

# Australian Educator

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# Fair Funding Now!

ALP promises to increase public school funding



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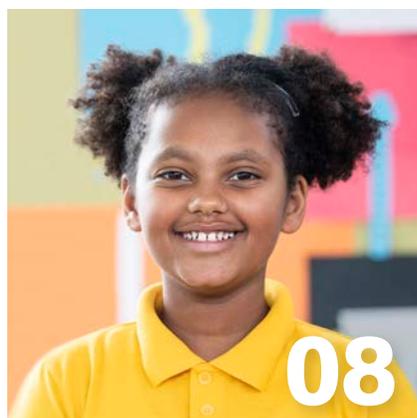
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**PHOTOGRAPHY** ANTHONY MCKEE



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# Know your union

With a federal office and branches or associated bodies in every state and territory, the AEU represents more than 188,000 members industrially and professionally.



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# 2019 election funding fight

Public opposition to the Morrison government's education cuts contrasts sharply with Labor's commitment to fund public schools. This will be an education election.

As the dust settles after what can only be described as several months of political chaos for the Federal Government, it's time to take stock of where we stand in the fight for fair funding for public schools.

Thank you for your support of the Fair Funding Now! Campaign. In school communities across Australia, our members and community supporters have taken action to ensure that federal parliamentarians heed the call to properly fund public schools. This cry is being heard far and wide, and politicians are listening.

On October 10, Labor leader Bill Shorten made a game-changing announcement for public schools.

If elected, Labor has promised to invest \$14.1 billion in our public schools, including \$3.3 billion in the first three years. This announcement has been widely welcomed by Fair Funding Now! supporters across the country. This investment will ensure that public education is the key priority of a future federal government and recognises the importance of properly funding the system responsible for educating Australia's 2.5 million public school students.

Make no mistake - this is a huge win for the Fair Funding Now! community. Labor's extra public school funding will mean smaller class sizes, more teachers and support staff, and more one-on-one individual attention for public school students.

Labor's extra \$3.3 billion in its first three years of government is in stark contrast to the Morrison government's \$1.9 billion cuts from 2018 and 2019.

An important part of Labor's commitment to public school funding is that it will work with the states and territories to bring all public schools up



**We must continue to work hard in the lead-up to the next election to highlight the differences between the political parties' policies.**

”

to 100 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS). This pledge to smash the Morrison government's arbitrary 20 per cent cap on federal SRS funding for public schools will help to restore equity to school funding.

Last, but not least, Labor has announced support for a review of NAPLAN. After a decade of this standardised testing, and a year of catastrophic failures of the NAPLAN online trial, it is the right time to conduct a broad review of NAPLAN; one which has the teaching profession at the heart of the decision-making process about assessment and reporting.

The Australian Greens has heeded the call in our fight for the fair funding of public schools, too. They have a strong policy focus on needs-based school funding, on investing in public schools, and on securing

funding for students with disability. The AEU has met with Green's Education spokesperson Senator Mehreen Faruqi and we look forward to working together to ensure that governments always put public education first.

Over the past few months the contrast between the Labor Opposition and the Liberal-National government has become stark. While Labor was guaranteeing funding for 15 hours of pre-school for three- and four-year-olds, announcing \$14 billion extra for public schools over the next decade and guaranteeing two-thirds funding for public TAFE, the Morrison government was announcing a \$4.6 billion special funding deal for private schools and nothing for public schools, and cutting funding to TAFE and pre-school.

The public has not been fooled - our own polling indicates strong opposition to the Morrison government cuts and their special private school deal.

In welcoming Labor's announcements it is important to emphasise that our work is not over. To make sure this additional public school funding is delivered, we must continue to work hard in the lead-up to the next election to highlight the differences between the political parties' policies on early childhood, schools and TAFE.

The voters of Australia have a clear choice between Labor and the Liberal-Nationals when it comes to public education.

Funding for public schools is already a critical issue in voters' minds. With more hard work we can make it the central issue in the election, and guarantee that students in public education get the fair funding and the opportunities they deserve.

**Correna Haythorpe** AEU federal president.

# News in brief



## → Summer reading ideas

Make the most of the summer holidays with a book or two. Here are some suggestions we've come across:

- *The Voice in Education: Vocal Health and Effective Communication*, by Stephanie Martin and Lyn Darnley. The authors, both voice specialists who previously wrote *The Teaching Voice*, discuss strategies and practical exercises for those who rely on their voice at work.
- *Educated* by Tara Westover. This is a woman's discovery of education, its transformative power and the price she has to pay for it. Barack Obama described the work as: "a remarkable memoir".
- *The New Democratic Professional: Confronting Markets, Metrics, and Managerialism* by Gary L. Anderson and Michael Ian Cohen. A look at how the corporate-funded education industry leaves educators with little influence over their own profession.
- *Sea Prayer*. Author of *The Kite Runner* Khaled Hosseini responds to the refugee crisis with an illustrated work of fiction for people of all ages.

## → Ways to support students with autism

Almost all students with autism face difficulties with their education, according to new research.

A study, commissioned by Amaze, Victoria's peak body for people with autism and their families, found that 35 per cent of students with autism finish school at Year 10 or below, compared with 17 per cent of the general student population.

**Amaze has listed 10 ways schools can help students with autism.**

1. Modify the curriculum
2. Change assessment techniques
3. Provide extra classroom support
4. Establish clear routines and avoid changes
5. Adjust the sensory environment
6. Support students with autism outside the classroom
7. Clear communication between school and home
8. Deal effectively with bullying
9. Work with other students
10. Create a classroom 'timeout break'.



PHOTOGRAPHY ISTOCKPHOTO.COM ILLUSTRATION OSLO DAVIS

## → SURVEY WINNER

Thank you to all those members who participated in the 2018 AEU *State of our Schools* survey. The survey collects valuable information about how educators are faring and conditions in our schools.

The winner of the iPad, for completing the survey, is **Heather Hirsch** from Nanango State School in Queensland.



## → Learning periods

When Australian filmmaker Tasha Lawton was making the documentary *HerStory*, she heard many “first period” stories about menstruation that often included “tales of shame and embarrassment”.

Lawton decided to take action and, together with the charity Share the Dignity, has created an education module for Years 5-8, *Period Talk*, designed to get kids talking about periods.

Share the Dignity, which provides sanitary products to homeless women, women at risk and those experiencing domestic violence, will receive \$10 from every sale of the module.

For more information go to [periodtalk.com.au](http://periodtalk.com.au)



## → Seven TAFE campuses closed in SA

The South Australian government has devastated the state's TAFE sector, announcing the closure of seven campuses.

This is on top of the 700 full-time jobs that have been lost across the TAFE sector in the state over the past five years, already decimating broader communities.

While the government has committed an extra \$109.8 million over five years, framing it as a 'bail out' for SA TAFE, there's no funding commitment after that time. That will see TAFE competing for funding with profit-driven private training providers.

Federal Labor says it will guarantee at least two-thirds of Vocational Education funding will go to TAFE funding.





# ALP'S FUNDING PROMISE

The next federal election will be fought and won on the guarantee of fair funding for public schools



PHOTOGRAPHY: ANTHONY MCKEE AND MELANIE DE BUYSTER

Voters will have the opportunity to guarantee fair funding for public schools at the next federal election.

They face a clear choice. On one hand, a commitment by a Shorten Labor government to provide extra funding for every public school will see more teachers in classrooms, smaller class sizes, and more one-on-one individual attention for public school students.

On the other hand, the Morrison government's \$1.9 billion cut to funding promised to public schools in 2018 and 2019, and continued federal cap on public school funding, will mean public school students will not get the opportunities they deserve.

If elected, Labor has pledged to deliver an extra \$14.1 billion for public schools over the next decade. Importantly, this commitment includes a \$3.3 billion investment in public schools in the first three years. In addition, Labor has promised to smash the Morrison government's arbitrary 20 per cent Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) funding cap, which will bring public schools much closer to 100 per cent of the SRS.

Federal AEU President Correna Haythorpe said Labor's public school funding commitments have the potential to transform public schools and provide many more opportunities for public school students. However, she said that there is still a lot of work to do to elect a government that will put public schools first.

"Labor's commitment to invest an additional \$14.1 billion into



Students at Footscray West Primary School in Melbourne would be among the hundreds of thousands across the country to benefit from properly funded schools.

public schools is a game-changing policy announcement and a huge achievement for the Fair Funding Now! community," says Haythorpe.

"It means every public school will have extra funds to invest in more teachers and more classroom support for those children who need it," she says.

"This is an excellent development and is largely due to the years of hard work by the Fair Funding Now! movement in building community support for public school funding. However, our work isn't finished. We need to keep up the pressure to ensure we elect a government that puts public schools first."

