SHORT CIRCUIT

Business Name

VOLUME 17 NUMBER 2 FEBRUARY 2026

NEWS AND COMMENT

In this edition we note the passing in November, 2025 of esteemed teacher of teachers, Warren Atkins. In the words of one of his former students:

> 'I was fortunate enough to have attended classes offered by him at the CCAE in the early 80s. I remember him fondly. His passion for the teaching of maths was infectious, and much of his thinking around the pedagogy of the subject certainly rubbed off on me. His passing came as quite a shock. We've all lost a great educator.'

See page 2 for the eulogy delivered by Peter Taylor.

The CMA committee for 2026 has some vibrant new members as well as its seasoned regulars. (See page 5.)

Planning for the annual conference has been underway for quite a while. Announcements will appear soon in readers' inboxes. (See the note on page 6.)

Our commitment to promoting success for Aboriginal students in mathematics continues. To that end, we list some recommended reading on page 7.

NEWSLETTER

The CMA newsletter, Short Circuit, is distributed monthly to everyone on our mailing list, free of charge and regardless of membership status.

That you are receiving Short Circuit does not imply that you are a current CMA member but we do encourage you to join.

Short Circuit welcomes all readers.

CMA MEMBERSHIP

Memberships run from 1 Jan to 31 Dec. each year. Membership forms may be downloaded from the CMA website: http://www.canberramaths.org.au

The benefits of Membership of CMA may be found on the website.

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CANBERRA MATHEMATICAL ASSOCIATION

ACU AWARDS

New teachers Sienna Pitt and Ellouise Rabbets received awards at an ACU celebration for new graduates in December.

CMA president Aruna Williams made the presentations.

Excellence in Mathematics in Education (Primary and Secondary):
Sienna Pitt

Excellence in Mathematics in Education (Primary):
Ellouise Rabbets

AUSTRALIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCE

Those on the Australian Academy of Science mailing list will have seen an impressive collection of resource offerings ready for the new school year.

From reSolve, Science Connections and Primary Connections, there is something for everyone from Foundation to Year 9,

VALE WARREN ATKINS

[Warren Atkins was highly respected by the ACT mathematics teachers he taught and by his colleagues. Warren died on 24 November, 2025, at age 87. This is the eulogy given by Peter Taylor at his memorial service. Herein is history.]

WARREN ATKINS OAM EULOGY

Good afternoon everyone and thank you Naida for inviting me to talk today about my long time close colleague and family friend.

I first knew Warren's brother Keith, as we both played first grade squash in Canberra as did Graham Pollard, where between Graham and me we taught Maths and Stats. In 1973 Keith told us his younger brother Warren, who had completed a Masters at Macquarie under the famous Freddie Chong, was applying for a lectureship at what is now University of Canberra, where we worked. I found this interesting as a close academic colleague who had shared an office with me at the University of Adelaide while we both worked on our PhDs had told me that he had applied for the same position. As it happened both were interviewed but Warren won, and whereas he was in the Faculty of Education training Mathematics teachers, he worked very closely at all times with my colleagues who were teaching mathematics and Keith's involvement was very helpful in enabling this. So thank you Keith, you may have catalysed Warren's association with us and helped our joint careers.

My senior colleague Peter O'Halloran had seen mathematics Competitions run effectively while on study leave in Canada, and also another competition in the US, and said he would like to put a team together to see if one would work in Canberra. So Warren, another mathematics colleague Josephine Edwards and myself came forward to form his team and in 1976 we advertised it, not being sure if it would take off because the word "competition" was not in vogue with some teachers because they felt it implied pressure.

Warren became the first chair of the Problems

Committee and Jo and I were more involved initially in administration. To our pleasant surprise every Canberra secondary school entered a number of students, there were over 1300 altogether. So we knew we were on a winner and in 1977 conducted a pilot scheme with schools in other parts of the country and went national as the Australian Mathematics competition in 1978. In a few years we had over half a million students a year and it was so successful we were approached by French mathematicians to see if we approved of them developing one based on ours and calling it the Kangaroo.

