FEB

IS THE CONTINUING INCREASED FUNDING FOR SCHOOLING ACHIEVING RESULTS?

From the Executive Director

The latest *Report on Government Services 2021*[1] released by the Productivity Commission highlights the continuing significant increase in Government funding for schooling in Australia.

In 2018-19, total government recurrent expenditure on school education was $65.6 billion with $49.7 billion of that amount spent on government schools and $15.9 billion on non-government schools. Governments' investment in government school infrastructure (user cost of capital) for 2018-19 was estimated at $7.5 billion.

This spending equates to average government recurrent expenditure in government schools of $19,328 per student. For non-government schools, the average government recurrent expenditure per student was $11,813.

The growth in funding for schooling is illustrated in Table 1, noting that from 2017/18 to 2018/19 funding increased for both government and non-government schools by over 6%, well above CPI increases (and above the increase in the Education component of the CPI). The growth in Commonwealth Government funding over the five-year period 2013/14 to 2018/19 is particularly noticeable. This coincides with the introduction of the Gonski funding model in 2014.

A key trend in schools funding is the relative decline in the funding of Government schools by States/Territories compared to that provided by the Australian Government.

There has been a similar decrease in the proportion of total Government funding provided to non-government schools by States/Territories.

This failure by State/Territory governments to increase their investment in schools must be frustrating for the Federal Government which inevitably is the subject of complaints about the "shortfall" in funding for public schools (particularly from the advocates for public schooling). Perhaps more focus should be placed on the financial contribution (or lack thereof) of State/Territory Governments.

The over $65 billion spent on schooling in 2018/19 does not include private contributions. The report on government services notes that total government recurrent funding accounted for only 58.6% of total non-government school recurrent funding in 2019, the remaining 41.4% sourced from private fees and fundraising. Queensland independent schools have private income of over $1 billion annually from fees and other sources.

For government schools, according to a report in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (10/2/21), in 2015, $1.8 billion flowed into public education in Australia from private sources – an average of $752 for each student. It notes that My School reveals Brisbane State High School

Table 1: Growth in funding by sector and source, 2013-14 to 2018-19

	GROWTH (%)				
	2013-14 to 2014-15	2014-15 to 2015-16	2015-16 to 2016-17	2016-17 to 2017-18	2017-18 to 2018-19
Government Schools					
Commonwealth	10.0	8.6	12.7	9.0	7.9
State & Territory	3.8	4.8	1.7	6.2	6.4
TOTAL FUNDING	4.6	5.3	3.2	6.6	6.6
Non-government Schools					
Commonwealth	7.9	5.0	6.4	6.1	7.4
State & Territory	4.5	1.8	3.4	5.6	4.6
TOTAL FUNDING	7.0	4.2	5.6	6.0	6.7

1   Available at https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2021/child-care-education-and-training

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Figure 1. Per student funding ($A2018, LHS) and student achievement (PISA and NAPLAN, RHS), 2009 to 2018 (all school sectors)
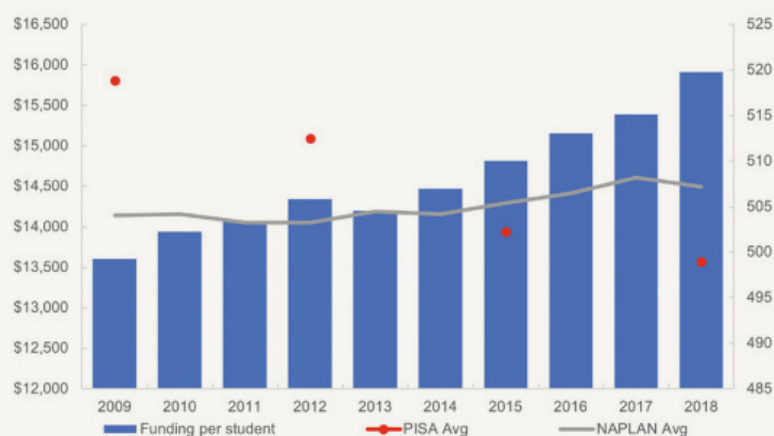
Source: *Dollars and Sense: Time for smart reform of Australian school funding.*
Glenn Fahey of the Centre for Independent Studies. (2020, p. 4).

received $3 million from fees, charges and parent contributions in 2018 and $2 million from other private sources.

