

## MEDIA RELEASE

### **In schooling, the early bird really does catch the worm**

#### *Research Conference 2014*

**4 August 2014:** New research shows that equitable access to quality education for all students in the early years of schooling is crucial for later success, delegates to a conference in Adelaide today will hear.

Researchers and practitioners at the annual conference of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), addressing the theme, *Quality and Equity: What does research tell us?* will review evidence on how quality education in the early years affects later schooling,

ACER Principal Research Fellow Dr John Ainley will discuss an analysis of large-scale assessment studies, including the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), that shows interventions in the preschool and early years of schooling have contributed to a steady improvement in reading achievement among Year 3 and 5 students from 2008 to 2013.

“The fact that these improvements have been greatest where there have been the strongest interventions gives some cause for optimism,” Dr Ainley said, speaking ahead of the conference.

Social epidemiologist Associate Professor Sally Brinkman from the Telethon Kids Institute will report on her research showing that the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) is an effective predictor of social and emotional wellbeing and educational outcomes.

“The AEDI can be used confidently as a population measure to predict later cognitive and behavioural outcomes, which means we now have an evaluation tool to further improve our knowledge around what are good investments to make in the early years,” Dr Brinkman said.

Economist Dr Diana Warren from the Australian Institute of Family Studies will report at the conference on her research with Professor John Haisken-DeNew from the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research on the impact of preschool teacher qualifications on students’ later NAPLAN outcomes in Year 3.

“Our research shows that the highest increases in students’ NAPLAN scores were attained by those whose preschool teachers had degree or diploma qualifications, identifying for the first time the crucial nature of teacher qualification in driving improvements in preschool outcomes, confirming that the actual training specialisation of teachers is important,” Dr Warren said.

Professor Stephen Zubrick from the Centre for Child Health Research at the University of Western Australia and Telethon Kids Institute will also report on his new research on school attendance revealing that the early years are emphatically foundational. “There is a clear dose-response relationship between school attendance and academic performance: every day counts,” said Professor Zubrick.

“The bad news is that some children appear to arrive at school, in the earliest years, with a poor attendance career already in their school bags. The good news is that programs to address unexplained absences at the point of entry to preschool, pre-primary and Year 1 improve the onward success of at-risk and otherwise disadvantaged students.”

*Research Conference 2014* takes place in Adelaide from 3 to 5 August.

Further information is available from [www.acer.edu.au/rc](http://www.acer.edu.au/rc)

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Media enquiries: Megan Robinson, 03 9277 5582 or 0419 340 058 [communications@acer.edu.au](mailto:communications@acer.edu.au)