I took Study Leave at the Open University in Britain in 1978 and Warren followed me there in 1979 so I took over as Problems Committee Chairman for about 15 years while Warren and Jo remained active, When Peter O'Halloran died in 1994 I was appointed to take his place as Executive Director of what had become the Australian Mathematics Trust, which had also developed programs leading to students towards taking part in representing Australia in the International Mathematical Olympiad. So Warren went back from Deputy Chair to Chair of the AMC Problems Committee and stayed on it until only about 3 years ago, although at one stage he passed the job of Chair to Mike Clapper.

In the early 2000s we decided to start an AMC for Primary students and Warren founded that committee also, which had different personnel, including Primary School teachers.

Warren did many other things in the Maths Trust including chairing for many years the national committee which administered the AMC and publishing many books, including of a pedagogical nature.

The AMC became a massive source of research data. In the early days Jo Edwards conducted research on the data, and once made the front page of the Australian, but she died in 1985, and Warren, Graham and I took over the research and published many papers on aspects like risk-taking, gender and mathematics topics in refereed journals.

Warren was part of the founding meeting in Adelaide in 1984 of the World Federation of National Mathematics Competitions which became the professional body linked to the International Commission for Mathematics Instruction. Warren became the founding editor of its Newsletter, and he developed it into the refereed Journal it is today and kept editing it for many years. That World Federation presented him with an Erdos Award, their main award, in 2004.

There was more in our friendship with Warren and his family. They soon moved into a house just two doors from ours and the two families became very close. Close enough for Naida to speak at my wife Lois' funeral in 2012. When my children Gregory and Stephanie and I made our last visit to see Warren in hospital Naida would refer to Stephanie as her niece when speaking to hospital staff.

There were many lighter occasions and more serious ones when we were at times both regularly attacked by the same magpie. When Grange wine was only $6.99 a bottle I had bought a case of it to use if there was to be a special occasion. My sister was staying with me when I got what I thought would be my first and only promotion, to Senior Lecturer, so I got some Grange out and my sister reminds me I went and got Warren from his home to come down and celebrate with it also.

There were many social occasions where we had good parties, usually featuring Graham Pollard and his wife, although Warren and Naida moved to Newcastle on retirement, and obviously we depended on less frequent visits to get together.

Warren also loved his sport, and not long before he broke his bad diagnosis with me he was boasting that he was still playing sport. He was keen on his tennis, golf, squash and swimming for most of his life.

He was also awarded an OAM acknowledging his many achievements in 2018. In all Warren has had a very active and successful life and we will remember him as a man loved and admired by all.

Peter Taylor 15 December 2025

ABOUT SCHOOL NAPLAN

From The Conversation, December 3, 2025
by Sally Larsen

On Wednesday, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority released the school-level results for this year's NAPLAN tests. This reporting includes scores for years 3, 5, 7 and 9 across literacy and numeracy.

Parents received children's individual reports in July. Now we can see how individual schools performed.

Parents and the community can see how schools performed in absolute terms and how their students performed compared to other students with a similar background. They can also see how a school's student cohort has progressed compared to other children with similar starting scores and similar backgrounds.

Media outlets have published stories about "top performing" schools and those "punching above their weight".

It is a refreshing change to see positive stories of school improvement and student progress rather than the relentless doom-and-gloom of the last few years. However we should still be careful to acknowledge there is no silver bullet when it comes to improving students' reading and numeracy.

IT'S HARD TO PINPOINT THE EXACT CAUSE

Looking at the news coverage about NAPLAN, it's clear different stakeholders have different explanations about why some schools make more progress than others.

Some attribute NAPLAN success to explicit teaching methods – where teachers clearly explain and demonstrate what students need to learn. Others talk about community support for parents, wraparound services for students who need extra help, or intensive language learning support for students learning English as an additional language.