Based on average per student figures, it is estimated that the total savings in government expenditure from students attending non-government schools was $10.1 billion in 2018/19.

The increasing amount of Australian Government funding for schooling (the 2020/21 Commonwealth Budget allocated around $24 billion in Federal recurrent funding for schools) reflects the financial dominance of the Commonwealth in public affairs. It is worth remembering the Commonwealth played little or no role in the funding of schools prior to the 1960s. The recently appointed Federal Education Minister, Allan Tudge has said "the Morrison Government is investing a record $315.4 billion in

funding for all Australian schools and that funding per student will increase by more than 60% by 2029.[2]"

Extensive media attention has been given to the fact the report on government services indicates Government recurrent expenditure per student continues to increase at a higher rate for non-government schools than government schools. Overall, between 2013/14 and 2018/19, real government recurrent expenditure per student grew by 11.4% in government schools and 18% in non-government schools.

However, there has been no analysis of the factors underlying these figures. It is well known that the significant growth in the independent sector over the past five years has been in specialist schools and schools serving mid to lower socioeconomic-economic

communities. These attract higher levels of government funding.

Further, the number of students with special needs is increasing at a much higher rate in the independent sector than overall enrolment growth. In Queensland, the number of indigenous students enrolled in independent schools has more than doubled over the last decade to nearly 5,000 students, whilst the number of verified students with disability has increased by an average 10.7% per annum.

With the introduction of more targeted student needs-based funding in 2014, it would be expected there would be increased funding going to independent schools given the increased enrolments of students with needs.

In addition, the Federal Education Minister notes "Commonwealth funding for government schools has grown by 63.2 per cent in real per student terms over the past decade to 2018-19, compared with 39.5 per cent in non-government schools.[3]"

Whilst the report on government services provides an overall picture about schools funding in Australia, an excellent research report, *Dollars and Sense: Time for smart reform of Australian school funding*[4] by Glenn Fahey of the Centre for Independent Studies (CIS) (released 1/12/20) examines the increased funding for schools and its effectiveness in terms of educational outcomes.

The paper notes that "Australia is among the highest-spending countries on schooling in the world", yet the educational return on this investment has deteriorated, with the "expensive" Gonski funding model, implemented since 2014, not resulting in higher student achievement (see Figure 1).

Fahey examines why "the persistent increases in school funding in Australia have failed to improve educational outcomes" and argues "how money is used is what really matters, not how much money is spent".

2   *The Educator* (16/2/21)
3   *The Educator* (16/2/21)
4   Available at https://www.cis.org.au/research/education/school-funding/

The CIS paper puts the view that "expensive policy approaches" in Australia haven't resulted in educational benefits.

One of these policy approaches that has proven to be expensive is reducing class sizes. Yet as Fahey points out "there is no evidence that smaller class sizes lead to better learning of students".

Fahey estimates that modestly increasing class size by just one student could save around $1.4 billion each year. These funds could be invested in schooling in areas where the research shows more funding makes a difference e.g. further developing the capacity of teachers and boosting the quality of teaching.

Fahey argues that Australia's school funding approach is based on a flawed methodology, highly centralised, overly complex, input-based rather than outcomes-based and not designed to promote school choice and competition.

He suggests a more outcomes-based approach to schools funding including performance-based approaches.

One of the more interesting suggestions is capacity-to-contribute (CTC) approaches should be consistent across school sectors, rather than being unfairly applied only to non-government school funding adjustments.

The introduction of the Direct Measure of Income to determine CTC for non-government schools which directly links each families' actual income to schools funding provides the opportunity for policymakers to examine whether such a measure should apply across all schools.

ISQ has raised and supported this general concept in the past. Given the intense financial pressures that all levels of government will be under in coming years and the increasing cost of implementing the latest version of the Gonski funding model, now would be a good time for a rigorous public policy debate on the concept.

The Federal Education Minister notes, "Commonwealth funding for government schools has grown by 63.2 per cent in real per student terms over the past decade to 2018-19, compared with 39.5 per cent in non-government schools."

Many reject such a concept on the basis that it would create a "voucher" based funding model. However, this is not the only way to ensure that those who can afford to contribute to the costs of schooling do so. For example, the tax system could be utilised. The health system provides a model with the Medicare levy for high income earners (and a further penalty for high income earners who do not participate in private health insurance).