Labor's pledge includes a commitment to working with the states and territories to bring all public schools up to 100 per cent of the SRS. A Labor government would immediately increase the Commonwealth share to 22.5 per cent (with 25 per cent for NT schools) by 2022.

The promised funding will put student needs at the centre of funding decisions and recognises the extra need in disadvantaged schools.

## A DIFFERENCE FOR STUDENTS

Principal Karen Terry from Victoria's St Helena Secondary College said that investing extra public school funding into staff development would make a huge difference for her students.

"I'd be trying to free up my teachers more so they have less face-to-face classroom time, so that they can get into each other's classrooms," says Terry. "That way they can drill down into the data with the kids, they can spend time planning together and actually individualising the program. For me it would be about having more staff on board and targeting when they worked."

For Cathy Anderson, principal at NSW's Chifley College Mount Druitt campus, extra funding would make a huge difference to students and teachers.

"We have a lot of new teachers and we do reduce their loads by two periods per week, but it would be great to have the funding to give new teachers a half load, and to have them transition into schooling where we would actually have

### IN SHORT

// Labor has promised an extra \$14.1 billion for public schools over the next decade.

// The promised funding would recognise additional needs in disadvantaged schools.

// The Fair Funding Now! campaign will continue to ramp up ahead of the federal election.

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developed programs of inservice so that they would develop their skills at the same time.”

Principal Peter Adams from Victoria's Pascoe Vale North Primary School said that using extra funding to reduce class sizes would be transformational for his students.

“I would use the funding for more teachers to support classroom teachers' efforts to reduce class sizes, and to provide more support outside of the classroom for kids,” says Adams. “More support from education support staff and from teacher aides is the stuff that makes a vital difference to kids.”

Labor has released data showing exactly how much extra money

every public school could expect to receive during the first three years of a Shorten government. Voters can see just how much their school will get by visiting [www.fairgoforschools.com.au](http://www.fairgoforschools.com.au).

## THE PUBLIC EDUCATION ELECTION

Earlier this year the Morrison government announced a \$4.6 billion special funding deal for private schools, while giving nothing extra to public schools. Recent polls have shown that voters weren't impressed.

According to a recent ReachTel poll in marginal federal electorates in Victoria, NSW and Queensland,

The Morrison government has handed private schools a special funding deal, while leaving public school students, such as those at Footscray West Primary School, high and dry.

more than seven in 10 undecided voters disapprove of the Morrison government's private school special deal. Meanwhile, more than eight in 10 voters said that education would be important in deciding who they voted for at the upcoming federal election.

While public support for the fair funding of public schools has always been strong, the figures show public school funding will be a crucial issue at the next federal election.

## THE CAMPAIGN ISN'T OVER

Haythorpe said that while these poll results were encouraging, it was vital for the Fair Funding Now! community to keep up the pressure going into the next federal election.

“We are still waiting for a commitment to a \$300 million capital work fund for public schools, indexed each year with enrolment growth and rising costs. Also, appropriate support for children with a disability to ensure every child is able to access a high-quality education.

“It's crucial that we keep talking to parents, voters and communities about the importance of fair funding for public schools,” says Haythorpe.

“Recent developments show that the issue has developed momentum – now is the time to roll up our sleeves and keep the Fair Funding Now! campaign moving ahead.”

“The strength of the Fair Funding Now! campaign is a clear indication that cutting funding for public schools is a major issue of national concern, and a major misstep by the Morrison government. We will



PHOTOGRAPHY ANTHONY MCKEE

## What are we asking for?

The AEU is calling on the government to commit to:

### 1 Fairer funding now

The government should immediately reverse its \$1.9 billion cut to public schools for 2018 and 2019.

### 2 Appropriate resources for all schools

Agreements should be struck between the Commonwealth and the states and territories to ensure public schools are funded to 100 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard by 2023. The 20 per cent cap on the Commonwealth share of the SRS should be removed from the Australian Education Amendment Act.

### 3 Upgraded classrooms and facilities

A capital fund should be established for public schools to help meet rising enrolments and ensure all students are educated in classrooms and learning spaces where their needs can be met. That fund, recommended by the Gonski Review, should be \$300 million in 2018 and increase each year in line with enrolment growth and rising costs.

### 4 More support for students with disability

The Turnbull government's cuts to disability funding should be reversed. The National School Resourcing Board should immediately review the three levels of funding for students with disability to better align them with the actual costs of delivering high-quality education.

## Fair funding... is the most important task for our union going into 2019.



**Correna Haythorpe**  
AEU federal president

continue to take our message to the people and ensure that they hear our message. "

The Fair Funding Now! campaign will escalate into next year's federal election. The recent national 'Do Your Block' event saw thousands of educators, parents and other supporters take the Fair Funding Now! message to their neighbourhoods. Supporters distributed tens of thousands of brochures to homes in marginal electorates across the country.

The back-to-school period next year will kick off with Fair Funding Now! campaign visits to regional

communities across the country, culminating on the Parliament House lawns in Canberra. "It will be a very hands-on engagement with local people," says Haythorpe.

"We'll be sharing the story in every school community about the importance of funding public schools properly and showing the difference between the major political parties," Haythorpe says.

"In the lead-up to the next federal election, our Fair Funding Now! tour will send a strong message to politicians in Canberra about the importance of fair funding for our public schools."

Haythorpe said that campaign supporters would not stop working until a federal government was elected that would put public schools first.

"The fight to restore fair funding for public schools is the most important task for our union going into 2019 and I know that the community is with us in securing a better future for our children," Haythorpe says.

## What Labor's promise means

The ALP's \$14 billion promise over the next 10 years will be the largest ever investment in public schools. Almost \$3.3 billion will go to schools in the first three years. Here's how each state will benefit:

### Extra funding between 2020–2022

<b>ACT</b>	<b>\$57 million extra</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>\$256 million extra</b>
<b>NSW</b>	<b>\$917 million extra</b>	<b>TAS</b>	<b>\$52 million extra</b>
<b>NT</b>	<b>\$41 million extra</b>	<b>VIC</b>	<b>\$804 million extra</b>
<b>QLD</b>	<b>\$647 million extra</b>	<b>WA</b>	<b>\$501 million extra</b>
<b>Total = \$3.275 billion</b>			



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Vanessa Pirotta, Marine-biologist, whale snot collector, drone operator, science educator, Macquarie University



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# The writing is on the wall

Is the national literacy and numeracy assessment program worth saving after this year's online fiasco? An AEU survey of teachers suggests not.

BY **NIC BARNARD**

**N**APLAN'S woes are piling up. This year's online trial has been condemned as a debacle, independent experts say its "unreliable" results must be shelved, and a new AEU survey reveals 85 per cent of teachers consider the test useless as a classroom tool.

Publication of this year's results on the My School website were postponed after heated debate at the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and among state and territory education ministers.

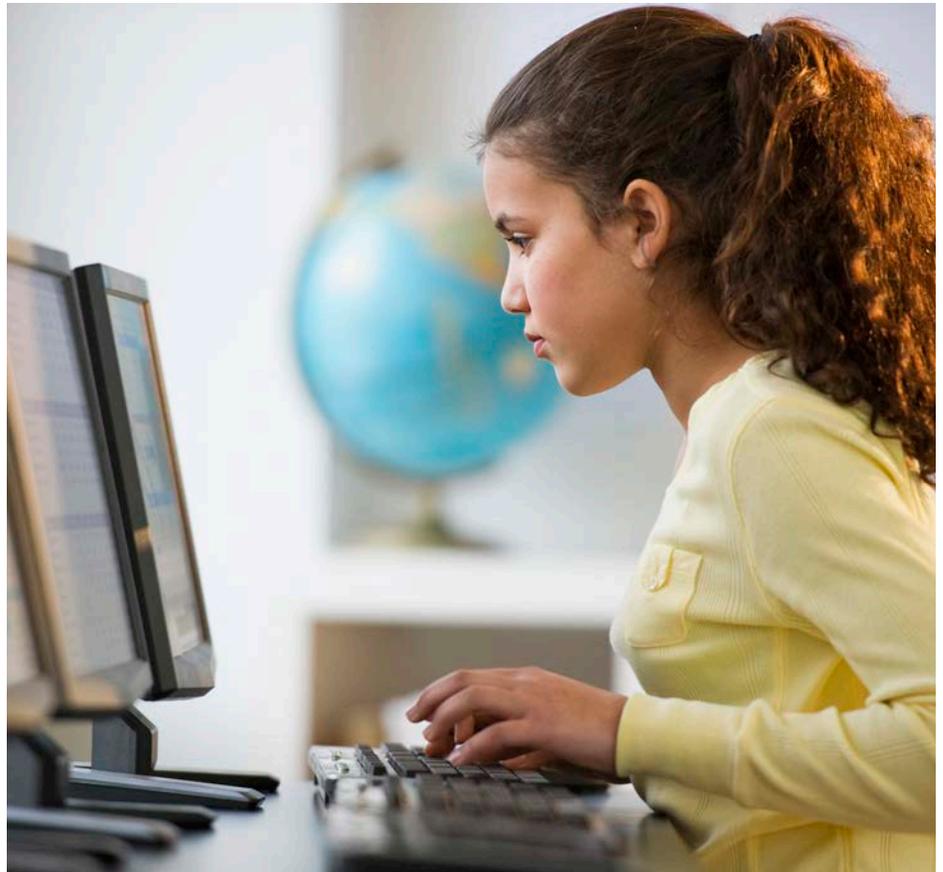
Results in grammar and punctuation for students who sat the NAPLAN Online trial are believed to diverge widely from those of students who sat the traditional pen-and-paper tests. The online trial also revealed a huge gulf in IT infrastructure between advantaged and disadvantaged schools.