These are all positive approaches and all of them likely support students' academic success in different ways, depending on the school context and the specific needs of their students. But it is difficult to identify any one of these programs or approaches as the definitive cause of a school's NAPLAN growth.

For example, explicit teaching is mandated in NSW public schools. But not every public school is making above average progress. Many schools outside of the NSW public system have also made above-average progress without the explicit teaching mandate.

WHAT ABOUT OTHER SCHOOLS?

We also need to be careful about holding up exemplar or "top" schools, particularly when there might be many other schools following the same practices but not seeing the same NAPLAN results.

The good news stories remind us principals and teachers in these schools are clearly doing a wonderful job. But there are other principals and teachers at other schools doing equally good work, but not seeing those same results. Some schools might see above average progress one year, but average progress the next.

We risk making school leaders and teachers feel disillusioned if they are doing the same things but not seeing the same results.

A MORE COMPLEX PICTURE

The NAPLAN coverage makes creating academically successfully schools seem straightforward, when the research tells us this is complex to achieve and can take time.

Many things contribute to academic success. These include students feeling a sense of belonging, being able to engage in their studies and attending school consistently.

Schools understand the needs of their unique student groups, but providing support, programs and the teaching approaches they need is a continually evolving project.

[Continued on page 6.]

NEWSLETTER OF THE BUSINESS NAME INC

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We're on the Web!
http://www.canberramaths.org.au/

ABOUT THE CMA

The Canberra Mathematical Association (Inc.) is the representative body of professional educators of mathematics in Canberra, Australia.
It was established by, among others, the late Professor Bernhard Neumann in 1963. It continues to run - as it began - purely on a volunteer basis.

Its aims include

* the promotion of mathematical education to government through lobbying,
* the development, application and dissemination of mathematical knowledge within Canberra through in-service opportunities, and
* facilitating effective cooperation and collaboration between mathematics teachers and their colleagues in Canberra.

THE 2026 CMA COMMITTEE

President	Aruna Williams	Erindale College
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	Peter McIntyre	University of NSW Canberra
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	Linda Goth	
	Katrina Simms	

Theresa Shellshear is CMA's COACTEA representative.

Bruce Ferrington is CMA's AAMT representative.

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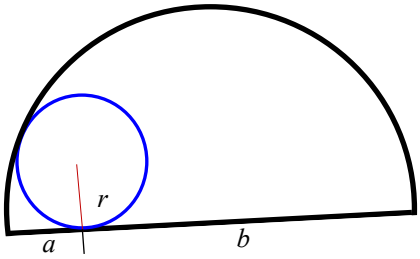
Find us on Facebook

http://www.facebook.com/pages/Canberra-Mathematical-Association/110629419011275

PUZZLE

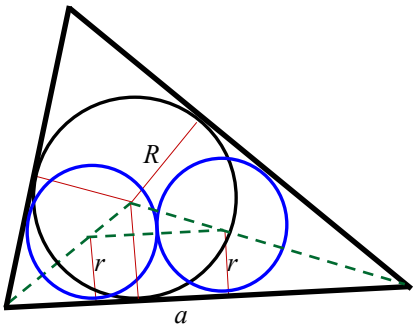
This puzzle has similarities to last month's (see below), but the way to the solution may be slightly harder to spot and there is an extra twist.



Find an equation relating the radius r of the small circle and the segments a and b of the diameter of the semicircle.

If it should happen that $r = 1$ and $b = a^2$, what special number would become the value of a?

PUZZLE SOLUTION from Vol 17 No 1



Discover an equation that relates the quantities r, R and a.

We have constructed lines from the incentre to the lower two vertices. By similar triangles, they pass through the centres of the smaller circles. Also, the line joining the centres of the smaller circles is parallel to the base a and has length $2r$. Using similar triangles again, we have $R/a = (R - r)/2r$. Rearranged, this is

$$\frac{a}{2}\left(\frac{1}{r} - \frac{1}{R}\right) = 1$$

[From page 4]

STAFFING AND RESOURCES

Meanwhile, funding continues to be patchy across Australian schools. Public schools in some states will not be fully funded until 2034.

