



Speech by

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**MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA**

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Hansard 20 February 2002

**EDUCATION [QUEENSLAND STUDIES AUTHORITY] BILL**

**Mrs REILLY** (Mudgeeraba—ALP) (3.44 p.m.): I am pleased to speak today in support of the Education (Queensland Studies Authority) Bill 2001. In an increasingly competitive and ever-changing job market, young Queenslanders and, indeed, all job seekers need to be armed with a higher level of skill and qualification than ever before, and education is clearly the key to the development of those skills and abilities.

This government must do all it can to assist our children and young people to be competitive and job-ready, and that is exactly what this bill seeks to do. By improving the retention rates to year 12 and providing a seamless transition to post-compulsory schooling, we are ensuring that young people leaving high school have the best chance possible of being successful in the job market.

The further intent of this bill, to provide a supported transition from formal schooling to post-school options, will also act to ensure that all school leavers have the opportunity to pursue the options of their choice. That includes options other than continuing study at university level. I have worked extensively in marketing and public relations, in tertiary education and vocational education and training at the university level, the TAFE level and in the public sector promoting traineeships and apprenticeships, and that is why I am extremely passionate about post-school options and the need for a supported transition.

I was delighted to see the collaboration between the Minister for Education and the Minister for Employment, Training and Youth. A constant source of frustration for members of the community and sometimes even for members of parliament is the seeming lack of communication at times between either ministers or departments on certain issues.

**Mr Cummins:** Hear, hear! They should be commended.

**Mrs REILLY:** It is indeed good to see. I thank the member for Kawana for that interjection. The Minister for Education, Anna Bligh, and the Hon. Matt Foley should, indeed, be commended. It is so exciting to see these two departments working together on such important issues as education and training because, clearly, the two go hand in glove. You cannot have one without the other.

This bill introduces very important functions under the Queensland Studies Authority which cement and support that relationship and recognise its symbiotic nature. As the Employment Minister said yesterday, vocational education is about more than gaining the qualification necessary for a job, it is about providing an educational experience that is nurturing as well as goal-oriented. We all know that employers look at more than a job seeker's resume and qualifications. Their maturity, presentation and attitude are equally as important. As someone who has worked very hard within the TAFE system to promote the fact that those opportunities are available, I am very keen to express the view that the TAFE system is indeed very adept at helping young people to develop these other elements, as well as focusing on the vocational requirements they need to reach their goals.

Leaving school—and there are some of us who remember that time—is one of the most difficult milestones for young people. Whether they decide to leave before completing year 12 or as senior graduates, they are faced with enormous pressure and with making some of the most difficult decisions of their lives, decisions which will impact significantly on their futures. Members who do recall that difficult yet exciting time would have to agree that for today's young people the scenario is very different to that of 40, 30 or even 20 years ago.

Young people today, particularly young women, certainly have a greater range of options to choose from in terms of both courses and types of learning facilities. However, with that choice comes the additional pressure of facing the dilemma of the best choice. In a global environment which is evolving every day to meet the new challenges of technology and science, there is no longer such a thing as a job for life. There is no longer the option of making one choice and hoping that you can stick with it for the rest of your life. As the global economy evolves, so must curriculum evolve. It is no mistake that we no longer teach Latin but have included IT, TAFE subjects and school based apprenticeships in our school curriculum.

The combining of the three bodies responsible for syllabus development into one body is a smart and sensible idea which recognises these changing economics and environments. Young people today almost need the powers of a clairvoyant and to take majors in crystal ball reading to be able to make the decisions they need to make to secure their future. Of course, neither this bill nor the Queensland Studies Authority can do just that, but they can come fairly close. They can help our children and our young people to be prepared for an ever-evolving work force. They can help them to grow into the flexible, intelligent and—dare I say—smart adults they will need to be in a Smart State. They can instil in them a recognition of the need for, and a desire for, lifelong learning.

As a mother of a toddler, I am already thinking deeply about one of the most difficult decisions I will ever have to make, and that is where to send my little boy to school. Part of my difficulty is the enormous range of options open to Louis, and this is due in no small part to the outstanding quality of my local schools. The electorate of Mudgeeraba is a bit of an education hub on the Gold Coast—certainly on the Gold Coast hinterland. It has a number of outstanding independent schools providing either a P-12 or a senior education—Emmanuel College, Somerset College, Hillcrest Christian College, Kings Christian College and, just across the highway, All Saints College, which many of my constituents attend. Somerset College is the only school in Queensland offering the prestigious Bacca Laureate senior school studies option—an internationally recognised university entrance program offering specialisation in a particular field, such as science, English or maths.

While the electorate does not yet have a high school—and I live in eternal hope that one will be online in the coming years—the relatively new Robina State High School and the modern-age Varsity College are also providing options for my constituents, as is Nerang State High School, which is fed by three of my electorate schools, William Duncan, Worongary and Gilston. Nerang State High School has excellent facilities, keen and interested students and a new principal and looks set at last to shake off the reputation which it may have been—and certainly unfairly—tainted with.