A confidential NSW Education Department briefing paper has confirmed that students completing the online assessment were at a disadvantage.

The briefing paper, obtained by the AEU under Freedom of Information, warned that NAPLAN results for this year and next "may be less helpful as a measure of school improvement" than previously seen.

## RESULTS SHOULD BE DISCARDED

An independent report into the trial by respected academics Les Perelman of Massachusetts Institute



The NAPLAN Online trial has been widely criticised by experts.

of Technology and Professor Walt Haney of Boston College concluded: "The 2018 NAPLAN results should be discarded.

"Comparison of 2018 results with those of prior years is, for the most part, a futile exercise," the report says.

ACARA is in damage-limitation mode as it tries to salvage its own reputation and that of its flagship test. Chief executive Robert Randall has announced – apparently

### IN SHORT

// NAPLAN Online 2018 trial revealed a gulf between schools.

// International experts say the results should be discarded.

// The vast majority of teachers say the test is useless as a classroom tool.

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unrelatedly – that he will step down in 2019 and the Australian Labor Party (ALP) has pledged a comprehensive review of NAPLAN if it wins office, with a “key role” for unions.

AEU federal president Correna Haythorpe says ACARA needs to explain “how and why the NAPLAN Online trial resembles a smoking ruin, and what it plans to do to salvage this debacle”.

But many educators will ask if it’s worth salvaging. The findings of the AEU’s annual *State of our Schools* survey make savage reading. The survey was conducted in NAPLAN Online trial schools and received 7,800 responses, including those from 700 principals.

The results show that educators have little faith in the test. Among teachers, 85 per cent say it was “not effective as a diagnostic test” – NAPLAN’s key purpose. More than half of principals agree.

Despite the test’s manifest flaws, teachers say it is increasingly dominating their classroom time. Nearly three in five say they spend too long preparing for tests (58 per cent) and administering them

**The best form of assessment is the informed judgement of the teacher and it must be closely linked to teaching and learning that’s taking place in the classroom.**

”  
Correna Haythorpe  
AEU federal president

The AEU is urging education minister Dan Tehan to review NAPLAN.

(57 per cent), including a quarter who say they spend “far too much time” on these processes.

There is growing pressure on teachers to improve NAPLAN results, say 76 per cent of teachers. And 75 per cent of teachers say the flawed metric is becoming a key measure of school performance.

That has led to greater stress levels among students – identified by 65 per cent of teachers – and reduced the focus on other areas of the curriculum, according to 54 per cent of respondents.

Principals, too, have lost what faith they had in NAPLAN. Two-thirds (67 per cent) say it is not an effective way of measuring their school’s performance, and three out of four (74 per cent) say it is not an effective way to compare schools – the primary purpose of publishing results on My School. NAPLAN and My School make up one of the biggest problems in new education minister Dan Tehan’s in-tray.

The AEU has urged Tehan to conduct a root-and-branch review of the NAPLAN regime and flag a return to student-centred assessment.

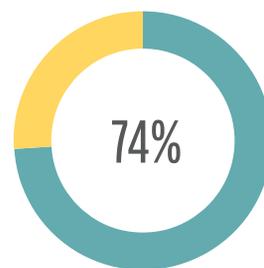
“The best form of assessment is the informed judgement of the teacher and it must be closely linked to teaching and learning that’s taking place in the classroom,” Haythorpe says.

“We’d caution any government against going ahead with NAPLAN Online next year,” she adds.

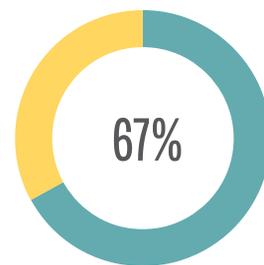


Nic Barnard is a freelance writer.

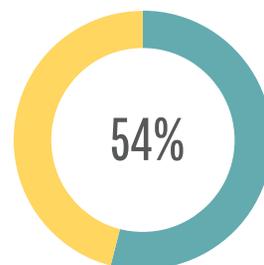
**NAPLAN DOESN'T ADD UP\***



of principals say NAPLAN is not effective for comparing the performance of their school with other schools



of principals say NAPLAN is not effective for measuring school performance



of principals believe NAPLAN is not effective as a diagnostic tool for teachers

\*Source: AEU’s 2018 *State of Our Schools* survey



# A GAME CHANGER

The ALP's \$1.75 billion commitment to early childhood education puts pressure on the coalition government to reverse cuts and provide certainty to the sector.

## Analysis of international test results shows that children who attended at least two years of quality preschool achieved much higher scores at age 15 than those who attended no preschool or only one year.



Elizabeth Death

Early Learning and Care Council of Australia CEO

It was a federal Labor government that introduced 15 hours' universal access to preschool education for Australian four-year-olds almost a decade ago.

Since then, successive coalition governments have cut \$440 million from the sector and failed to provide long-term funding. At this stage funding is not guaranteed beyond 2019.

But Labor's recent policy announcement of its National Preschool and Kindy Program, guaranteeing ongoing funding for two years of preschool for three- and four-year-olds, is a game changer. It's been enthusiastically welcomed by teachers who have been campaigning for years to secure permanent funding.

Guaranteed funding will give certainty to educators and provide proven benefits to hundreds of thousands of children and their parents, says AEU federal president Correna Haythorpe.

"It's a critically important investment in the future of our

children because the number of years spent in early childhood education is a strong indicator of a child's level of achievement in later stages of life, both in and out of school," says Haythorpe.

### AUSTRALIA LAGGING

Quality early childhood education improves school readiness, lifts NAPLAN results and PISA scores, and increases Year 12 completions among a host of other benefits, says Elizabeth Death, Early Learning and Care Council of Australia CEO.

Australia lags behind many countries that already provide two years of early childhood education, and "children who start behind, stay behind," says Death, who was part of an AEU delegation of educators and parents who visited federal parliament recently to lobby for secure funding.

"Analysis of international test results shows that children who attended at least two years of quality preschool achieved much higher scores at age 15 than those who attended no preschool or only one year," Death says.

A head start is particularly important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, or where English is a second language at home.

Cara Nightingale, a preschool teacher from a diverse community in the Melbourne suburb of Hampton Park, notices the practical benefits of investing in early childhood education. She says that children who've attended have a much smoother transition and settle faster into the routine of primary school.



Numerous studies have highlighted the long-term benefits of early childhood education.

"It also helps break the cycle of disadvantage for our most vulnerable children, as well as contributing to Australia becoming a more equitable society that will prosper both socially and economically," says Nightingale.

### A CLEAR CHOICE

The uncertainty of Australia's political landscape makes it difficult to predict where the early childhood education sector will be in 2019. As things stand, coalition government funding for early childhood runs out at the end of this year.

Labor's pledge to boost preschool funding and extend access to three-year-old children if it wins power gives voters a clear choice to consider when they next head to the polls.

"It's also a really strong indicator that public education generally is shaping up to be the big issue for the federal election," says Haythorpe.

### IN SHORT

// The ALP will guarantee ongoing funding for two years of preschool.

// Many other countries provide two years of early childhood education.

// Access to early childhood education helps to break the cycle of disadvantage.

# Reporting in

The three new starts we've been following are wrapping up the year with a positive report card.

BY **NIC BARNARD AND MARGARET PATON**

## LEADERSHIP WITH VISION

**On the home straight of her first year in charge, new principal Jennie-Marie Gorman is starting to stamp her vision on her Adelaide primary school.**

IF THE FIRST half of the year was all about getting to know the nuts and bolts - the staff, students and parents at Sheidow Park School in Adelaide - the second half has seen her working with colleagues on the changes needed at a school that has doubled in size and is still growing.

