Dear principals, teachers, students and parents

Australia can be proud of its rich democratic heritage. It is a remarkable history that many of us take for granted. We have the opportunity to reflect on our people, events and institutions that have given shape to our nation. Australia’s history of achievement has been developed within a remarkably peaceful and democratic framework. History teaches us that an informed and active citizenry is essential for the continuation of a strong and vital Australian society.

All Australians feel privileged to have one of the most free and democratic societies in the world. I invite your school to join with other schools around Australia and participate in Celebrating Democracy Week 2006. During the Week, I ask schools to reflect on how our democracy shapes our harmonious way of life.

While we all enjoy living in our environment with our uniquely Australian wild life and plants, open spaces, landscapes and beaches, we don’t often reflect on the “glue” that binds our community so that we can all live together harmoniously and share in the benefits a democracy brings.

We all have a part to play. Knowing who we are as a people, and who we want to become as a nation, is important. Our different backgrounds, experiences and views give us different perspectives of what our nation should be like now, and into the future.

Schools can reflect on the values and democracy which keep our communities safe, harmonious and enjoyable places to live during Celebrating Democracy Week 2006. Having a robust parliamentary system, supported by institutions that maintain the rule of law and protect human rights contributes to everyone’s freedom.

The Australian Government promotes diversity, understanding and tolerance. Australia’s harmonious, pluralistic, multicultural society requires all of us to learn from each other, and to learn about each other. Schools make a major contribution in this area. Celebrating Democracy Week 2006 allows schools to showcase their good work to parents and to the wider community.

Celebrating Democracy Week 2006 supports the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century, in particular the goals that students, when they leave school should:

- have the capacity to exercise judgement and responsibility in matters of morality, ethics and social justice, and the capacity to make some of their own decisions, to think about how things got to be the way they are, to make rational and informed decisions about their own lives and to accept responsibility for their own actions and
- “to value and informed citizens with an understanding and appreciation of Australia’s system of government and civic life.”

Civics and citizenship education is a recognised priority for schooling in Australia. The Australian Government is committing nearly $43.7 million to civics and citizenship education from 1997 to 2008.

Celebrating our democracy encourages students to appreciate the essential values that underpin our democratic society. The National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools, endorsed by all State and Territory Ministers, highlights “developing student responsibility in local, national and global contexts” as a focus for schools in their values education efforts.

Celebrating Democracy Week 2006 supports all these national priorities.

“...I always think that it is so important to listen to what other people are saying and to understand ...” (Anika Bratzel, Hobart College, Tasmania)

“...I think it is so important to listen to what other people are saying...” (Ruveyda Ozturk, Warrawong High School, NSW)

“I feel wonderful to be a young person in this country of freedom and caring...” (Anika Bratzel, Hobart College, Tasmania)

“I feel like I can build a successful future and have a right to voice my opinions.” (Joy Shia, Elizabeth College, Victoria)

“The project is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training”

Denzel Washington

Celebrating Democracy Week

Wednesday 18 October to Tuesday 21 October 2006

Highlights of Celebrating Democracy Week 2006

On Wednesday 18 October 2006 in Parliament House, Canberra, the Hon Julie Bishop MP, the Minister for Education, Science, and Training, will launch Celebrating Democracy Week 2006.

State and Territory winners of the Year 10 and 11 Every Voice Counts will be presented with certificates. The winners will be selected from their response to the topic: ‘Living in an harmonious democracy - what it means to me The State and Territory winners will receive an all expenses paid trip to Canberra to take a first hand look at democracy in action and take part in a forum to debate the topic: ‘Living harmoniously in our democracy. How young people can influence the future of our democracy’.

Visit the website http://civicsandcitizenship.edu.au for information on how to apply for Every Voice Counts student competition. Alternatively, you could telephone Curriculum Corporation on (03) 9207 9800. Applications for Every Voice Counts close on Friday 8 September 2006.

- Students from refugee backgrounds at Merriylands East Public School in NSW conducted a photographs display entitled ‘Celebrating Diversity in a Democracy."
- Calvary Lutheran Primary School in SA conducted an excursion on the Jindabyne Trail to gain an understanding of how learning occurs in other places of our lives.
- Thornlie Primary School in WA held a breakfast assembly with the Australian Islamic College and Croydon Park Primary School to celebrate a diverse and democratic culture.
- "Gallipoli at Goondiwindi" - students at Goondiwindi State High School, QLD, researched and commemorated the local soldiers who fought in WWI.
- St Joseph’s Primary School held “Celebrating Women” which examined the changing roles of women over time.

On 18-24 October 2006

Celebrating Democracy Week 2006 will include an Every Voice Counts forum for Year 10 and 11 students. The students who were selected to participate in this forum in 2005 represented diverse backgrounds and locations, and learned first hand how our democracy functions to keep us safe and free. Students discussed current issues with parliamentarians and observed Question Time in the House of Representatives. Their feedback indicated the forum was one of the best experiences of their school life.

