

NSW public-private partnership schools a lesson for NZ

Nine new schools delivered under a public-private partnership model are “an improvement on traditional public sector delivery”, a New South Wales Treasury report has found.

The nine primary and secondary schools – built under a privately financed project (PFP) model – opened in north-western and western Sydney, Illawarra and the Central Coast between 2004 and 2005.

Under the PFP model, the private sector financed, designed and constructed the schools to standards that met or exceeded Department of Education and Training’s standards.

The private sector also provides cleaning, maintenance, security, furniture, equipment and grounds maintenance and other services for the buildings until 2032, when the buildings are handed back to the government.

The Treasury report says the schools were built two years earlier than would have been possible under a traditional public sector contract, had improved management of facilities, released school principal’s and teachers’ time that was previously spent dealing with facilities management, and delivered better value for money as tested against the Public Sector Comparator.

The chief executive of the New Zealand Council for Infrastructure Development, Stephen Selwood, said the report gave clear insight into the benefits of public and private sector partnerships.

Public-private partnerships were being used extensively worldwide to bridge the gap between infrastructure demand and the limitations of public funds.

“As this example demonstrates, well-managed partnerships can provide



Stephen Selwood

better value for money and clear control and accountability for service standards,” Mr Selwood said.

“There are important lessons to be learned from this for New Zealand.”

The report also says teacher unions

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NZ parents want school choice, report shows

A new report showing 90 percent of parents want to choose the schools their children attend highlights the 'lack of sense' in government policies that restrict choice.

The Maxim Institute report, the fourth released in its series of education research, shows that nearly all parents (96 percent) would like to select the school their child goes to; and most parents (80 percent) agreed that education should be funded to allow parents to send their children to the school of their choice.

The institute recommended zoning regulations be relaxed as an interim measure "on the path to the complete abolition of zones". Where schools were over-subscribed, places should be filled according to factors other than the location the family could afford to live in.

Joy Quigley, the executive director of Independent Schools of New Zealand, said the report highlighted the lack of sense in government education

funding policies.

It made no sense that parents could choose preschools and tertiary education for their children and government money would go to the institution they chose but "inexplicably those

"Why can't the government respond to parents by funding education in such a way that there is greater choice, particularly for less well-off families." Joy Quigley

same parents are considered by the Government to be hopeless when it comes to making an informed decision about school choice."

"By denying parents this option, the government is clearly saying that parents are not a reliable authority in this vital

decision-making process, and that only the state has the magic formula that can determine what is best for each child.

"Why can't the government respond to parents by funding education in such a way that there is greater choice, particularly for less well-off families," Ms Quigley said.

"To say that they want all schools to be good schools is not the point, because all schools, no matter how good, are different. Similarly, all students are different and therefore there will not always be a good match with the local school and the local child. Parents know this."

The Maxim Report is at http://www.maxim.org.nz/parentfactor/report4_accesstoeducation.php

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and the Secondary Principals Council criticised some aspects of the schools but were positive regarding the operation of the contract, and were responsive to calls for assistance on facilities management issues.

"This represents a substantial shift from early concerns," the report says.

In *The Australian Financial Review*, NSW Education Minister Carmel Tebbutt described the nine new schools as part of a five-year plan to fast-track

construction in the areas of NSW that needed them most.

Consortium to build nine more schools

The consortium of companies that completed the nine schools has won a contract to design, build and maintain a further nine schools over a 30-year concession period.

The Axiom Education consortium comprises ABN AMRO, Babcock and Brown, St Hilliers, Hansen Yuncken and Spotless Services.

Construction on the first schools starts in March. At the end of the 30-

year period, responsibility for the schools transfers to the state government.

The New South Wales Treasury report is at <http://www.treasury.nsw.gov.au/pubs/trp2005/trp05-3.pdf>

A statement from Stephen Selwood is at http://www.nzcid.org.nz/Press_Release_01_18_06.htm

Carmel Tebbutt's reported comments are at http://www.ibisworld.com.au/car/News.asp?enterprise_id=3385#68818

A press release from Axiom is at <http://www.abnamro.com.au/content/media/articles/271.asp>

'20 free hours' won't help the most disadvantaged'

New Zealand's most disadvantaged children will continue to miss out on early childhood education if Labour's '20 free hours a week' policy is not modified, says research released in January.