Whilst it is vital that the funding provided to schools is utilised effectively, and clearly there is much reform to be done in this area, we can also assure that there are adequate funding for schools into the future by applying the capacity-to-contribute arrangements to all schools and their communities.

DAVID ROBERTSON
Executive Director
Independent Schools Queensland

LEADING THROUGH LONG-TERM CRISIS

JOSEPHINE WISE
Director (Education Services)
Co-author
MICHAEL GILLIVER
Senior Advisor (Education Services)

"Crisis is when it is most important for leaders to uphold a vital aspect of their role: making a positive difference in people's lives."

(D'AURIA & DE SMET, 2020)

The past 14 months of the global pandemic has been similar to other times in human history. However, to this generation, it has rightfully felt 'unprecedented'.

While Australian Indigenous cultures continue to feel and respond to repercussions of a complete upheaval, other Australians have never before experienced a need to do everything 'normal' differently. The decisive impact on health, business, the arts, sports, culture, family-life and education has shown the effect of global upheaval on constructs we thought were slow-moving and possibly absolute.

However, the same crisis has also led to advancements in disability access and improved working conditions for families with caring responsibilities. It has led to improvements in contemporary IT solutions that has enabled greater collaboration and equitable access to learning than ever before. This time has also demonstrated Australia's immediate commitment to compassionate social policy for the unemployed and homeless, and a commitment to scientific reason when shaping public policy.

Schools are community hubs that provide continuity. Teachers are 'front-line' workers who have supported the education and wellbeing of children, families and carers through this upheaval. Influential educational leaders have shone. But it is not over.

A well-meaning school leader may reflect on 2020 and decide, 'Last year was difficult, so this year, we will keep change to a minimum'. However, they would probably be wrong to do so for two reasons. Firstly, because change will inevitably arrive. Secondly, because change is not necessarily as energy-sapping, as we may believe.

Leaders do have the ability to maintain a team's resilience, support their capacity to work with rapid change, and keep them focused on what matters most – young people's education and wellbeing.

"Effective leaders, like effective teachers, adjust and draw on a range of skills and approaches depending on the context. A typical school day requires leaders to move from authority figure to teammate, to coach, to therapist, navigating through a range of roles as each demand arises. An ability to shift and adjust leadership approaches based on what is needed is key to being effective as a leader" (AITSL, 2020, para. 8).

D'Auria and De Smet (2020) describe an effective leader's ability to "unify teams behind a single purpose and frame questions for them to investigate". They state, "what leaders need during a crisis is not a predefined response plan but behaviours and mindsets that will prevent them from overreacting to yesterday's developments and help them look ahead".

They consider the quality of deliberate calm "the ability to detach from a fraught situation and think clearly about how one will navigate it" as critical to effective crisis leadership (D'Auria & De Smet, 2020).

The following research feature summarises recent inquiry into the adaptive qualities of influential leaders during a crisis, which highlights the

qualities leaders may have always held, but are now required to draw on, in more intense and deliberate ways. The research provides ideas that can be applied sustainably, and improve the emotional and intellectual resilience of the leader and those around them.

Manage cognitive load

Scientifically, it is well established (Moreno, 2006; Pashler, et al., 2007; Sweller, 2006) and borne out in everyday teaching experiences, that students have limited working memory capacity. Forcing a child to wrestle with too many ideas simultaneously can be a sure pathway to impeded learning. Consequently, great teachers scaffold tasks into step-by-step processes, communicate concepts using multiple modalities, or pace the learning into logical portions.

Recent research is now identifying cognitive load as present in the adult world of work. Indeed, Freed (2020) has described this phenomenon as the "most important employee metric for the next 10 years".

With this in mind, it is unsurprising that good school leaders have adopted classic pedagogical strategies when coaching staff in crisis. They consider how they might structure the change agenda or strategic priorities into a curriculum revealed over time. For example, leaders can deliver some parts during casual lunchroom conversations, other informal staff meetings, and others during reviews or even by other line managers.

Just as students do, staff require scaffolding and multi-modal communication to adapt to rapid transformation. Leaders' ability to reflect on the current context and apply un-called on or rarely used change leadership strategies is critical to supporting a calm, organised and optimistic approach to the inevitable evolutions taking place.