As 20 Year 7s leave for secondary school in December, they will be replaced by 38 eager five-year-olds in January. The school, which only recently had enrolments of 190, will soon have 370 students.

Gorman has a new deputy principal - marking a complete leadership changeover - and has convened a planning group of interested staff from across the school that meets regularly to work on the school improvement plan.

In a small school it's easier for staff to know what each other is up to, Gorman says. But as the school gets bigger, maintaining a whole-school approach needs a bit more work.

"We're using distributive leadership," she says. That means bringing in more voices to ensure changes don't happen from the top down, and "more people are on the same page so when we take it to staff, there are more people that can talk it through with teachers".

Sheidow Park is also preparing a new handover ceremony for next



year's house captains, and the school has a new, more succinct set of values. The old set had eight. "That's a lot of values," Gorman says.

She asked students, staff and governing council members to vote for their three most important. The winning values were respect, responsibility and persistence, which encompass many of the others and are simpler to convey.

**Jennie-Marie Gorman has faced - and overcome - challenges in her first year as principal at Adelaide's Sheidow Park School.**

### NEW PRINCIPAL



**Jennie-Marie Gorman**  
*Sheidow Park School,  
Adelaide, SA*

Previously assistant principal at Darlington Primary

**You get into a new school, and you're eager to do things, but actually you don't need to be in a hurry.**

”

**Jennie-Marie Gorman**  
Sheidow Park School, Adelaide, SA

So, what have been the highs and lows?

The lows, she says, are the same as any teacher anywhere might face: a violent student.

“My natural instinct is to put myself between the staff member and the child – not always the best response. But you feel like the one who's there to look out for everybody. And you need the child to understand that you still care about them, even though you don't accept their behaviour.”

But such incidents pale beside the welcome she's received and the stimulation of new challenges.

Gorman is grateful for the support of her peers in the local school network and her director at the education department.

The biggest lesson she's learned is not to be too hard on herself and that everything doesn't have to happen straight away. “You get into a new school, and you're eager to do things, but actually you don't need to be in a hurry”.

With almost a year under her belt, she says: “I'm still smiling, and I still enjoy getting up every day and coming to work. It's a great job.”



## STEPS TO CONFIDENCE

**Students need to believe in their own ability to learn, says this energetic new English and drama teacher.**

KATE SMITH is notching up her first 18 months of full-time teaching drama and English at Epping Secondary College, north of Melbourne. She's

proud that her management of challenging classroom behaviour has improved.

“I'm feeling stronger and more capable with it, and I keep learning and picking up more,” Smith says.

“I've also noticed a lightness come back to a lot of the students through joyful play moments they have in class, and their conversations with me. It's been a beautiful end to the year.”

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Smith is also set to move from provisional to a fully registered teacher.

**NURTURE SELF-BELIEF**

As her confidence grows, she has become more aware of the need to nurture her students' self-belief. Smith says her previous work as an arts space practitioner has shown her the importance of encouraging her students to simply "get things down on the page".

"Some will only do the minimum for class time, so it takes a lot to address that and to encourage them to keep going. Telling the Year 8s they had to write 600 to 800 words was a big hurdle for them.

"I said, 'Write it as if you're telling your younger sibling the story'. I have to prepare them for Year 10 and VCE where it's a lot stricter."

When her middle school students tackled a creative writing unit recently, their work "blew her away".

"One girl, who's obsessed with birds, has a low self-belief, but a quick wit, and doesn't feel she's any good at English. She'll crumble

**It was so important to me to see the kids shine and do some amazing stuff.**



**Kate Smith**  
Epping Secondary College, Vic

when you ask her to do work. I asked her to use her knowledge of birds to write in the horror genre and the piece of writing she created was so magical."

**TAKE TO THE STAGE**

Smith forged strong relationships across the school when she took on a writer and producer role for the school production, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

"It couldn't have gone better... despite the chaos and confusion during rehearsal," she says.

"By the evening, they had the right mindset, it just tightened up and everything went smoothly."

"As a new teacher with my theatre-making background, it was very empowering from a professional point of view to follow my instincts.

"It was so important to me to see the kids shine and do some amazing stuff. They even said they were proud, but I said they should feel proud every day because they have that ability and skills."

After the busy year, Smith plans to spend her summer holidays driving to Darwin to explore and do some yoga.



**FROM LITTLE THINGS, BIG THINGS GROW**

**As Jesse Weston nears the end of his first full year of teaching, he says it's "absolutely incredible" to look back on the photos from his students' first day.**

"THEY'VE GROWN and changed so much. Their personalities have developed," Weston says.

"One child, at the start of the year, was really uncomfortable with any form of negative comment. The other day, she stood up in front of the class and, in a very polite, confident way, she disagreed with me about a change in how we stored the fine-line pens, which kept going missing.

"I was talking to her about it later. She said she realised she'd got her point of view across and wasn't

**NEW TEACHER**



**Kate Smith**  
Epping Secondary College, Melbourne, VIC

Previously a performance artist, talent scout, TV casting agent, singer-songwriter

going to change my mind; that I'd listened. She said if she'd continued it would have been an argument, rather than a discussion."

Weston, who teaches a Year 4 class in regional Western Australia, said some teachers might say that child challenged him, but he says she did it in "such a respectful way" that it was a positive outcome.

### RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS

Weston packed a lot into the later section of the year, running an assembly, open night and after-school program at Baynton West Primary School, which is a 15-hour drive north of Perth.

"Quite a few students from my class were in that after-school program so they got to see me in more of a helper than teacher role."

The open night was a success. It featured static displays with many QR codes linking to digital videos.

"One parent said it was the best open night she'd attended. As well, I had a few really good conversations with parents who haven't been part of the classroom due to their fly-in-fly-out work commitments."

### NEW TEACHER

**Jesse Weston**

*Baynton West Primary, Karratha, WA*

Previously a youth worker in foster care



### EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION SUCCESS

The school's approach is to teach content through the explicit direct instruction method.

"I'm finding it's a really useful strategy because we teach in a very linear way. It's easier to pick up when kids don't understand something. You just go back to the previous step and cover that," Weston says.

Sometimes his students will grasp a concept much faster than he'd expected, he says.

"We looked at money and the kids absolutely grasped what currency is used for and the rounding of it. I thought, let's talk digital currency and how you don't round up with credit cards. I had room to add it, although it's not specifically in the curriculum.

**Teacher Jesse Weston has been busy in and outside the classroom, including running the after-school program at Baynton West Primary School in WA.**

We even touched on cryptocurrencies," he says.

Along with the other Year 4 teachers, Weston has been integrating key learning areas such as humanities and social sciences.

"I've been finding that teaching them separately doesn't really work."

For report time, he created a "bank of comments" about students in a spreadsheet, matched to their achievement levels. That helped with streamlining and consistency, but the comments were still personalised.

"I've grown insanely proud of how all of my students have grown as learners and people," he says.

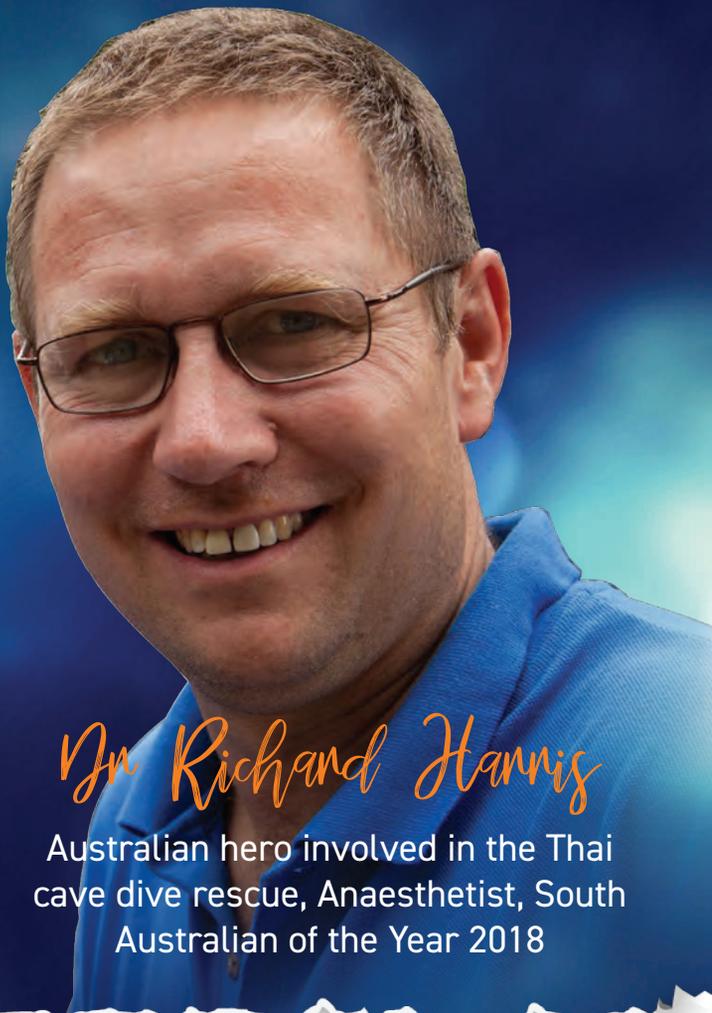


**Nic Barnard and Margaret Paton** are both freelance writers.

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# Taking learning back

Researchers in a remote community are witnessing the benefits of 'on-country' education for Aboriginal students – and their non-Aboriginal teachers.