A New Zealand Institute of Economic Research report says the 20 free hours policy will waste millions of dollars on those already in preschool, while continuing to fail the most disadvantaged who are not currently participating.

The report assesses Labour's election promise of free early childhood education for all three and four year olds at teacher-led centres.

It says disadvantaged children are most likely to benefit from early childhood education, but are most likely also to miss out under Labour's plan.

The report recommends using the existing Work and Income childcare subsidy to fund 20 free hours for the most disadvantaged, and 'actively seeking out and recruiting' children not yet participating in early childhood education.

The report was commissioned by the Early Childhood Council (ECC).

ECC chief executive Sue Thorne said the policy, if unmodified, would give more than \$100 million a year to children who, for the most part, already

received early childhood education, and very little to those in most need.

"If we focus even a part of this money on ensuring disadvantaged children have access to preschool education we will change the lives of thousands."

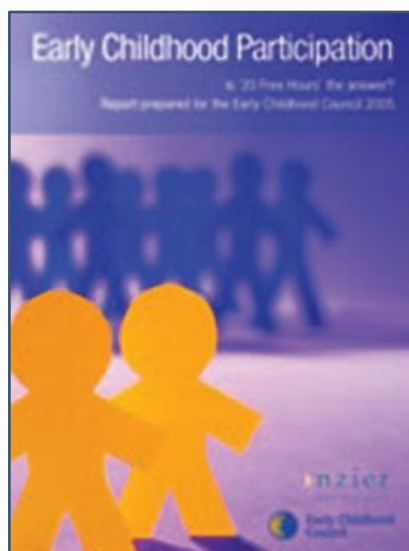
Mrs Thorne said low-income children benefited much more from early childhood education than the better off.

Children from low-income families who received quality early childhood education were more likely to go on to tertiary education and get high-skilled jobs, she said.

They were also less likely to drop out of high school, be in special education, be arrested as a juvenile and be repeat offenders as adults.

The Government's proposed policy gives 20 hours per week free early childhood education to three and four year olds at teacher-led centres. It is scheduled for introduction in 2007.

The ECC report, "Early childhood participation: Is '20 free hours' the answer?" is at <http://www.ecc.org.nz/report/index.php#part>



Education Forum member appointed to govt advisory group on '20 free hours' policy

The government last month appointed an advisory group to help ensure that its policy for 20 hours free ECE was as "practical and workable as possible."

Education Forum member Sue Thorne is one of the eight members of the group

Mrs Thorne said her aim would be to ensure that the implementation of the policy would be as straightforward as possible and that it would be simple for centres to administer.

The group's first meeting is in February, and it will continue to meet until October next year.

The Early Childhood Council released an earlier NZIER report on the '20 free hours' policy in July last year. Information on that report is at <http://www.ecc.org.nz/report/index.php#put>

High school building good education with private sector

An innovative construction course at an Auckland high school, made possible by the private sector, has seen a big turn around in some difficult students, job offers to graduates and increased support for the second year of the course.

Onehunga High School started its Building and Construction School last year in partnership with Fletcher Construction. It is the second such privately supported course at the school, following on from its highly regarded Business School.

Twenty-two Year 12 boys did the course last year and 18 graduated. Most saw high school as increasingly irrelevant or were only there for rugby. A beneficial side effect of the course has been a change in attitude for many of them.

Principal Chris Saunders said leadership qualities, a strong work ethic and a noticeable improvement in self-worth were “some of the exciting outcomes” from the course.

“Some who had been very challenging to the school underwent a remarkable change for the better.”

All 18 could have been placed in apprenticeships as a result of the links the school had formed with the building industry, and the high regard the industry had for the quality of their work. Many took that opportunity, while

some elected to spend another year at school and others opted for different career paths.

Fletcher Construction was so impressed with the school’s results last year that it has promised an additional seven students apprenticeships this year.

Peter Mayow, operations manager of Fletcher Construction, believes firmly in the project’s two-way benefits.

“We saw this initiative as a much-

“There is a skills shortage and any programme like this can only help to ease those shortages over the long term.”
Peter Mayow



needed step towards introducing students to construction as a career,” he said.