Communicate

Furthermore, a school leader's communication strategies are critical to managing the cognitive load of staff, students, and families. Cornwell (2020) outlines a communication framework, applied by leaders after prolonged wars and natural events, to transform communities. His framework identifies that influential leaders initially respond with direct and clear directions, giving priorities and objectives. The second phase moves to more collaborative leadership, *Reintegration*, before working with critical teams to redefine the 'new normal' for the organisation in the *Restoration* phase. An effective leader in this stage encourages a focus on a new future, not returning to the state before the crisis. Instead, they will emphasise all that might now be possible because of the experience.

New Zealand's Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern has been globally acknowledged for her approach to leading her country during the pandemic. Her communication strategies were critical to her success. Wilson (2020) highlights that Ardern's communication strategies were in line with Mayfield and Mayfield's (2002) crisis communication research.

Ardern was able to give clear directions, make meaning of the experience through honest acknowledgement of the situation and demonstrate empathy for the potential negative impact of her leadership choices. She made herself available to the community through daily briefings on social media, gave ample time for questions at media events and encouraged community action for the collective good (Wilson, 2020).

Enable autonomy

A leader's ability to enable autonomous and independent leadership at every organisational level is another approach to lower cognitive stress during rapid change and crisis. Bäcklander et al. (2019) found a relationship between "autonomy and cognitive stress, in which higher autonomy was related to lower cognitive stress. Autonomy likely protects against stress since it both allows some control for the individual over what happens to her and since it allows for many ways of coping with demands". Professional autonomy comes when there is genuine trust and collaboration between crucial teams, minimising middle leaders' need to wait before acting to respond to the emerging situation.

D'Auria and De Smet (2020) have determined that "leaders should foster collaboration and transparency across the network of teams" as well as highlighting the need for leaders to "promote psychological safety so people can openly discuss ideas, questions, and concerns without fear of repercussions. This allows the network of teams to make sense of the situation, and how to handle it, through healthy debate".

On an emotional level, staff can also achieve autonomy through organisational behaviours such as naming or reframing.

> *It is unsurprising that good school leaders have adopted classic pedagogical strategies when coaching staff in crisis. They consider how they might structure the change agenda or strategic priorities into a curriculum revealed over time.*

LEADING THROUGH LONG-TERM CRISIS CONTINUED

The ability to 'name' is a learnable skill that can be socially enacted by school leaders authentically acknowledging how one might feel. In a social experiment, a group of people with arachnophobia went through week-long exposure therapy. Those who were assigned to label their emotional responses were less likely to show physiological stress than those who did not (Grant, 2020a).

Similarly, Petersen (2019) discussed millennial burnout, and reached the same conclusion when she reflected on her personal experience:

"I'm seeing myself, the parameters of my labour, and the causes of my burnout clearly. And [because I can describe it] it doesn't feel like the abyss. It doesn't feel hopeless. It's not a problem I can solve, but it's a reality I can acknowledge, a paradigm through which I can understand my actions."

The mindful response to 'reframe' emotional challenge is similar to this, except there is a level of intentionality in questioning the accuracy of your initial response. A meta-study by Alison Wood Brooks (2014) found that participants felt and performed better in stressful situations when instructed to 'recast' their feelings of anxiety as excitement, compared to those asked to 'calm down'. For example, in a singing accuracy test, those who were asked to label their feelings as 'I am excited' had an accuracy rating of 80.52%. In contrast, those in the 'I am anxious' group scored 52.98%.

Use optimism

D'Auria & De Smit (2020) highlight "bounded optimism," or confidence combined with realism as an optimum balance to strike. The warning is that if leaders display excessive confidence, in the face of obviously difficult conditions, they can lose credibility.

"It is more effective for leaders to project confidence that the organisation will find a way through its tough situation but also show that they recognise the crisis's uncertainty and have begun to grapple with it by collecting more information".

A reasonable way forward is to intentionally recognise small wins. Daily progress, not tremendous accomplishments, is "the single strongest predictor of engagement at work" (Grant, 2020b). For example, Chicago Public School Principal, Conrey Callahan, made tutoring disadvantaged students on weekends her bulwark against burnout. Her solution meant more work but, more importantly, meaningful work. She could see her impact in one field, which helped her to push through uncertainty in a related field.

