

# Media Release

**The Hon Natalie Hutchins MP**

Minister for Education

Minister for Women



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## VIRTUAL AUTHOR PROGRAM GETS UNDERWAY

Thousands of Victorian school students will be able to hear from their favourite authors and illustrators as this year's Virtual Author Program gets underway, supported by the Andrews Labor Government.

Minister for Education Natalie Hutchins said the program the number of students participating in the program had increased significantly in recent years.

Now in its seventh year, the Virtual Author Program involves well-known writers and illustrators holding online sessions where they read and talk to students across the state about their work and the importance of reading.

Today's program launch features Matt Cosgrove, author and illustrator of the much-loved Macca the Alpaca series, and is expected to be attended by students from around 140 primary and secondary schools, many of them in regional and rural areas.

The remaining nine sessions will take place over the school year and are set to feature authors Morris Gleitzman, Kirli Saunders and Adrian Beck, plus many more.

The funding support from the Labor Government enables thousands of Victorian government school students to take part each year, no matter where they are, with an estimated 50,000 students from all over the state participating in 2022.

Another great way students can engage with books is to take part in this year's Premiers' Reading Challenge, set to launch in coming weeks.

The Challenge asks children below school age to experience 40 books with their parents or carers; children from Prep to Year 2 to read 30 books with or without assistance; and students in Years 3 to 10 to read 15 books.

More than 15,000 books feature on the Challenge list. Children can read picture books, short stories, poems or non-fiction books in any language as part of the Challenge.

Last year, more than 66,000 school students and 8,000 young children across the state completed the Challenge and collectively got lost in the pages of more than 2.9 million books.

Since the Challenge began in 2005, more than 4 million students in Victoria have read 57 million books. For more information, visit: [www.vic.gov.au/premiers-reading-challenge](http://www.vic.gov.au/premiers-reading-challenge).

### Quotes attributable to Minister for Education Natalie Hutchins

*"Supporting children to read is one of the most powerful things you can do to encourage a love of learning – developing skills that will set them up for life."*

*"The Virtual Author Program ensures our students can meet the people behind some of their favourite books – no matter where they go to school."*