“The programme offers real trade skills and hopefully convinces the students that construction can be a rewarding and satisfying job choice. There is a skills shortage and any programme like this can only help to ease those shortages over the long term.”

To get the school off the ground last year, Fletcher Construction was approached for support and committed seed finance of \$200,000, plus expertise and advice. It also assisted with resource

High school building good education with private sector

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consents, uniforms and tools. Other building industry firms, such as Hitachi, have contributed tools.

Local organisations associated with building and construction volunteered alongside Fletchers to offer specialist knowledge.

Private sector partnerships key to success

Onehunga High School's ground-breaking private sector partnerships – in its Business School and one-year-old Building and Construction school, that have brought students much success, have built a template for further similar initiatives.

Principal Chris Saunders said the partnership aspect between school and the private sector could not be overstated.

"I believe schools cannot undertake these projects without additional resources and outside expertise.

"Nothing in my experience has matched this partnership model for relevance, speed, effect and economy."

Mr Saunders said other parts of the school curriculum were perfect for similar initiatives and "we look forward to developments in those areas".

"The two most significant curriculum developments achieved at Onehunga High School have involved significant partnerships with the private sector."



Last year, the school's students studied Building and Construction as their core NCEA component and took other classes in English, Mathematics and Business Studies, which are mandatory and tailored to suit each student's experiences and qualifications.

"Nothing in my experience has matched this partnership model for relevance, speed, effect and economy."

Chris Saunders

Other courses can also be taken.

Building and Construction makes up between one-third and one-half of the total course time, with a one-hour block on Mondays and four other blocks between two and five hours on each of the other weekdays.

In 2005, two single-roomed units were built for on-sale. This year it is intended students will build a simple two or three bedroom house that will

be sold to fund the following year's development.

This year, the school will run two classes with a total of 45 students. It aims to complete a purpose-built facility by the end of term so students can work in proper industry conditions on larger projects and student numbers can increase further.

The building school's mission statement is to provide quality, relevant pre-apprenticeship building, construction and business education and training to selected students at the high school.

Mr Saunders said the high school – of which the roll is more than half Maori and Pacific students – would continue to emphasise the values of trades courses.

"Our past over-emphasis on the more academic outcomes of the school will have to change. Sitting alongside that traditional emphasis will be a conscious attempt to promote the worth of the trades, reflected in the ceremonies and celebrations of the school."

Give immigrants loans to train for work Australian govt dept argues

Newly arrived immigrants in Australia should get loans for bridging courses to help them get work in the profession of their speciality, the Australian Department of Immigration has argued.

The cost of investment would be outweighed by the benefits of getting overseas qualified professionals and tradespersons into productive jobs, the department argued.

In a submission on a Productivity Commission report into the economic impact of migration and population growth, the department said its proposed scheme could be similar to the loan scheme for tertiary education students.

“The cost of bridging courses and training for those who were deemed to need it could be paid for by recipients either up front, for those who are able to pay or on a deferred loan basis, to be recovered with interest once they start gainful employment.”

The department also called for a campaign to help employers overcome their bias against employing immigrants. It argued that such workers could help open up new markets for companies.

Migrants were generally younger and better qualified than the broader Australian population but work experience, language barriers and employer’s bias were employment barriers, the submission said.

Educated migrants had difficulties turning that education into good jobs.

An example of how that could be overcome was the 10-year-old migrants work experience programme that provided job opportunities with the New South Wales government for people

with overseas skills and qualifications.

About 50 percent of Australia’s population growth in recent years had come from immigration.

Most Australian research suggested migration had little effect on unemployment figures and that most migrants provided a ‘fiscal surplus’ to the country.

There was also some research that immigration had opened up new labour market opportunities for current residents.

The Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs submission is at <http://www.pc.gov.au/study/migrationandpopulation/subs/sub022.pdf>

Employers to give approval to training colleges and courses

Industry groups will be allowed to choose which colleges and courses deserve a stamp of approval as preferred suppliers under new Australian government trade training plans.

The plans are part of the government’s moves to set up an Institute for Trade Skills Excellence. It plans to invest AU\$23 million over four years in the institute in a move to improve the quality and industry relevance of vocational and technical education.

The institute would be set up as a public company. One of its roles would be to let people know which colleges and courses had been approved by employers.

