

**INQUIRY INTO MEASUREMENT AND OUTCOME-BASED
FUNDING IN NEW SOUTH WALES SCHOOLS**

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Date Received: 31 August 2019

Submission to: the NSW Legislative Council Inquiry into measurement and outcome-based funding in New South Wales schools

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31 Aug 2019

My submission to this inquiry will be pointed and brief, as my views of the issues being raised are based on a long and active career in research and development in school reform in Australia. Since 1992, I have led, designed and reported several large scale studies and evaluations of different reform initiatives (inclusive of the National Schools Project, the National Schools Network, the Innovative Links Project, the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study, the New Basics Initiative, The NSW based study on the Systemic Implications of Pedagogy and Achievement, The NSW Schools Climate Change Project and the national evaluation of the Stronger/ Smarter initiative. I have also been directly responsible for the development of the NSW Quality Teaching Model, adopted by several other states (based on our QLD research), as well as the national curriculum statements on sustainability curriculum. I have formally conducted the NT structural review of their DET and advised several governments (of all party affiliations), plus overseas initiatives. The standing of my more academic research work is reflected in my recent (2013-2018) invited service as assistant and co-editor of the American Educational Research Journal, (the flagship journal of the largest educational research association on the planet.) For several decades, I have maintained long-term collaborations with several schools across NSW, inclusive of remote western schools. My children, two daughters, both attended and graduated from local NSW Schools.

Thus, my views emanate from a deep knowledge of the NSW school systems, from a long history with the schools in NSW and from multiple perspectives. I will make direct responses to the issues raised in the terms of reference. Should the committee wish further elaboration of explanation, I am happy to assist.

To those points:

1. (a) New South Wales school results relative to other states and other countries and what these trends show about schools policy,

NSW schools' relative results are well known in terms of the achievement tests used for national and international comparison. Little can be said of any other results apart from attainment and achievement on any systematic basis. For any 'outcomes,' I should remind the committee, attributing causation is not a simple matter, especially given the known patterns of documented 'results'. Those patterns include a stable position in literacy (inclusive of reading), numeracy (and broader mathematically literacy) and scientific literacy as compared to other Australia jurisdictions. Essentially, NSW is typically at the top of those rankings, or very near the top. This has not change in the entirety of my now 27 year career in NSW.

Comparisons with other countries are most known through two main international surveys, the TIMMS survey and the PISA survey – both administered in Australia by ACER. There are minor differences in the trends revealed in these surveys which can be summarised as: the relative standing of Australia has been stable for decades, and the relative standing of NSW has likewise.

Over time trends differ between the surveys: there have been little to no overtime change TIMMS results (more often than not within margins of error for the test); and, a steady but small decline in PISA results since the early 00s. It is important to note here, that decline persisted and, in some instances, accelerated with the introduction of the national testing regime, external accountabilities measure (inclusive of MySchool), and the introduction of national teaching credential mechanisms. All these international trends have been well documented in ACER reports – and NSW has essentially matched them. Reports from ACARA on NAPLAN results vary in minor ways only. (It is important here to keep in mind that ACARA is not an independent body.)

The obvious inference to be taken from these patterns is that the specific policies of those initiatives have not led to any notable improvements on the outcomes that were targeted. Arguably, the decline post 2008 demonstrates a negative impact from those reforms. I should also note that each of these policy initiatives required substantial funding and creation of bureaucratic bodies. It would be interesting to know how much of the nominal increase in educational funding has been directed to these endeavours.

2. (b) the existing state of measurement in the New South Wales education system and the measurement systems and data requirements that would be required to implement outcome-based budgeting in the New South Wales education system,

NSW public school systems is the best placed among the Australian states to deliver any high quality systemic analysis of its substantial data. That is a direct consequence of the work of many dedicated and very skilled civil servants. Note again, however, any data that might be considered 'outcomes' are limited in range. That is not a criticism, as any attempt to measure outcomes systemically carries significant consequences – not all of which are positive. The introduction of NAPLAN has been accompanied by several well established reports of unintended consequences, overt attempts to 'game' the system, narrowing the curriculum focus of schools (note here that the increased decline in scientific literacy documents in PISA coincides with the implementation of the very narrow focus on NAPLAN). Recent developments within the NSW department have expanded the range of data available to school leaders – to include access to other sources of relevant community data from other departments. While it is theoretically possible that schools may one day be able to use that data in an intelligent analysis of non-academic outcomes (such as in physical activity, health outcomes), but that would require a substantial amount of development and testing, and ultimately would rely very heavily on inferential reasoning. If the committee is interested, I have published articles on this issue

(inclusive of an award winning review of the research literature on 'non-academic' outcomes), should anyone wish further information.

3. (c) consequences of the introduction of outcome-based budgeting for New South Wales schools with particular regard to:
 1. (i) the needs of and impact on disadvantaged schools and students from a disadvantaged background

This matter has been well analysed by several other sources, but I should underscore two main points: 1) additional compensatory funding to schools with high populations of disadvantaged students is a necessary but insufficient condition of improving their relative outcomes, and 2) any achievements that have been documented are fundamentally local and most often not sustained beyond the efforts of individual professionals and temporary funding.