BY **KATE O'HALLORAN**

**A** boriginal children have observably higher levels of confidence, self-esteem and general wellbeing when learning in an 'on-country' school setting, a Murdoch University study has shown.

Associate professor Libby Lee-Hammond and Elizabeth Jackson-Barrett spent 18 months with a remote community school in the Burringurrah community, in the Gascoyne region in Western Australia.

The researchers made eight trips to nearby country with Aboriginal children and their teachers, exploring places of cultural significance with the guidance of traditional owners. During on-country lessons, students participated in activities such as making cultural artefacts, learning to draw maps of their journey from school, and painting.

Such practice refocuses attention away from deficits or gaps in Aboriginal educational achievement to instead emphasise cultural competency, says Lee-Hammond.

"Presently, schooling in Australia tends towards separating Aboriginal children's learning from their identity," she says. "[With learning on country] we seek to enable Aboriginal culture to occupy a central position in the curriculum."

She cites the example of seeing a girl from kindergarten instinctively pick up a rock, spit on it and start drawing.

"She said, 'This is a paint rock, miss' – and it was ochre. I asked her how she knew how to do that and she said her nanna had shown her.

"She has all this [cultural] knowledge, but when does that ever manifest within the four walls of the classroom?"

An important benefit of on-country learning is that Aboriginal children are able to exhibit mastery over skills learned and practised, says Lee-Hammond.

"She was the expert, and other kids were learning from her. That's important for children – feeling they have something to contribute and bring back to learning.

"If you ask them months later what we did [on country], they'll be able to tell you in detail. But if you ask them what worksheet they did last week, they probably won't remember."

Promisingly, results from the study also showed improved literacy and numeracy skills for students thanks to greater recall while learning on country. And when asked to report how supported they felt in learning, students rated lessons in the classroom 4.1 out of 6, compared to 4.8 ("outstanding") for on-country learning.

**Aboriginal students perform better in the classroom when given the opportunity to learn in culturally significant places.**

## LOSING KNOWLEDGE

Buy-in from the nearby community was critical to the Burringurrah project's success, says Lee-Hammond.

"The community is concerned about the kids. It had been asking for this kind of thing for a long time and wasn't getting any traction from schools.

"There's a fear this knowledge will get lost when people pass away. If it isn't shared, it's really hard to get it back."

On-country lessons also proved educational for the teachers.

"Sadly, even though teachers are in these remote places, they often don't get the induction process they need to really understand the local community," says Lee-Hammond. "They get an induction from the education department rather than from the Aboriginal community.

"[Non-Aboriginal] staff at a childcare centre told us they were afraid to approach Aboriginal people for information. They're worried they might say the wrong thing.

When on country, teachers and elders could have informal conversations that enabled teachers to take their own cultural experiences back into the classroom, incorporating them into lessons to facilitate better learning.

"And students are recalling more information because it's something they've experienced with their body, negotiated through conversation, or drawn a picture of."

### IN SHORT

// Learning on country puts Aboriginal culture at the heart of the curriculum.

// Students feel they can exhibit skills and contribute to learning.

// Improved literacy and numeracy skills have been witnessed.



**Dr Kate O'Halloran** is a freelance writer.

**There's a fear this knowledge will get lost when people pass away. If it isn't shared, it's really hard to get it back.**

”

**Libby Lee-Hammond**  
Associate professor, Murdoch University



#### CASE STUDY

## Maningrida College's rangers program

Since receiving federal government funding in 2013, Maningrida College in Arnhem Land has run a Learning on Country (LOC) cadetship program in partnership with the Bawinanga Djelk Rangers.

The rangers are traditional landowners and *djungkay* (managers) who work to keep the sea and land in western Arnhem land healthy, and communities strong.

In partnership with Maningrida, the rangers teach students practical skills on country as a means to possible employment. The students simultaneously work towards completion of a Certificate I or II in conservation or land management.

Shane Bailey, Maningrida's LOC coordinator, who introduced the program as a curriculum elective, says six students from Maningrida's initial cohort have graduated with a Certificate II from Charles Darwin University.

Maningrida was the first remote school to achieve this honour, and the local

community was overjoyed. More than 400 people visited the school to celebrate.

Five years on, Maningrida has had more than 30 Certificate I completions and nine Indigenous students have graduated from Year 12, in part by earning Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training credits from their ranger cadetship.

Following Maningrida's success, the federal government has committed to funding four additional LOC sites in Arnhem Land, bringing the total to nine.

Maningrida principal Daryll Kinnane says the community and college holds the LOC program in high esteem because of its capacity to provide culturally relevant learning opportunities.

"Community ownership and engagement with the LOC program flourishes due to the Bawinanga Rangers partnership and collaboration with local traditional owners and elders," says Kinnane.

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# Are books still relevant?

School libraries offer students tactile experiences, varied resources and a safe space to learn.

BY **JANINE MACE**

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**T**o keen readers, the idea of a world without books is horrifying. But, as dedicated school libraries disappear to be replaced by online resources, the concept may be closer than we think.

"As an avid book lover, I absolutely believe books are relevant. Children need access to a broad range of experiences, not just digital resources," says AEU federal president Correna Haythorpe.

"We are seeing an increasing trend for school libraries to disappear and to be replaced by IT or other centres. Learning resources are not just about digital tools, there is also an important role for print-based literature."

It's a view endorsed by Holly Godfree, teacher librarian at Lake Tuggeranong College in the ACT, AEU ACT member and coordinator of the Students Need School Libraries campaign.

"Books are definitely still relevant, especially in the early years, as young children are more tactile and like to hold things," she says.

## **PAPER AND DIGITAL HAVE THEIR PLACE**

Godfree is a firm believer in school resource collections featuring a mix of formats. "When people say 'book', they are often referring to literature, but there are also non-fiction books. A book is just a format for delivering a story or facts, and whether it is physical or not is a separate question."

Different formats suit different students and tasks, says Hajnalka Molloy, president of the



School Library Association of South Australia and a teacher librarian at Aberfoyle Park Primary School Campus.

"Research shows printed books are preferred by most children - especially non-fiction texts - but some prefer ebooks or audiobooks. With younger students, information is often easier for them to understand if it is printed, or in a print-like format," she says.

Printed materials are often easier for younger students to understand, says Hajnalka Molloy of the School Library Association of South Australia and a teacher at Aberfoyle Park Primary School Campus, South Australia.

**Students  
need  
school  
libraries  
to:**

## Research shows most students reading for pleasure prefer physical books. Reading books teaches empathy... They are a window into the lives of others.



**Hajnalka Molloy**  
School Library Association of South Australia

Deakin University researcher Dr Leonie Rutherford found digital devices were not popular with teens as they often lacked the digital literacy to find suitable ebooks.

This is unsurprising to Godfree. "There is a misconception that young people are natural digital experts."

The continuing popularity of physical books – particularly for personal reading – is important, as research indicates regular recreational readers tend to do better at school.

### GOING, GOING, GONE?

School libraries have a crucial role to play in encouraging reading.

"You want students to access a broad curriculum. Libraries and printed literature have an important role to play in that," Haythorpe says.

Replacing physical books with digital resources is not the answer. "Often what is online is written for adults and is inappropriate for young people."

The cost argument is also a misconception.

"It is usually a lot cheaper to have a physical book. With most ebooks, after they are borrowed a few times the licence requires them to be repurchased," Molloy says.

Doing away with school libraries often means resources are lost or difficult to find.

"This leads to students and teachers wasting time looking for material. It's a teacher librarian's job to curate and choose resources to save them time," Godfree says.

### REFUGES AND A QUIET PLACE

Libraries also play a vital role as a safe space and refuge.