Reference groups would advise the institute on the needs of employers in a range of industries.

The industry reference groups would provide the opportunity for the direct involvement of industry in recognising high performing Registered Training Organisations within each specific industry.

Executive director of New Zealand’s Industry Training Federation Darel Hall said the Australian plans were a more blunt tool than the New Zealand situation where organisations wanted to be able to differentiate between the strong and the weak parts of a training organisation.

He said there was an upward curve of employer input into training; and

Opinion

School zoning my seem fair by in reality fit fails

by John Morris, headmaster of Auckland Grammar School

In 2000, the Labour government re-introduced school zoning, the aim of which was to use the existing network of schools more effectively and efficiently. In general terms, it sounds like a good and fair idea but unfortunately it is not quite as simple as that, and in the larger metropolitan centres it is plainly not working fairly or even legally.



John Morris

In the 1960s and 70s every school was zoned and every school had the right to take approximately 40 students from out of zone. No doubt some schools were in greater demand than others even in those days, but there was certainly a far greater homogeneity across the secondary school sector.

All schools seemingly provided the same quality of education and the same opportunities for children to succeed. Zoning in that meritocratic society worked acceptably.

The world, however, has changed; attitudes have changed, aspirations have changed and the composition of New Zealand's population has also changed along with the social mores of our time.

All this has impacted on education and schools, and what was once a fairly homogeneous landscape of secondary schools is now one of huge diversity. Now, not all schools are the same – philosophies, expectations, resources, ethnicity all differ markedly between schools.

The days when a 'one size fits all'

education policy like geographical zoning may have suited our country are well and truly gone.

Fast forward to the twenty-first century and we have a totally different situation and yet we are being legislated as if the situation was the same.

Education is a high-profile issue, qualifications are more important than ever before and many families will do whatever they can to ensure their children get what they consider is the best education possible, and if that includes using deception, then so be it.

A case in point is Auckland Grammar School (AGS). Regardless of your own personal opinion about Grammar, and most people have one, AGS holds a special place in the education landscape of New Zealand. It is the oldest school in Auckland (137 years old) and has an incomparable history and tradition of academic excellence and sporting success.

Anyone who understands about Grammar's place in the New Zealand education scene would realise what the result would be of drawing a firm line around the school and stipulating that anyone who lives within its borders could go to Grammar, and then not putting any accompanying requirements on these people.

Predictably, there has been a mass migration into the zone and, consequently, a huge roll increase (600 extra students since the legislation was changed).

Our roll increase has little to do with natural population increase within our zone and everything to do with deliberate in-migration into the zone from families whose children are already at other schools in Auckland.

This is why the idea of shrinking the "Grammar zone" won't work; families will still move into the many apartments and units that are everywhere within our zone.

Neither should the board of trustees be responsible for suggesting such action because it is a strategy that would impact greatly on property values in the area.

According to all the Ministry of Education demographics, AGS should have a falling roll. Our own research also tells us that the main contributing schools had lower numbers of boys living in our zone last year and yet our Form Three roll has increased yet again.

Over the week prior to school starting we had nearly 80 additional applications for places, most of them

School zoning may seem fair but in reality it fails

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for Form Three, from families who had just moved into the zone from other suburbs in Auckland and that were zoned for other schools.

The legislation allows families to leave their enrolment that late and the school can do little about it. The impact on our school from such inconsiderate but legal behaviour is huge, with class sizes, teaching timetables and provision of facilities all compromised hugely.

The fact that we cope and still provide a style and quality of education that is in great demand is a superb tribute to the staff and board of the school, but it should not, and need not, be like this.

The enrolment legislation that we have to endure is based on a bygone assumption that all schools are the same and all student learning needs are essentially similar. This is patently not the case today, and it also fails to take into account unique local circumstances.

In 2000, AGS made a strong submission to the select committee on the Education Amendment Bill No. 1 chaired by Liz Gordon, and we suggested improvements to that bill. Our suggestions fell on deaf ears.

Over the succeeding five years the weaknesses of the bill in operation have been plain to see, especially in Christchurch and Auckland.

The school has made further representations to the Minister and Ministry over those five years but without making any headway.

