the makeup of the school, its students and location factors, which can have a significant influence on how schools fare in exams'.

Meanwhile, a survey of secondary school principals' attitudes to the public release of school performance information found that approximately 90 per cent of respondents believed that comparisons of school benchmark data would not lead to school improvement. The majority of respondents also stated that the publication of school performance information could be detrimental to students and staff and could damage schools' reputations. It also suggested that national benchmark tests were unreliable and that there were more effective measures of student performance available. Following the release of the survey, the President of the Australian Secondary Principals' Association (ASPA), Mr Andrew Blair, and the President of the New South Wales Secondary Principals' Council, Mr Jim McAlpine, indicated that some principals were considering whether they might refuse to pass on 2009 benchmark test results or to take part in 2010 benchmark testing if the Australian Government failed to ban future publication of school performance results. The ASPA and other bodies have convened a meeting with federal Australian Labor Party backbenchers to demand that legislation be introduced to prevent schools from being 'unfairly named and shamed'.

The former Dean of Education at the University of Melbourne, Professor Brian Caldwell, claimed in his *Agitation Hill Lecture* that the push by the Australian and state governments to make schools more accountable 'could do grave harm to our profession' and represented an 'unprecedented centralisation in the control of public education...While they deny the intent, without question the Rudd Government is leading the charge, with premiers and chief ministers in all states and territories following, to create league tables.' The editor of *The Australian* argued that threats to boycott national benchmark tests provided an example of 'provider capture', in which 'teachers' unions and principals' associations have betrayed their real intention: to shield their members from community scrutiny'. The newspaper welcomed the decision by the *Courier Mail* and the *Hobart Mercury* to put the interests of the public ahead of the interests of educators. However, Chris Bonnor argued in *The Age* that 'the recent outbreak of school league tables' represented 'a new low standard in misinformation about schools, but one aided and abetted by official encouragement and confusion'.

In response, the Australian Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, The Hon Julia Gillard MP, reiterated that the Australian Government was not interested in 'simplistic league tables'. She stated that 'the government understands that there are some that remain opposed to greater transparency in our schools [but] believes it is time we stopped averting our eyes and ensure every Australian child is receiving a world-class education'. Minister Gillard also argued that governments needed to know which schools were underperforming so that resources could be targeted to the neediest students. The Victorian Minister for Education, The Hon Bronwyn Pike MLA, indicated that she did not support simplistic league tables, but wanted to ensure that parents could make informed decisions when choosing a school for their children.

### OECD Report Released On Gender Imbalances in Reading and Mathematics Performance

*Daily Telegraph, Bruce McDougall, 28/05/09; The West Australian, Andrew Tillett, 28/05/09*

A report released by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has claimed that the gap in reading performance between boys and girls is increasing in Australia. The OECD analysis of 15 year old students' *Program of International Student Assessment (PISA)* results found that girls across the world tended to perform better on reading tests than boys at the end of primary school, that the gap tended to increase at the secondary level and that the gap had 'grown significantly since 2000 in several countries', including Australia. By contrast, while there was little difference at the end of primary school between boys' and girls' performance on mathematics tests, boys tended to perform better than girls by age 15. The report argued that girls tended to have a higher interest in reading than boys, but that they tended to be more anxious about mathematics. The report recommended that 'teachers can do more to promote gender equality through strategies to build self-confidence and motivation and by reassessing their own expectations. But action is also needed at home and across society as a whole...Attitudes such as reading is not for boys or maths is not for girls must not be allowed to persist: they are too costly in terms of lost potential.' Go to [www.oecd.org/dataoecd/59/50/42843625.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/59/50/42843625.pdf) to access a copy of the report.

### Parliamentary News

The Victorian Parliament (Assembly and Council) rose on Thursday 7 May 2009 and will next sit from Tuesday 2 June 2009 until Thursday 11 June 2009. The Australian Parliament (House of Representatives and Senate) rose on Thursday 14 May 2009. The House of Representatives will sit from Monday 25 May 2009 until Thursday 4 June 2009. During this time, the Senate will not sit, but will consider the Budget Estimates. The Senate will not resume sitting until Monday 15 June 2009.

### Victorian ICT Week

As part of Victorian Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Week from Monday 27 July 2009 to Saturday 1 August 2009, the Victorian Information Technology Teachers' Association is running a series of free activities for teachers and students. Melbourne High School will host an ICT and Careers Expo for students which will provide students with information from representatives of a range of industries where ICT plays an important role, as well as representatives of tertiary institutions. Teachers and careers counsellors will also be able to attend an ICT industry bus tour to four organisations working in the ICT industry. The Expo will take place on Saturday 1 August, from 10.00 am until 3.00 pm at Melbourne High School, Forrest Hill, South Yarra. The Tour will run on Thursday 30 July 2009, from 9.00 am to 6.30 pm. Go to [www.ictweek.vitta.org.au](http://www.ictweek.vitta.org.au) for further information on ICT Week.

### Festival of Ideas

The University of Melbourne has invited school staff to attend its 2009 *Festival of Ideas* which will focus on *Climate Change*, *Cultural Change*. The Festival runs from Monday 15 June 2009 to Friday 19 June 2009 and consists of a range of lectures, panels and forums on various topics regarding climate change and the possible cultural changes of climate change in Australia. Admission to all Festival of Ideas events is free, but participants are required to book and download tickets through the Festival of Ideas website. Go to <http://ideas.unimelb.edu.au> to access further details about the festival.

### Seminars for the week beginning 1 June 2009

Day	Seminar Name	Time	Venue
Monday 01/06	Literacy Co-Ordinators Network Meeting: Day Two of Four	9.30 am – 3.00 pm	Seminar Room
	First Steps Writing 2nd Edition- Program B: Day One of Two	9.30 am – 3.30 pm	Training Centre
Tuesday 02/06	Authentic Learning- Integrating Pedagogy & ICTs for Developing Schools	9.00 am – 3.30 pm	Training Centre
Wednesday 03/06	LOTE Get Them Talking Years 7- 11	9.30 am – 3.30 pm	Seminar Room
	Directors' Professional Learning 2: Day Three	4.00 pm – 6.00 pm	Seminar Room
Thursday 04/06	Maintain and Enhance Professional Practice	9.30 am – 3.30 pm	Seminar Room
	Staff Matters – Health and Wellbeing for Staff	9.30 am – 3.30 pm	Training Centre
	Anaphylaxis Training	9.00 am – 4.00 pm	West Melbourne
Friday 05/06	Turkish – Creative Planning to Motivate Students	9.30 am – 3.30 pm	Training Centre
	Anaphylaxis Training	9.00 am – 4.00 pm	West Melbourne

The Seminar Room is located at 20 Garden Street. The Training Centre and Board Room are located at 30 Garden Street. The anaphylaxis training will take place at the Asthma Foundation of Victoria, 491-495 King Street West Melbourne.

Note: The AISV Weekly Briefing is also available on the AISV web site, including back issues. The AISV web site is at <http://www.ais.vic.edu.au>.

To obtain further information on any of the above matters, please contact AISV

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