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DIRECTIONS in Education

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

Volume 14 Number 2

11 February 2005

Report Card Gulf Widens

"THE CLASS system that exists within education in this state is entrenched. Government schools are the only chance most Victorian children have to improve their lot in life, so we must ensure students in the public system have the same chance to succeed as private schools pupils" (HSun, 23/1/05:16).

An increased emphasis on the importance of, and reward for, quality teaching is needed. Many of our government schools have three or more principals, who collectively consume a disproportionate share of the salary pool. But the people in schools who make the most difference to student learning are the teachers. We need fewer principals and more talented teachers in our difficult schools.

The highest paid professionals in any school should be its best teachers, but special incentives are urgently required to lure good teachers away from private schools to the more difficult and demanding government school milieu in our less affluent suburbs.

Salaries of at least \$110,000 per annum would help keep good teachers in struggling schools and attract other outstanding practitioners to join them.

Good teachers touch and influence young lives; they help students reach full potential. We must provide incentives to keep them in the classroom and not have their very special gifts wasted in administration, management and leadership roles.

Money should be provided for after-school academic tuition. Many students in struggling schools come from homes where little importance is placed on education. They have to tolerate classrooms where the learning program is regularly interrupted by the presence of difficult to manage, unruly students. Conscientious pupils in these schools should be given free after-school tuition, so they may better compete against more privileged peers in private schools. Free school holiday coaching courses should also be available to disadvantaged students, to help them deepen and broaden their knowledge base, practise their skills and develop good examination technique. Students in our struggling schools are no less intelligent than other students but they will often not know what's required. School holiday coaching courses will help them overcome this disadvantage.

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