I am sure a meeting of principals of affected schools with some Ministry personnel could end up with sensible and pragmatic solutions, and while it will not be universally popular I do believe that some element of parental choice must be part of any discussion.

Much research has been done on this in the USA, UK and Australia; and three main arguments for choice over a strict area assignment to school come to the fore.

First, there is the libertarian notion of

choice for its own sake.

Second, there is the argument of equity. Choice of school extends to all, a privilege that under zoning is available only to those able to afford houses in desirable suburban catchment areas ('selection by mortgage') or send their child to a fee-paying school.

Children from poor and ethnic minority groups should be able, in principle, to "break the iron cage of zoning" (Waslander and Thrupp).

Third, there is the argument that market forces will drive up educational standards. Successful schools will be popular; weaker not so and consequently their funding will drop until they either improve or close. Over time, therefore, the general standard of schools will be higher (Chubb and Moe).

Given all this, it is surely time for the government to reassess this legislation and have a discussion regarding the whole concept of zoning and choice, and it should be urgent before our so-called more successful schools become too large and unwieldy to cope with ever-burgeoning rolls.

Employers to give approval to training colleges and courses

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moves to have more employer input into training would help create a market of voices for the training sector.

Mr Hall said employers were going to have more and more voice over time in training. This had been clear in speeches from Dr Cullen (the Tertiary Education Minister) and communications from the Tertiary Education Commission.

An Australian government statement on the institute is at <http://www.dest.gov.au/Ministers/Media/Hardgrave/2005/12/h001211205.asp>

PTE wins best Maori Small Business award

The Solomon Group, an Auckland-based literacy and numeracy Private Training Establishment, has won the Best Small Business award in the 2005 Maori Business Awards.

The family-run business has been operating since 1998 and runs more than half a dozen courses.

The Maori Business Awards are run by the Maori Women's Development Inc.

The Maori Women's Development Inc website is at <http://www.mwdi.co.nz/main.asp>

While we were away ...

Subtext was offline for nearly three months over summer, but while we were away the world of education reform kept on turning. Here are some stories from around the world from the past few months.

Men and women pay back student loans in same time

Men and women are paying their student loans back in full at about the same rate of time, according to Statistics New Zealand figures released in November.

A Statistics New Zealand press release is at <http://www2.stats.govt.nz/domino/external/pasfull/pasfull.nsf/web/Media+Release+Integrated+Data+on+Student+Loan+Borrowers+1997%E2%80%932003?open>

Australians create mega-sized childcare provider

Australia's largest privately owned childcare provider, ABC Learning Centres, is set to become one of the world's largest listed childcare service providers.

The company recently acquired the US's third largest childcare and early education centre, Learning Care Group, in a deal worth almost AU\$218 million.

ABC currently owns about 700 childcare centres in Australia and New Zealand. Learning Care Group operates

460 corporate-owned and franchise centres throughout the US and internationally.

ABC plans to acquire and develop another 250 centres by June this year.

The ABC website is at <http://www.childcare.com.au/>

An ABC investor statement is at http://www.childcare.com.au/documents/Investor_Presentation-161105.pdf



Largest school choice bill ever introduced

The US's largest school choice bill was introduced in December.

Up to 372,000 schoolchildren displaced by hurricanes Katrina and Rita are eligible to receive federal funds to use in the public or private school of their choice.

Meanwhile, lobby group Alliance for School Choice described 2005 as the best year ever for school choice, citing: 38 states introducing targeted school choice bills this past legislative session; school choice legislation passing 19 legislative houses in 12 states plus the US Congress; and six states enacting into law 10 programmes – four new and six expanded.

More information is at http://www.allianceforschoolchoice.org/media_center.aspx?IITypeID=3&IID=2452

Competition can boost school performance, report finds

An increase in the competitiveness of a school's local environment can lead to an increase in average test scores, a recent US report finds.

'Choice and Competition in Local Education Markets' by Patrick Bayer and Robert McMillan is at <http://aida.econ.yale.edu/~pjb37/BayerMcMillanSchoolComp.pdf>

Vouchers work best in larger urban areas, report suggests

US voucher programmes are most appealing when states contain large cities, suburban districts are not included, housing values are not threatened and programme design allows for compromise between disparate political ideologies, a report suggests.