However, it is with my local primary schools that I have been most impressed. I attended private Catholic schools in Brisbane, including, in my primary school years, a very small school in Fortitude Valley called St Patrick's, a two-storey brick and mortar facility. The playground was made of concrete. My knees are testimony to that. It is only in my last year as member for Mudgeeraba that I have become familiar with the state school system, and what I have seen has impressed and delighted me. I have found innovation and creativity. I have found care and genuine concern. I have found passion and commitment. I have found these qualities in principals, teachers, P&C organisations and also in the students.

I spend a lot of time with my local schools—there are so many—whether attending P&C meetings, speaking at assemblies and ceremonies or just meeting with a class of year 7s to talk about my job as a member of parliament. Last year I attended almost every awards night and was completely blown away by the magnitude of skill, ability and talent that I witnessed at each of those events—everywhere from the Beechmont State School, a small school, to the really large schools in the suburban areas.

**Ms Keech:** They are great nights, aren't they?

**Mrs REILLY:** They are fantastic. I congratulate all of the schools and thank them very much for those invitations. Some of the ones I missed have already booked me in for this year; they were a bit disappointed that I could not get there last year—and so was I.

Most recently, I have been visiting primary schools to meet new school leaders and congratulate new school captains, vice captains and student councils. All of these positions are completely foreign to me. Going back to the tiny primary school I attended, if we had chosen a school leader for every year we would not have had any students left, and so we did not have those opportunities open to us in a year 7 class with a total of 12 students.

I wish I could spend some more time with my schools, but in any one day it is not unusual for me to visit one of my large suburban schools before driving for up to an hour to one of my small two-teacher schools in one of the remote communities, such as Springbrook, Numinbah Valley or even Beechmont, which services my community of Lower Beechmont. So I have an appreciation of the needs and issues of concern to both small schools in rural and remote communities and schools in rapidly growing areas.

Mudgeeraba is a growth area. Students come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Therefore, their education needs are also diverse. This bill not only accommodates students who have needs that are outside of the box but will also enable their strengths to benefit their peers. Currently, the programs in place serve the majority of students extremely well. I have received much feedback from parents who are very happy with programs such as support-a-reader, support-a-maths, the extra literacy teacher-aides provided in most of our schools, and the behaviour management programs which help our young people stay on track with their education.

This bill further acknowledges the nurturing approach the minister is taking towards our youth—our citizens of the future. With the enormous growth rate the Gold Coast hinterland is experiencing I am delighted and very excited about the new school being built in the Bonogin-Reedy Creek area due to open in 2003, and I look forward to taking part in the announcement soon regarding the exact location and other details of that school.

I have worked very hard with my local state schools over the past 12 months, and will continue to do so, to bring their problems and issues to the minister. I know that she expects me to do so. Without fail, these matters usually relate to facilities—to the built environment and the grounds. Older schools always need paint and repairs. Some fall victim to regular vandalism and graffiti. Some suffer from soil erosion and the increased traffic that comes with residential development. Even in relatively new schools issues arise as the school grows and additional buildings are added. I have to thank the minister again for her prompt attention last year to the call for covered walkways by Mudgeeraba Creek Primary School. The Mudgeeraba Creek P&C needs to be congratulated for managing such a coordinated campaign. They chose the issue of most concern to them. They worked out what they wanted and petitioned for it. That is what I am encouraging other P&Cs to do.

Mudgeeraba Creek State School has also established the Boys Belong program, which helps to address learning and self-esteem issues for boys—something that I will be watching very keenly. These areas can seriously hinder boys' learning, and Mudgee Creek is addressing that. Another area in which Mudgeeraba Creek is developing its students is in leadership for students in years 6 and 7. The peer mediators and mentoring programs both enhance student relationships during their time at school as well as preparing them to be good citizens. Mudgeeraba State School, Worongary and William Duncan are also large schools, with almost 1,000 students each, and all three are doing exceptionally well in the areas of encouraging and nurturing leadership and communication, supporting children with special needs, and providing innovative classroom options and learning environments. These hinterland schools are also excelling in sport, performing arts and other extracurricular areas.

Worongary boasts a national chess champion and an internationally competitive chess team. Gilston Primary School is very proud of its history and places a strong emphasis on literacy and creativity. Last year, I helped judge the book writers competition, which students from preschool through to year 7 had entered. Sadly, interest in the competition seemed to be greatest in the lower grades, with only a few entries from year 7 students. But I suspect it was not so much a lack of interest in writing being demonstrated; rather, the competing interests of children at that age was probably the major factor.

While I do not argue the need for a pleasant school environment, I fully accept that pleasant and also practical surrounds facilitate learning. For me, it is the learning itself which is most important. In order to ensure the best possible educational outcomes for our children we need to have the most efficient and streamlined system—a smart system which will result in smart kids and a Smart State. This is Smart State legislation. It facilitates seamless education from P-12 through to post-school study, training and job placement. It supports and encourages innovation and creativity in syllabus development and delivery, and it provides for equity of opportunity across the government and non-government sectors.

Having said all of that, I have not helped myself at all in making my decision on baby Louis's future education, but I have no hesitation in commending the bill to the House.

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