



This week's stories from the media

- Major SA study into dropouts and at-risk students
- Disability Royal Commission - day one
- Disability Royal Commission - reluctant teachers
- More play time for kids, but when
- Call for funding to keep kids in school
- Lack of exams may cause stress
- State sued for abandoning autistic boy's education

Royal Commission: Disability

Day one of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with a Disability centred on a disturbing tale of a girl with Down syndrome whose early school years involved being excluded, segregated and abused.

The Commission heard that in Grade One the child was colouring in endlessly, not learning anything and basically being "babysat".

At a dance presentation the child was forced to dance away from the rest of her cohort and instead stay close to the teacher. This was despite the fact she was doing the "same performance at the same standard as all of the other children".

In fact, her mother said her child was capable of learning most things and used to be "happy" and "independent".

The mother noticed the teacher treating her child very differently from other students, "yelling and screaming at her" when the child needed to stand up to pull out a drawer where her materials were kept.

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800 Dropouts And At-Risk SA HighSchool Students To Be Subject Of Major Study

Hundreds of South Australian high-school dropouts will be quizzed about their reasons for leaving the classroom, as part of a landmark study aimed at boosting Year 12 completion rates.

Next April and May, 800 students who either dropped out of Years 10-12 this year, or are Year 12s but at risk of not completing their SACE in 2020, will undergo detailed interviews on the reasons behind their situations & decisions.

The Department is teaming with the Australian Council for Education Research for the study.

The Advertiser has previously revealed that only 60% of public students complete the SACE, including just one in three from the most disadvantaged schools.

Close to half of public students who make it to Year 12 do not complete their SACE in that year, and more than a quarter finish with neither the high-school certificate nor a school-based vocational qualification

That means close to 4000 Year 12s have an "unknown" outcome each year, though some might have found jobs or be in other training.

The study will make good on a commitment Education Minister John Gardner made a year ago to commission a research project on understanding student choices and the role schools play in them.

ACER principal research fellow Dr Petra Lietz said: "This study will investigate why students choose different learning and earning pathways, and what they see as successful outcomes of their experience at school."

"This project aims to add to the knowledge and understanding of effective senior secondary pathways and see more students succeed in their career journeys by zeroing in on their needs and intentions."

The research questions and methodology will be determined this month.

[More](#)



“...only 60% of public students complete the SACE, including just one in three from the most disadvantaged schools....”

Disability Royal Commission—Reluctant Teachers

The disability royal commission heard today that some teachers are “resisting diversity” by not catering to the learning and behavioural needs of students with a disability.

While three special education teachers told the commission that all students should be valued, welcomed and able to attend mainstream schools despite having “complex needs”, they added that some teachers were “resisting diversity”.

The teachers’ testimonies followed alarming evidence from parents who said their disabled children were “bullied relentlessly”.

Loren Swancutt, regional head of the special education service in Townsville, gave a less than glowing review of the current situation, saying “reluctant teachers” are falling short in catering for the learning needs and behavioural issues of students with disabilities.

“They are currently still offering segregated classes for students with disabilities.”

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More Play Time For Kids, But When

Australians believe school students don’t spend enough time playing but can’t agree on what that should mean for break time.

A survey has found around nine in 10 Aussies feel play helps children build skills, while a majority believe too much pressure is placed on kids to grow up quickly, holding back effective learning and healthy development.

Professor Pasi Sahlberg said the view that children are being pushed to grow up too fast is echoed around the world. “What that means often is that we ask them to do more structured activities and school-related things and homework ... rather than allowing them to be children and play outside,” Sahlberg said.

“And what some schools are doing here in Australia ... is to rethink the time that they have available during the school day and make sure that the children will have enough time to go outdoors and play.”

The question had respondents divided – half want less break time at schools for kids each day, while 40 per cent want more.

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Call For Funds To Keep Kids In School

Child advocates have called on the federal government for \$10 million to fund a national rollout of a program to stop kids dropping out of school.

Save the Children has pointed to a recent Productivity Commission mental health report, which called for funding boosts to help with youth mental health issues in schools.

Chief executive Paul Ronalds said his organisation’s Hands on Learning program, which is in place at 100 schools across Australia, had helped address truancy issues.

He is calling for the \$10 million funding to be spread over four years, with the program to target students aged nine to 14.

[Full Story](#)

Lack Of Exams Causes Stress

The trend away from exams could be contributing to rising anxiety in young people because they are not being prepared to face high-pressure situations, experts say.

Nearly half of SACE Year 12 subjects don’t have exams and Adelaide-based Healthy Minds is worried about a declining focus on them at lower year levels, too.

“Students don’t get to learn that they can handle it, they don’t get to build up distress tolerance, and they don’t get to adjust to time-limited exam settings specifically.”

Education Minister John Gardner said the fact more than 13,000 Year 12s had at least one exam showed they still played “a prominent role”.

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State Sued Over Autistic Boy

The mother of a 17-year-old autistic boy has sued the state of Victoria over a government school’s alleged abandonment of her son’s education and failure to teach him the curriculum.

The case, which could have implications for thousands of families, is listed for a three-week hearing in the Federal Court next year.

The boy is on the cusp of year 12 graduation but, according to a statement of claim filed with the court, his skills have progressed minimally in his 13½ years.

The statement of claim alleges the school and the Victorian education department have breached four sections of the Disability Discrimination Act.

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