"It's not only the worlds that are opened up to children through the books, libraries also allow children to take themselves out of the hurdy-gurdy of the playground environment," Haythorpe says.

Godfree believes this is significant given the increasing concerns about mental health. "Students gravitate to the school library as a 'third space', where there is some supervision and they are welcome and known."

In Molloy's school, the library is

used for a variety of purposes including a chess venue and a computer-aided design (CAD) space.

### TEACHER LIBRARIANS: ON THE WAY OUT?

Although Godfree understands the budgetary constraints, she is a staunch advocate for school libraries. "The reason they are disappearing is that there are not qualified teacher librarians running them," she says.

Molloy agrees: "Where this has been done, you often see unnecessary duplication of resources, as the schools don't know what they have, or even if there are gaps in their collection."

In response, the School Library Coalition has launched an Australia-wide advocacy campaign, Students Need School Libraries, to promote the importance of school library services.

For more information, check out [studentsneedschoollibraries.org.au](http://studentsneedschoollibraries.org.au)



**Janine Mace** is a freelance writer.



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# Heading off violence

A program with a long-term approach to eliminating domestic violence also has the flexibility to allow schools to apply it in their own way, and it's already making a difference.

BY **CHRISTINE LONG**

---

**C**reative approaches to a recently introduced Respectful Relationships program are already achieving positive results for schools in Victoria and Queensland.

The result of a key recommendation from the 2015 Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence, the program is an early prevention method aimed at eradicating domestic violence in the next generation of Australian adults.

In Victoria, more than 1,000 schools have elected to participate following a pilot program at eight schools in Victoria and 10 in Queensland.

At Eltham High School in Melbourne, the program is regarded as an extension of a long-term focus on building positive relationships and an additional way to embed the school's values in its culture.

Eltham High has approached its Respectful Relationships rollout in a number of ways after surveying staff about the options, says assistant principal Fran Mullins.

**One of the impacts we've seen is that students are able to articulate, using very clear language, what their concerns and worries are.**

”

**Shelby Papadopoulos**  
Colac Primary School, Victoria

---

It started with developing a presentation for students about the power of language.

The school's Respectful Relationships in Our School Community policy incorporates guidelines for creating a culture of respect, responding to high rates of family violence, recognition and restorative practices, and learning and support.

It carried out a curriculum audit of all year levels, and staff completed 'four R' (resilience, rights and respectful relationships) curriculum training through the Department of Education and Training Victoria.

"We're delivering through a tutorial program across years 10 to 12, an Involve program across years 7 to 9 and through health classes," says Mullins.

## **POSTER POWER**

As part of Eltham High's whole school approach, it created a policy for recognising and celebrating the student voice. Students took part in the creation and exhibition of

11 large-format posters produced by 20-student focus groups. The groups were asked to discuss how respect related to each of the school's values: individuality, respect for diversity, integrity, creativity, the pursuit of excellence, and social and environmental responsibility.

"We distilled that down into key messages we wanted to communicate to our school community," says Mullins.

Each poster has a photo of students and a quote that arose from the discussions.

Talking about the subject with students from different years and social groups was eye-opening, says year 9 student Lachlan.

"It was interesting to get a different perspective on not only what they think respect means, but also how they would act upon it."

The conversations continued when the posters were displayed, says Hayley, another year 9 student. "I was surprised by how many people wanted to talk about respect as a topic."

## **TARGETING COMMUNICATION**

At Colac Primary School, 150km west of Melbourne, principal Shelby Papadopoulos says its program has been rolled out after a perceived increase in exposure to domestic violence among its 260 students.

"We were certainly seeing the effects of that in the way students were presenting at school and the challenge that was providing," she says.

The school's 10 generalist teachers and 10 specialist and

### **IN SHORT**

// Schools are working on ways to help eliminate domestic violence.

// The Respectful Relationships program is rolling out in Victorian and Queensland schools.

// Early results point to improvements in conflict resolution and communication.



ELTHAM HIGH SCHOOL  
Values  
Respect

“We look after one another regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, social group or context.”



ELTHAM HIGH SCHOOL  
Values  
Respect

“We know that it doesn't hurt us to let others be who they are.”

Melbourne's Eltham High School created posters displaying key messages about respect.

## Spotlight on gender stereotyping

Gender stereotype issues among year 6 students initially prompted Capalaba State College near Brisbane to get involved in the Respectful Relationships program.

Junior campus principal Lachlan Thatcher says that when he found out the program began with year 1, the school still decided to go ahead with it.

“It's such an important message for everyone,” he says.

“Our Year 1 teachers worked with the deputy principal at the time to do the training, and develop and review the resources,” he says.

The team also shared with the 25 staff some startling research on 18- to 25-year-olds' attitudes to male and female roles.

“We were quite horrified by that, and we decided to take a journey among ourselves to call each other out on our own behaviour.”

support staff had already been trained in trauma informed practice.

“But we hadn't changed the way we were educating children on their rights and resilience.”

Adults in the caring professions, police, hospitals and the school community were making decisions on behalf of children without necessarily consulting them, so the school's implementation team initially targeted language and communication, says Papadopoulos.

“One of the impacts we've seen is that students are able to articulate, using very clear language, what their concerns and worries are. That's leading to a much quicker response to potential mental health issues or issues in the family home that are impacting

their ability to learn at school.”

She says that results from student surveys and a rapid decline in the number of student incident reports indicate the children are “more skilled in conflict resolution and appropriate vocabulary to work through what is going on for them”.

The program's curriculum and resources have been important to its success, says Papadopoulos. She suggests that when other schools implement the program, their teachers be given time to visit and talk to teachers at schools that have already rolled it out. Having an enthusiastic and dedicated implementation team at school level is also crucial.



Christine Long is a freelance writer.

# Educators on the campaign trail

The teacher-versus-billionaires battle in the US offers lessons about the power of persistence.

BY **NIC BARNARD**

**E**ven before voters went to the polls for the United States' mid-term elections on 6 November, educators in Oklahoma were winners.

A dozen incumbent Republican legislators who voted against tax increases to fund teacher pay rises found themselves kicked off the ballot paper in a stunning series of primary upsets. Of the 19 state legislators who voted against tax rises, only four survived.

Or as the media outlet Daily Intelligencer put it: "The teachers beat the billionaires in a rout."

Oklahoma has some of the lowest paid teachers in the US. Over the past decade, US\$1 billion (A\$1.4 billion) has been slashed from education funding – a 28 per cent cut that incredibly, in the world's richest nation, has left one in five schools in the state operating four days a week to save money.

This year, the state's teachers decided enough was enough. A threatened walkout won them a promised US\$6000 (\$8500) pay rise over three years but not the tax increases to fund it. So, they walked out anyway and went hard after the fracking industry-backed Republican legislators who had insulted and opposed them.

They were not alone. In the most politicised mid-term elections in recent memory, educators are campaigning and standing for office in unprecedented numbers, backed by their union, the National Education Association (NEA).

Educators now hold nearly 15 per cent of all state legislative seats in



**US public school teachers' campaigns have won broad support.**

the US after 1,080 were elected in state contests.

"What we are witnessing is not a moment but a movement by educators running for office to fight for the public schools our students deserve," NEA president Lily Eskelsen García said when the figures were released.

Their presence has been felt most in the "red states" of the southern and central US – the run-down, poverty-hit states in which the

## IN SHORT

// In the US, the majority of public-school parents support strike action by educators for better pay.

// Teachers have walked out in six US states this year.

// More teachers have been running as candidates.

## What we are witnessing is not a moment but a movement by educators running for office to fight for the public schools our students deserve.



Lily Eskelsen García  
NEA President

Republicans have a stranglehold on power and people voted in huge numbers for Donald Trump in 2016.

### ANGRY TEACHERS WALK OUT IN SIX STATES

This year, teachers walked out for up to two weeks in six states, including Oklahoma, Kentucky, Arizona and West Virginia. Many won long-withheld pay rises but that has done little to assuage their anger.

These states have witnessed years of Tea Party-style government – hard-right, small-government state administrations that have cut funding, attacked union rights and introduced Trojan horse privatisation programs such as charter schools and education vouchers.

In Oklahoma, any tax increase requires a 75 per cent majority. In some states, strikes by public sector workers have been made illegal, so staff instead stage walkouts, some using personal or annual leave to do so.

State governors have been hailed in Washington as conservative trailblazers but back in his home state, voters have not seen the promised economic growth that would swell tax coffers, rather education and health services on the brink of collapse. In effect, they have been the subject of an experiment in Reaganite economics since the 1980s.

As social studies teacher John Waldron from Tulsa in Oklahoma told *The New Yorker*: “We have gotten to see here pure

unalloyed, deep-red conservative government...People say they aren't interested in politics. But then politics happens to them.”