The National Center for Privatization in Education paper was written by researcher Lawrence Kenny and is at http://www.ncspe.org/publications_files/OP108.pdf

US doctorate programmes to be ranked

The National Research Council has begun a study to rank doctorate programmes around the US. It last carried out the study in 1995.

More information is at <http://insidehighered.com/news/2005/11/23/graduate>

Universities plan to sponsor controversial academies in England

Some of England's leading universities are talking with the British government over plans to sponsor schools in the controversial academies programme.

The *Guardian* has reported that University College London and Brunel University have agreed to sponsor academies, and four others are discussing plans with the government.

Prime minister Tony Blair has thrown his weight behind a drive to replace 200 struggling state secondary schools with privately backed academies by 2010. He is encouraging businesses, not-for-profit organisations, churches and parent and community groups to run the academies.

Under the scheme, private individuals and businesses pay up to £2 million in initial sponsorship and then gain a large degree of control over a school's curriculum, staffing and ethos. As part of the deal, the government provides up to £25 million in funding for the

school, a higher than usual sum for ordinary schools.

The government said last year that organisations including KPMG, Microsoft, the Open University, the Church of England and a number of trusts had agreed to work with it to develop the approach.

CfBT, a British not-for-profit education management organisation, is looking to run schools under the scheme.

In a submission to the government, CfBT chief executive Neil McIntosh said the transfer of services from government provision to not-for-profit providers over the past 20 years had been beneficial for staff and customers alike and would also work well in education.

"The more arm's length relationship

with government will, over time, distance teachers from political regulation of their day-to-day work. Provision by independent, not-for-profit bodies will encourage innovation and diversity."

The *Guardian* story is at <http://politics.guardian.co.uk/foi/story/0,9061,1658172,00.html>

A 2005 report, from UK think tank Reform, on Academies and their academic success is at <http://www.reform.co.uk/website/pressroom/bulletinarchive.aspx?o=101>

While we were away ... Continued from page 9

Increasing US government encouragement for private sector in education

A new study has found an expanding role for the state in encouraging education market activity, an increase in test-related services and products, and emphasis on technology-based solutions.

More information on the study from Columbia University is at <http://www.tcrecord.org/Content.asp?ContentID=12259>

Lifelong learning's economic impact studied

Lifelong learning is a prominent issue in many countries, with many business leaders and policymakers viewing it as an effective strategy for producing skilled workers and helping economic growth.

However, there is not much education research looking at how lifelong learning programmes might be financed and their costs distributed. A new paper by researcher Hans Schuetze examines these issues.

The National Center for Privatization in Education paper is at http://www.ncspe.org/publications_files/OP107.pdf

Safeguards proposed to improve international education

With more and more people taking university degrees from foreign providers, there is a growing need for safeguards against low-quality services. A UNESCO and OECD initiative aims to meet this need.

More information on 'Guidelines on quality provision in cross-border higher education' is at http://www.oecd.org/document/52/0,2340,en_2649_34549_29343796_1_1_1_1,00.html

briefs

Quote of the month:

“The two most significant curriculum developments achieved at Onehunga High School have involved significant partnerships with the private sector. Nothing in my experience has matched this partnership model for relevance, speed, effect and economy.”

- Onehunga High School principal Chris Saunders in a *Subtext* story (page 5) on his school's innovative Business School and Building and Construction School.

Hoxby wins top research prize



Caroline Hoxby, a Harvard University professor and a visitor to New Zealand last year as a guest of the Education Forum, has won this year's prestigious Fordham Prize for Distinguished Scholarship.

The Fordham Foundation gives the award to a scholar “who has made major contributions to education reform via research, analysis and successful engagement in the war of ideas.”

More information is at http://www.edexcellence.net/foundation/about/press_release.cfm?id=21

An interview with Professor Hoxby is at <http://insidehighered.com/news/2006/02/08/hoxby>

British Conservatives would keep tuition fees

The British Conservative party has confirmed it would keep tertiary education tuition fees.

The fees were introduced by the current Labour government and are due to take effect this year.

A Guardian story on Tory leader David Cameron's comments are at <http://education.guardian.co.uk/students/tuitionfees/story/0,,1682627,00.html>

Non-profit firm in £30m Scottish campus deal

A non-profit firm has been awarded a £30 million contract to build halls of residence at the new Queen Margaret University College campus, *The Scotsman* reported last month.