2. (ii) the needs of and impact on students with a disability

This is beyond my field of expertise apart from being very confident that any improvement in the educational provisions available for inclusive education will fundamentally depend on increased capacity building among all educators.

3. (iii) parental/community involvement in school accountability

I note that the Education Reform Act of 1990 was in large part motivated by a need to improve local community / parental involvement. All principals I know are keenly aware of the need to work closely with parents and the community and make regular endeavours to develop a productive relationship with their community. The NSW Department also supports schools in providing instruments and techniques for this purpose.

The one area of this which I would recommend developing more is in the active provision of educational experiences of students in the community, integrated into the curriculum provision of the school. There are several ways in which this can be done (e.g., community-based authentic assessment, training placements, service learning, etc).

4. (iv) the development of the status and quality of the New South Wales teaching profession

There are three important points to make here. First, the perceptions of low status often reported by teachers themselves are not consistent with any systematic analysis of the general public (teachers are very highly regarded, far above politicians, on any large scale surveys). To me, this suggests teachers' perceptions of status say more about the conditions of their work than anything else. Second, public reports of the 'quality' of teachers are typically not based on any systemic evidence that directly measures that quality. Third, any effort to improve the actual quality of the profession will fundamentally depend on the degree to which they are able to work independently from centralised initiatives that limited the degree to

which they can exercise professional judgement relative to curriculum, assessment and pedagogy. Right now, the manner in which the systemic centralisation of curriculum and assessment has been developed operates as a significant hinderance to teachers work.

5. (v) establishing international best practice for teaching methods, performance measurement and school management in New South Wales

Establishment of best practice requires systematic programs of sustained and well supported innovations that are themselves subject to rigorous developmental research and review. While there are some examples of such innovations around the state, they are too few, not sufficiently supported over time, subject to quite variable evaluation and review and significantly inhibited by existing systems. Thus, I am a regular advocate for serious forms of alternative schooling – at the same time I am a strong advocate of serious and rigorous analyses of those initiatives.

6. (vi) the effectiveness of the Local Schools/Local Decisions policy,

To my knowledge, publicly available analyses of this initiative are limited. There has been at least one PhD theses involving research into the initiative.

4. (d) how schools should be funded into the future and whether New South Wales growth funding, including from Gonski and other sources, should be linked to outcomes and performance,

Linking outcomes and performance to funding is a highly problematic, and very risky proposition. First, the link between advantage and performance is well known. Less well known is that this also holds for raw 'gains' at a school aggregate level. Attempts to account for these known differences all involve a form of statistical analysis (typically called 'value added') which has popular appeal but is highly problematic, if not simply nonsense. Most of these are models of 'performance' estimates based on deviations from predicted outcomes. This is literally that which isn't measure (it's called 'error' in the statistical models used for good reason). If the committee seeks the most expert views on this, the person who literally invented that term (in a doctoral thesis at Harvard Graduate School of Education in 1976) is Tony Bryk, now President of the Carnegie Foundation. He has distanced himself from the way policy actors have used that work – publicly. There are several papers and presentations available should the committee wish to seek his views. He has developed the most nuanced view of these issue of anyone I know. I recommend his work to you. The other points of reference the committee should consider are the formal statements on this issue made by both the American and Royal academics of statisticians.

The second major area of concern is the distortion effects of implementing such funding linkages. We have already seen the effects of imposing the NAPLAN regime. While many dedicated professionals in NSW have made heroic attempts to use that

regime in an educationally sound manner, it's design and rollout have been compromised since its inception, as it attempts to meet several different functions at once. It can't. Thus, we have seen the subsequent narrowing of student experience, limitations of teachers' professional flexibility, distorted public discourse (which often is based on fundamentally false perceptions – also often expressed by those whose job it is to justify its use).

The positive effects of compensatory funding to address social disadvantage is known – and still possible but highly constrained in the current structures of curriculum and assessment. It is also known that funding alone is not sufficient. Here I would point out that the degree to which parents' socio-economic background predicted children's subsequent education attainment declined in Australia during the 1980s. That time period coincided with the Disadvantaged Schools' Program and the Schools Commission. I'd suggested the Committee familiarise themselves with that work should it wish to find ways to use funding to improve school outcomes.

5. (e) reporting and accountability measures for all schools in regard to state government funding,

Within the current systems, I see no need for shifting accountability reports within the government sector. I cannot say the same for the Catholic and Independent uses of public money.

6. (f) the provision of wrap-around services to support educational outcomes, and

There is ongoing work in this area within specific initiatives – most notable being the Connected Community program. Further exploration and analysis of such initiatives is one of the areas of innovation to which I referred above.

7. (g) any other related matters.

Overall, when analysed rigorously, adopting simple systems of tied funding have not led to substantial improvements, anywhere on the planet.

I would suggest that if the committee seeks to improve school outcomes, it should prioritise the need for funding alternative systems of curriculum, assessment and pedagogy as formal trials of innovations. Those innovations are very much currently limited by the curriculum, which is itself constrained by legislation. These innovation trials would need to be conducted in parallel with *independent* research and evaluation. From this, we could find ways to improve and document school outcomes beyond academic achievements.