These are also states in which the Democratic party is on life-support, often not even fielding a full slate of candidates. That too has prompted some educators to step into the breach.

### #REDFORED DEFINES THE RESISTANCE

The NEA has given the resistance movement its own hashtag – #RedForEd. For the first time, it has run a training program, See Educators Run, to train and support members seeking elected office. More than 200 members attended the three-day program, learning about fundraising, communicating on the campaign trail, and the nuts and bolts of running an effective campaign.

Polling for the NEA shows voters firmly on side: 78 per cent of public-school parents support strike action by educators for better pay.

Candidates also found themselves pushing an open door. In 2016, laid-off Oklahoma teacher Mickey Dollens ran for a state seat on a ticket of raising taxes by 0.25 per cent to fund education. Knocking on doors, he explained that it amounted to just \$30 a year for most families. He won, in a state that in the same election swung heavily for Trump.

Further west, in Arizona, 270,000 people this year signed a petition to place an “Invest in Education” proposition on the ballot paper,

lifting state income taxes from 4.54 per cent to 8 per cent for those earning over US\$250,000 (\$350,000) to fund teacher pay rises and education services.

The proposition was thrown out on a technicality after a state supreme court challenge by the local chamber of commerce. (The court itself had been stacked by a law change two years prior that allowed the Republican governor to appoint two additional judges.) But a second proposition, rolling back Arizona's voucher system, made it onto the ballot.

Meanwhile, in Kentucky, House speaker and rising star of the right Jonathan Shell found the limits of power when his part in slashing public servants' pensions prompted a primary challenge from maths teacher and Republican voter Travis Brenda. Amid fury at the cut – rammed through in a single day – Brenda won and knocked Shell off the ticket, then went on to win the seat.

NEA political director Carrie Pugh says: “In many cases, educators are running after seeing years of legislative neglect and the chronic underfunding of public education. [They] are now demanding more for their students.

“They are taking matters into their own hands and running for office. They are ready to step up for their students, their communities and public education.”



Nic Barnard is a freelance writer.

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# The pursuit of happiness

Distance is no challenge for a project that brings students across NSW together in a lesson for life.

BY MARGARET PATON

Questions about happiness are being tackled across a range of subject areas by Year 8 students at Dubbo School of Distance Education.

And they're ticking many boxes for general capabilities, student engagement and a range of technologies, says Kelly Pfeiffer head teacher, teaching and learning (futures learning), at the school.

Pfeiffer says students working on the Happiness Project collaborate, problem solve and use creative thinking and communications skills via a Google Doc in a Google classroom, despite not working face to face.

"It's giving them real-world skills for 21st century learning," she says.

"We found the learners who usually struggle at school were much more engaged and delivered better quality ideas; and those you deem more academic can really struggle with the concept [of happiness] because there's no definitive answer to the driving question. Those students had



## IN SHORT

// The Happiness Project asks students to work in groups and think about the question of happiness.

// Less academically inclined students tend to excel.

// A team of teachers took two years to develop the program.

## It's like tenpin bowling. Teachers are the bumper bars. If we've done our job well, learners have a lot of freedom, but not enough to go off the track.



**Kelly Pfeiffer**

Dubbo School of Distance Education, NSW

to upskill in areas needed in the workforce such as teamwork, compassion and empathy."

The students tackle the same driving question: How can I determine the "happiness" level in my community and create a realistic plan to increase happiness by the year 2020?

"That's not something you can Google," says teacher Michelle Sullivan, stage 4/5 futures coordinator and Pfeiffer's team member.

Students are paired with others and they do a launch activity, followed by working through learning materials.

For English, they consider that happiness might mean something different to each of us; in science it's biological - what happens to "our body when we're happy; and in PDHPE they investigate it from a wellbeing and mental health perspective.

"Once the project is launched, they're getting into each other's heads working out their definition of community and what resources they have," Pfeiffer says.

"Teachers support and scaffold student learning. It's like tenpin bowling. Teachers are the bumper bars. If we've done our job well, learners have a lot of freedom but not enough to go off the track."

Student work culminates in an infographic poster with an embedded QR code linking to a video presentation. Students also present to youth organisation headspace Dubbo, which gives meaningful industry feedback.

A team of four teachers from

Students explore how happiness can manifest in different subject areas, such as science or languages.

**Happiness is what?**  
Happiness is a positive emotion that people feel, and express when something goes right in their life. When you feel happy, the brain releases a chemical called *endorphins*. This may happen whilst having a super time on a rollercoaster or eating your favourite food!!

**How would you explain happiness?**  
"Happiness is the feeling of joy, contentment, general laughter whilst feeling good and appreciative. I sneakily feel happy when eating junk food!!"  
"Happiness to me is being with someone you love and someone that loves you!"

**Why do people feel happy??**  
A huge 50% of people say they feel happy when they get away from their usual lives. This may mean overseas holidays, visiting family or going camping to a relaxing destination.

Category	Percentage
FOOD	10%
FAMILY	40%
WORK	1%
HOLIDAYS	50%

Dubbo School of Distance Education took two years to develop the scope and sequence, undertake professional development in project-based learning, and create and learning materials for the project.

"Project-based learning has been around for a long time, but for distance ed, there was no successful model," she says.

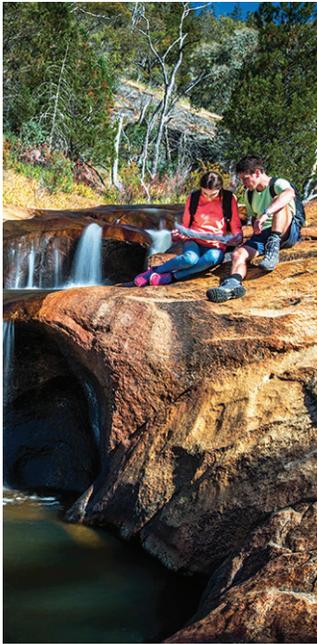
The team looked to one of the

founding fathers of project-based learning - Thom Markham, whose online courses helped them get the Happiness Project up and running.

Find out more at [dubbo-d.schools.nsw.gov.au](http://dubbo-d.schools.nsw.gov.au) and [pblglobal.com](http://pblglobal.com).



**Margaret Paton** is a freelance writer and casual K12 teacher.



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# Window to a wider world

Three educators share their online lesson planning resources.

BY MARGARET PATON

Teachers are always on the lookout for ideas and resources as they work to satisfy the voracious Australian curriculum. Many say websites, social media and organisational tools offer practical, accessible solutions.

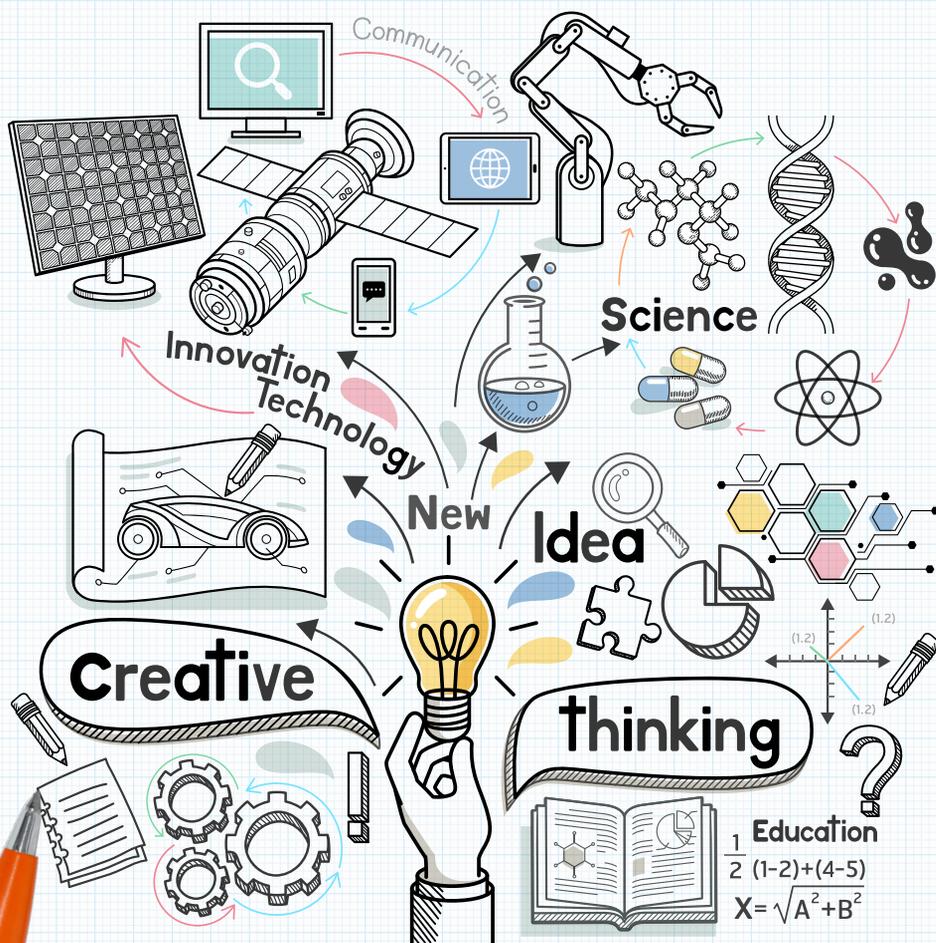
Our experts recommended sites such as Teachers Pay Teachers, Tes, math-aids.com, SMART Exchange, Studyladder, SparkleBox and blog Authentic Maths Inquiry. They say Facebook and YouTube, plus administrative tools such as Trello, Evernote and Dropbox, provide valuable, time-efficient support.