Sanctuary Housing, one of the UK's largest housing associations, will create the accommodation for 800 people at the 35-acre site in Craighall, and provide day-to-day maintenance services for the halls over a 35-year contract.

School choice gets good results in Israel

A school choice programme in Tel Aviv, Israel had positive effects on high school dropout rates, matriculation rates and programmes of study, a study has found.

The National Bureau of Economic Research working paper is online at <http://papers.nber.org/papers/W11969>

Vouchers having success in Washington DC

A Manhattan Institute study of the growing Washington DC school voucher scheme has found increased opportunity for racial integration in schools and little evidence of public schools being academically affected by competition from private schools.

The Manhattan Institute study, by Jay R Greene and Marcus A Winters, is at http://www.manhattan-institute.org/pdf/ewp_10.pdf

Humanities subjects have become too PC, says, Australian PM

Humanities subjects in Australian schools, have “succumbed to a postmodern culture of relativism where any objective record of achievement is questioned or repudiated,” Prime Minister John Howard has argued.

In an Australia Day speech in January, Mr Howard said that “too often history has fallen victim in an ever more crowded curriculum to subjects deemed more ‘relevant’ to today. Too often, it was taught with a fragmented stew of ‘themes’ and ‘issues’” and no sense of structured narrative.

It should include indigenous history and the heritage of Western civilisation.

It was impossible to understand the history of Australia without an understanding of the “evolution of parliamentary democracy or the ideas that brought about the Enlightenment,” Mr Howard said.

Mr Howard's speech is at http://www.australianpolitics.com/news/2006/01/06-01-25_howard.shtml

Australian childcare rebate should be extended to nanny care, says backbenchers

The new childcare rebate in Australia should be extended to all forms of childcare, including nannies, and paid to parents immediately, argue female Liberal Party MPs.

The rebate gives parents AU\$4000 a year per child to help with childcare fees, but is not available for people who use nannies or preschool and is payable only at the end of the financial year.

Meanwhile, a survey of 452 of New South Wales' 800 community preschools shows that government funds covered about 80 percent of preschool running costs in the past but only 30 percent today, and fees have risen 26 percent in the last two years.

The cost increases are seeing children dropping out or attending fewer days.

A Sydney Morning Herald story on the rebate is at <http://smh.com.au/news/national/childcare-rebate-should-apply-to-nannies-bishop/2006/01/16/1137260004187.html>

A Sydney Morning Herald story on the fee rises is at <http://smh.com.au/news/national/soaring-fees-make-preschools-a-class-issue/2006/02/01/1138590568667.html>

US business group to rank schools

The largest US business association plans to rank school systems' performance to help build a workforce to better compete in the global economy, CNN has reported.

Website offers resources to design a school choice programme

A new US website offers resources for parents and school administrators to build school choice programmes.

The resources come from US school districts that have been identified as having promising practices related to choice.

The Department of Education-initiated website, *Building Choice*, is at <http://www.buildingchoice.org>

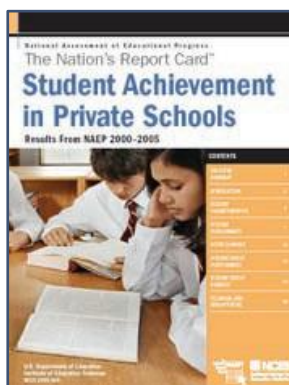
Performance pay approved in Houston, Texas

Houston, Texas has become the largest school district in the US to adopt a merit pay plan for teachers that focuses on students' tests scores.

The Houston plan will see teachers paid up to US\$3,000 extra if their students improve on state and national tests. The programme may be expanded in the future to provide as much as US\$10,000 in merit pay for teachers.

More information is on the Houston Independent School District website at http://www.houstonisd.org/HISD/portal/article/front/0,2731,20856_142973398_144356624,00.html

US private school students get better marks



US private school students have higher average scores in reading, mathematics, science, and writing than their counterparts in public schools, research finds.

In addition, higher percentages of students in private schools performed at or above 'Proficient' compared with those in public schools.

The recently released research from the US Department of Education is in *The Nation's Report Card* at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/studies/privateschools/>

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