The Australian Government funds small grants to help individual schools participate in Celebrating Democracy Week 2006. This year, I plan to announce that I have increased the small grants to $1,000 for individual schools, and more for schools which conduct joint activities.

CELEBRATING DEMOCRACY WEEK 2006

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Students who are interested in participating in Celebrating Democracy Week 2006 should contact their school principal to apply for a place at this forum.

I invite your school to participate in Celebrating Democracy Week 2006 and look forward to hearing about the activities that will be conducted around Australia from 18-24 October 2006.

Julie Bishop

Australian Government Minister for Education, Science and Training

The Australian Government is committed to the achievement of equal opportunities for all Australians.

Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training

Civics and citizenship education for a harmonious democracy...
Values Education

From 2004 to 2008 the Australian Government is providing funding of $29.7 million to help make values education a core part of schooling.

The National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools, endorsed by all State and Territory Ministers in 2005, highlights “developing student responsibility in local, national and global contexts” as a key component for schools to focus on in their values education efforts. Using the National Framework as a guide, all schools across Australia will be expected to conduct a forum on how values education can become embedded into their school practice. Schools received a free kit to help them to prepare for their forum.

The Framework includes new Values for Australian Schooling. Core and companions; Doing your best, Fair game, Freedom, Honesty and truthfulness, Integrity, Respect, Responsibility, Understanding, Tolerance and Inclusion. These values help students appreciate their responsibilities as citizens and encourage them to resolve differences in constructive, nonviolent and peaceful ways. For more information about Values Education visit the website: http://www.valueseducation.edu.au.

Twenty six clusters of schools received funding to implement good practice in values education through the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 1.

The successful projects cover a range of topics including the teaching of values education through philosophy, Indigenous education, links to the National Safe Schools Promotion Program, and history. The findings from these projects are available on the values education website. For more information visit the website: http://www.valueseducation.edu.au.

What’s happening in civics and citizenship education in Australia?

Civics and citizenship education is a national priority. The Australian Government, State and Territory Ministers of Education are developing nationally consistent curriculum outcomes in civics and citizenship education, along with English, mathematics, science and information communications technology, through the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA).

The National Statements of Learning for civics and citizenship for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 identifying common elements in all curriculum policies for civics and citizenship across Australia are currently being developed. The Statements provide a common basis for education systems to develop greater consistency in their curriculum documents. The National Statements of Learning for civics and citizenship will become available later this year.

In 2006, MCEETYA conducted the first national assessment of civics and citizenship education for a representative sample of Year 6 primary and Year 10 secondary school students as the basis for national reporting. Future assessments are planned for 2007 and 2010. A report of the outcomes of the first national assessment will be released later in 2006.

The national assessment two key performance measures (KPMs) are (see the website: http://www.mcreta.edu.au):

• KPM 1: Civics: Knowledge and Understanding of Civic Institutions and Processes includes “knowledge of key concepts and understandings relating to civic institutions and processes in Australian democracy, government, law, national identity, diversity, cohesion and social justice.”

• KPM 2: Citizenship: Dispositions and Skills for Participation include “understandings related to the attitudes, values, dispositions, beliefs and actions that underpin active democratic citizenship.”

Under KPM 1 for example:

• Year 6 students are expected to be able “explain the ways that understanding of and respect for commonalities and differences contributes to harmony within a democratic society”, and

• Year 10 students are expected to be able “to analyse how Australia’s ethnic and cultural diversity contributes to Australian democracy, identity and social cohesion.”

Visit the website: http://www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au for more information about civics and citizenship education.

How can schools participate in Celebrating Democracy Week 2006?

Celebrating Democracy Week 2006 allows your school to demonstrate good practice in civics and citizenship education. Your school may like to develop a special theme, hold a debate with other schools, or host a local event for teachers, parents and students. You could show how your school is using the Discovering Democracy resources and the civics and citizenship education website http://www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au

Use the Week to explore and understand the issues that affect our nation. Hold a debate on the values that help make Australia’s democracy work and invite your local Members of Parliament or Senator to attend. Explore the roles and responsibilities of local, State and Federal Government. Organise special parliamentary, multi-faith events or workshops for young people to become involved in a local community issue.

Visit older Australians in a local nursing home or collect their stories. Revisit a civics quiz to raise money for charity. Collect the history of residents in the local area. Discuss Australia’s peacefulkeeping role in overseas countries. Ask a grandparent to tell the story of what they did when they were a good citizen living in our democracy and ask them to compare it to when they were young.

Help to restore a local waterway or wildlife habitat. Invite volunteer organisations, such as St John’s Ambulance, Red Cross, the Royal Life Saving Association or Guide Dogs, parents and community members to your school’s celebrations.

To register your school activity or to apply for a small grant visit the website http://www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au. Download the application form and fax it to Curriculum Corporation on 1300 785 545 or by Friday 15 September 2006. If you need help with your application please telephone (03) 9207 9600.

All schools participating in Celebrating Democracy Week 2006 will receive a certificate.

Visit the website http://www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au to see the Discovering Democracy resources that can help your school to prepare for Celebrating Democracy Week 2006.