## BEYOND THE LESSON PLAN

Fiona McRobie, who teaches Years 9, 11 and 12 maths at Tennant Creek High School in the Northern Territory, says she creates her lesson plan first, then looks online for "middle activities".

"I don't use anyone's lesson plans but my own because my cohort is unique, just like everyone's classroom. I'll find individual activities online, but I have to box in how it will fit together, how it will be assessed and fit to the curriculum," she says.

McRobie won a CHOOSEMATHS Teaching Excellence Award for her pioneering work on an intervention program this year. The program pinpoints gaps in students' understanding and teaches through rich learning and hands-on activities.



McRobie said when she started teaching she made most of her resources herself.

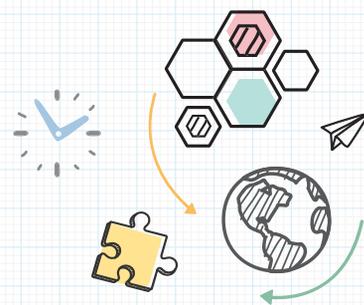
"I teach in an area of low literacy and many students speak English as more of a second language. A lot of the resources I initially found online weren't transferrable into my classroom... but I'm more familiar with the sites now."

Teachers can experiment with a range of lesson planning resources, including websites, social media and workflow planning tools.

McRobie vouches for the Authentic Inquiry Maths blog by Canberra primary teacher, Bruce Ferrington. He's "brill", she says, for giving insights into how children's minds grasp mathematical concepts.

## WELL-HONED RESOURCES

McRobie says she's "very keen" on the Teachers Pay Teachers and Tes websites because they offer



well-honed classroom activities.

“Teachers Pay Teachers has a large body of teachers contributing to it, so it takes a bit of time to look through. You can find something that another teacher has used before and sounds successful. Because I’m a maths teacher, a lot of the international resources translate easily.”

Michael Pace, a Year 3 and 4 teacher from Meadow Heights Primary School north of Melbourne, also recommends the site.

“It’s well laid out, easy to navigate and you’re supporting other teachers who have found these things useful. You’ve got a plethora of displays, lesson plans, units, posters and more. I’ll go there to get an independent numeracy activity, for example,” he says.

“Another site, Math-aids.com, allows you to create and tailor your own maths worksheet. It’s not perfect, but really good for quick independent activities. I used to use Studyladder for that a lot, too.”

### SHOULD YOU FORK OUT?

There was a time, though, that Pace says he balked at paying for lesson planning resources.

“When I first learnt that SparkleBox and Teachers Pay Teachers required payment, I wasn’t in favour. I was a first-year graduate on a minimum wage. But I’ve come to realise that the amount of time I save by using ready-made resources makes it worth it. I’m more efficient.

“No teacher will tell you they have too much planning time. Teaching is a game of prioritising.”

Since an interactive whiteboard appeared in his classroom this year, Pace has also tapped into Smart Exchange for lessons that allows students to engage with the screen. The whiteboard is also useful for tapping into Google Earth and *Behind the News* for current issues.

### LOOK TO THE CLOUD

Carla Beth Anderson, a high-school-trained teacher from regional NSW, says accessing social media, professional networks and cloud-based apps saves time and allows resources to be easily accessed and shared. She has used online resources for teaching since joining the profession 12 years ago.

Anderson, who balances relief work with her own businesses in educational copywriting and academic coaching, says Trello is a favourite. “I use it in lieu of a day planner for lesson planning. As well, it’s a task manager and calendar,” she says. “I use it to keep a store of contingency lessons and resources for each subject or stage level.

“That way, whatever class I’m called in to cover, I’m prepared with curriculum-based lessons. I also use Evernote, Dropbox and Google Drive, and carry extra paper resources in the boot of my car.”

Anderson is also an active member of several subject-specific Facebook pages for teachers that share ideas and resources. She occasionally taps into Twitter for extra teaching ideas.

### VALUE IN VIDEO

Anderson recommends online video resources including



**Fiona McRobie**  
Tennant Creek High School, NT



**Carla Beth Anderson**  
Relief teacher, NSW



**Michael Pace**  
Meadow Heights Primary School, VIC

EnhanceTV, an Australian site that shares documentary videos sorted by subject, stage and rating.

“It’s really good if there’s a change in the routine, say, or you might be waiting for the laptops to be brought to your classroom. I can put on a short video related to the subject, and do some summary or thinking tools activities to keep students engaged and on task. It makes the transition between lesson activities smoother.”

She also recommends YouTube channels, such as Flipping English, Wimble Don (HSIE) and Eddie Woo’s misterwootube (maths) while TED-Ed is excellent for extending students. Padlet and other online “whiteboards” help assess students’ understanding in a way that’s more comfortable for those who don’t wish to put their hand up, she says.

Quizlet and Kahoot make revision and quizzes fun for students of all abilities. Anderson also uses interactive storyboarding apps such as Storyboard That, to help students understand narrative structure and timeline events at a deeper level.

Anderson says while teachers need to be mindful of costs and the practicalities of internet speed and access, online resources can become vital nourishment for the hungry Australian curriculum.



**Margaret Paton** is a freelance writer and casual K-12 teacher.

# Sum and substance

Teaching wasn't her first career but Cassandra Portelli's love of maths saw her head back to school in a move that changed her life.

BY MARGARET PATON

Cassandra Portelli's teaching career got off to an uncertain start after she was posted to the remote Goodooga Central School in outback NSW, almost 800 kilometres inland from Sydney but a bit "all at sea".

"The school hadn't had a qualified maths teacher in years. There were no books or programs and I didn't really know how to teach," she says.

Portelli had decided on teaching after brief stints at the then Commonwealth Employment Service, as an aerobics instructor and in the Royal Australian Navy.

Despite her shaky start, and thanks to her "very patient and supportive" supervising teacher, Portelli thrived at Goodooga.

She also ventured into the VET area because locals found it difficult to attend the nearest TAFE campus 150 kilometres away. Portelli wrote an office skills course that the school ran for students and adults, which helped them find local jobs.

That first teaching job was 25 years ago. But it was a later role, at Wingham High School, near Taree, that Portelli says changed her life. The school was running the Australian Securities and Investments Commission's trial MoneySmart program in 2013.

"If I hadn't been part of that pilot, I probably wouldn't have been so passionate about financial literacy education and may never have applied for the Premier's [First State Super Financial Literacy] Scholarship," she says.



**I'm part of the vehicle that gets kids from where they are to where they want to go well beyond school.**

”

**Cassandra Portelli**  
Hunter School of Performing Arts in Newcastle, NSW

She won the Scholarship in 2017 and, this year, toured five countries - the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, Canada and the US - to learn more about their financial literacy education programs.

"We're so lucky we have an excellent framework that's built into our national curriculum from K to 12. No other country had that, but I'd like to improve how we celebrate Global Money Week in March," she says.

Now head mathematics teacher at Hunter School of Performing Arts in Newcastle, Portelli also runs the school's MoneySmart program.

After five years at the school she says a highlight has been setting up a 'Maths and Milo' program, a free daily homework and study

**Portelli is passionate about financial literacy and runs the school's MoneySmart program.**

program for students of all ages.

"It makes a big difference for students who want to be more successful. In my time, the senior uptake in maths has gone from 50 per cent to 75 per cent, and this year more chose Advanced than Standard Mathematics," she says.

Portelli's more than two decades in the classroom haven't diminished her enthusiasm for the profession.

"I do love teaching. I teach because I can see I make a difference. I'm part of the vehicle that gets kids from where they are to where they want to go well beyond school."



**Margaret Paton** is a freelance writer and casual K-12 teacher.

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