Specialised supports, programs and staff all cost money. Some schools also find it very difficult to find the teachers they need.

Principals may have a great vision. But if they don't have enough teachers it is extremely challenging to implement new ideas or embark on a program of school improvement.

WHAT IF YOUR SCHOOL HAS PERFORMED BELOW AVERAGE?

Remember the numbers reported on the MySchool website are school year-level averages. These tell us something about the group of students at the school each year, but not a lot about individual students.

NAPLAN results on their own are not necessarily going to tell you whether any school is best for your child or family.

So don't be alarmed if you don't see your school making above-average progress this year. That's only one aspect of what a school is doing. It's more important to look at whether your child is being supported to learn, enjoy school and progress academically.

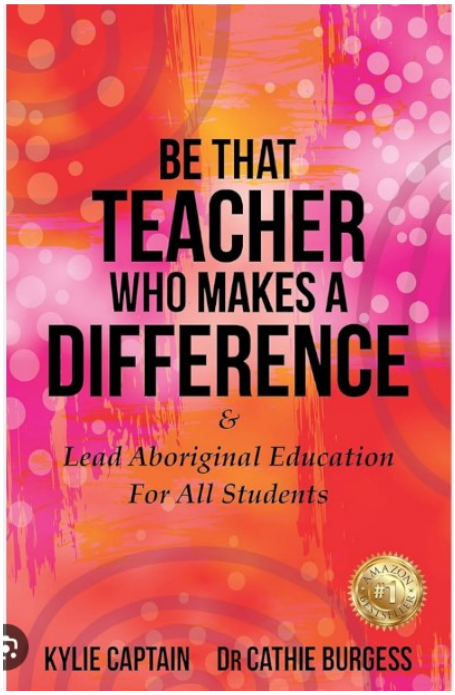
CONFERENCE 2026

The 2026 CMA Conference will be held at ADFA on Saturday 28th March. The theme is

Mathematics: Are You Game

If you have contributions of ideas, experiences or research to share at the conference, contact Valerie Barker via canberramaths@gmail.com.

READINGS



Yuka Saponaro writes:

I met Kylie Captain, a Gamilaroi woman and former teacher, at the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Symposium 2025. Her keynote presentation addressed the importance of having high expectations of all students and of being the **one** who helps them believe in their potential. A high school teacher did exactly that to change the trajectory of Kylie's life. The story was inspirational.

Kylie's book, Be that Teacher …, is highly recommended for educators who are interested in integrating Cross-curriculum Priorities - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, but may have some fear of offending or fear of making mistakes.

It could be described as a guide book with practical approaches, co-written with Kylie's former high school teacher and now mentor, Dr Cathie Burgess. This book is also on the ACT Indigenous Education Officers' recommended reading list, so it may already be available at your school library.

If you are interested in purchasing a personal copy, please make an order via Kylie's website https://kyliecaptain.com.au/ as proceeds from her book sales go to future First Nations projects. (This is not the case, unfortunately, with purchases from other online or in-store retailers.)

By reading this book, you will be joining our support for the National Indigenous Commitment Statement.

While not immediately concerned with education, Stan Grant's book, Australia Day, identifies complex and contradictory ways of thinking that may well affect an indigenous young person's interaction with the education system.

The country has just experienced Australia Day 2026 as another day of rancour and of arguments about changing the date. Protests were held: a bomb was lobbed. Some people celebrated: many were sad.

Whatever else it is, January 26 marks the beginning of the British invasion of this land. What followed was catastrophic for the people who had been living here for a very long time. There have been accommodations and adjustments since, but the effects are still felt and the job of healing is not done.

Stan Grant tells from experience how the descendants of those first peoples do and do not endure what has occurred. Sometimes angry, more often magnanimous, he does not in the end take sides.