Joni (2008), reflected on leadership during the Global Financial Crisis, and similarly found ways to identify wins

by being systematic and transparent, and balancing optimism with realism. She encouraged leaders to list "at the edges, for creative dissent" and to ask themselves "what … can [you] do now that you couldn't do before. How can you position yourself now, so that you will be better off than you were, once the crisis is over?" By doing so, one might "put aside that very understandable anger and instead [become] glad, even honoured, that they are in a position to respond to a once-in-a-lifetime set of circumstances". Taking time to withdraw and reflect on the opportunities and possibilities that are emerging during this current social crisis will allow school leaders to be able to plan for a consistent and coherent narrative about what must change, as well as consider how and when. Leaders who have internalised this clear direction may guide their teams with confidence and ensure learning is not readily forgotten.

Zhao (2020) echoes this optimism and calls leaders to 'hard work' in his article *COVID-19 as a Catalyst for Educational Change*. He encourages educational leaders to treat COVID-19 "as an opportunity for reimagining education. Schools are institutions for education, but they were built at a time when human understanding of learning and learners, knowledge, and skills, as well as teaching and teachers was different from today".

Monitor wellbeing

Leading a school through waves of crisis response, reintegration and restoration take a toll on a leader's

Leadership during a sustained crisis requires school leaders to draw on existing skills more intensely and deliberately.

energy and resilience. The impact of fatigue or stress can reduce leaders' abilities to communicate in ways that will enable effective crisis management. Leaders who use their close colleagues to provide feedback about their emotional state and wellbeing, and listen to that feedback, "will stand a better chance of countering functional declines… and heed the warnings they are given. Investing time in wellbeing will enable leaders to sustain their effectiveness over the weeks and months that a crisis can entail" (D'Auria & De Smet, 2020).

Macdonald (2020) notes that we are living in a "perfect storm of factors that could impact very negatively on people at the top of organisations, and could easily trigger problems with anxiety or depression, two of the most common mental health concerns in the UK".

She invites leaders to be mindful of their emotional states and practice some form of quiet reflection daily to remain in touch with their sense of wellbeing. She suggests that leaders who reach out to colleagues to collect feedback about emotional performance and ask for help are less likely to experience their crisis. She encourages leaders to take time to focus on health, having fun and maintain joyful activities that refresh and distract from the pressures at hand. Finally, she encourages leaders to celebrate success across the organisation, acknowledging the small and large efforts that have enabled the school to continue and thrive through this time (Macdonald, 2020).

There has been a great deal of reflection on effective leadership over the past year. Schools are central to their communities' health and wellbeing, and school leaders are vital to their schools' health and wellbeing.

Leadership during a sustained crisis requires school leaders to draw on existing skills more intensely and deliberately. While leaders need strong direction in the intense periods of an emergency, they also need to be able to look to the future and enable the community around them to adapt and move forward. Leaders can empower and transform those around them by being transparent, calm, honest about challenges, and optimistic about their team's and community's capacity to cope with a crisis.

They can employ powerful and proven strategies, including collaborating to problem solve, trusting and enabling expertise throughout the organisation to make the right decisions, and celebrating collective success.

During this long-term crisis leaders must consider their wellbeing and seek support to ensure they can continue to lead education forward. A long-term crisis is also an opportunity to innovate. School leaders are encouraged to challenge previous absolutes and celebrate the team's adaptive strength and capacity team during this extraordinary time.

Patton (2020) states that "leadership expertise is developmental and evolutionary, requiring continual refinement, with experience acting as a scaffold and even perhaps an incubator as leaders develop their own nuanced skills and perspectives."

As Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano stated, "adaptive or complex challenges can be approached in multiple ways, often with multiple solutions and usually require changes in numerous areas. Adaptive leadership requires collaborative problem solving, continual learning and adaptation, the leveraging of multiple perspectives and shared leadership responsibilities" (as cited in AITSL, 2020, para. 11).

LEADING THROUGH LONG-TERM CRISIS CONTINUED

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Independent Schools Queensland Ltd
ACN 614 893 140   **ABN** 88 662 995 577

Head Office
Level 1, 96 Warren Street, Spring Hill Q 4000
PO Box 957, Spring Hill Q 4004
P (07) 3228 1515 **E** office@isq.qld.edu.au

Professional Learning Centre
Level 5, 500 Queen Street, Brisbane Q 4000
P (07) 3228 1507 **E** events@isq.qld.edu.au

www.isq.qld.edu.au