

Briefings

Thought leadership for the independent schooling sector

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THE NEW PARENTAL INCOME TAX (PIT) MEASURE – A LOT OF WORK TO BE DONE

From the Executive Director

The Australian Government's announcement on 20 September 2018 of new funding arrangements gives independent schools certainty for the period 2019 to 2021. Although the focus of the announcement has been the \$4.6 billion in additional funding for non-government schools over the next decade, little examination has been made of the significant change in the funding arrangements involving the replacement of the long-standing measure to determine the capacity of parents to contribute – the Socio-economic Status or SES¹ score – with a new measure – Parental Income Tax (PIT).

The new measure of PIT will be implemented from 2022, although schools will be given the option of being funded under the PIT methodology from 2020 should it result in a better outcome for them compared to SES.

The implementation of PIT, on current information, involves significant uncertainty for schools post-2021.

As independent schools are now discovering, it is not currently possible to determine the impact PIT will have on an individual school's future funding. Further, clarity about PIT scores at the school level is not likely until mid-2019 at the earliest.

Not only is there incomplete and insufficient data available on PIT as it applies to individual schools at the current time, there are many policy and technical questions in relation to the PIT measure that need to be urgently examined.

In the past, funding models for schools have been thoroughly researched and validated prior to their adoption. It is surprising that this new PIT measure has been accepted for implementation prior to any rigorous validation and testing.

The replacement of SES by PIT results from the recommendation of the National School Resourcing Board (NSRB) as outlined in their report *Review of the socio-economic status score methodology*². The review of

SES was established as part of the passage of legislative amendments to the *Australian Education Act* in 2017 to provide for the Gonski 2.0 funding model under the Coalition's *Quality Schools, Quality Outcomes* package.

The PIT links each student's address to parental income through Australian Taxation Office data.

It is hard to argue that a direct measure of parental income, such as PIT, will not be a better measure of parent's capacity to contribute than an area-based methodology such as SES.

However, a key policy issue is whether using a direct income measure is appropriate to set a school per student funding rate. In other areas of Government payments where direct income measures are used, such as early childhood, the funding goes directly to the parent and therefore can be linked directly to the individual's capacity to pay. Ideally under the PIT methodology, each parent would receive a level of Government funding commensurate with their level of income as opposed to the current system where each parent receives a level of Government funding based on the income of the entire parent population of the school.

This would mean a "voucher" type system. Unfortunately, consideration of any such concept does not appear to have featured in determining the new funding arrangements.

1 Socio-economic Status score – the SES has been in place since 2001 for independent schools and measures the socio-economic status of the community from which schools draw their students. It takes into account income, educational attainment and occupation based on ABS Census data. Non-government schools receive a proportion of the School Resource Standard (SRS) based on their SES score.

2 The NSRB Report was released on 29 June 2018 and is available at www.education.gov.au/national-school-resourcing-board

THE NEW PARENTAL INCOME TAX (PIT) MEASURE – A LOT OF WORK TO BE DONE

On the current proposal, parental gross income will be used to determine the PIT score. Is this a more appropriate measure than net income (i.e. after deductions for tax purposes)? Or further, should the measure be about disposable income (i.e. after-tax income) which is ultimately what parents have available to spend on school fees?

There is also the question of whether there should be a separate PIT score for primary and secondary students. Common sense would suggest that the parents of secondary students are likely to have higher incomes in general than the parents of primary students. They will be older and further progressed in their careers. By setting a funding rate for a school on a per student basis there is significant potential to disadvantage the parents of primary students where that rate might be more in line with the income of parents of secondary students.

The currently proposed PIT measure uses medium income of a school's parents to determine a funding rate for the school. This needs to be researched to ensure that it is the appropriate measure. The medium means that 50% of parents at a school will be below the PIT figure whilst 50% will be above. This seems to guarantee that up to 50% of

parents may have difficulty meeting the fees that a school might set based on the Government funding rate.

Further examination is also required in relation to the spread of incomes for an individual school. It is highly unlikely that parent income at a school will resemble a bell curve. For example, there does not appear to have been any rigorous testing by the National School Resourcing Board (NSRB) of the potential implications where a large majority of parents below the medium income for a school are well below that medium.

The currently proposed PIT methodology does not account for family size and its relationship to PIT. Parents on the same income, but with a different number of children, will have significantly different capacities to contribute to school costs. If family size is to be a factor in the determination of Government funding, should it be all dependents or just school-aged children? Should any income generated by children be considered (for example, a teenager working part-time)?

No work has been done on testing what the potential variation of PIT scores might be on a year-to-year basis. This is almost certain to be the

case for many schools (for example, small schools and schools in rural areas where incomes may fluctuate considerably from year to year). Whilst there has been the NSRB suggestion that the PIT be based on a three-year rolling average, this has not yet been confirmed by the Government.

Several other issues have the potential to erode community confidence in PIT as a method for determining Government grants including students in split family circumstances where the income of one parent may not reflect the capacity to pay of both parents, where for parents do not generate a Tax Return and the use of tax minimisation strategies. Similarly, data would suggest that for some students, school fees are paid by grandparents and in such cases, the income of the parent may not be relevant.

Many of the policy and technical issues associated with the new PIT have been recognised by the Federal Minister for Education, the Hon Dan Tehan, who has agreed to the establishment of a working party to examine several issues associated with the PIT methodology.

That these will be examined after PIT has been formally announced by the Government as the funding mechanism to apply from 2020 gives a clear indication that the political and policy environment in terms of schools funding remains highly charged and unstable.

The policy and technical issues should have been thoroughly examined and debated well before any formal adoption of the PIT measure. It would appear the development of PIT has been undertaken in a degree of secrecy and haste with the NSRB only revealing its draft recommendations about six weeks out from the release of its report.

Whilst the NSRB in its report claims to have undertaken extensive consultation with the non-government

By setting a funding rate for a school on a per student basis there is significant potential to disadvantage the parents of primary students where that rate might be more in line with the income of parents of secondary students.

Independent schools rightly need to take a cautious approach to assessing the implications of PIT on their future funding. There is much work to be done to validate that PIT, as currently proposed, is appropriate and the best measure available to determine parents' capacity to contribute to school costs in the non-government sector.

schooling sectors, the reality is there was little consultation on a new direct measure and issues raised by the independent sector in the limited consultation seemed to have largely been ignored.

Nor has any rigorous assessment of the impact of PIT on particular groups of schools or cohorts of students been undertaken. The Minister has recognised this by including in the list of matters to be examined "the impact on regional, rural and boarding schools"³. The one year of PIT data made available by the NSRB has less than desirable matching rates with over 30% of independent schools not achieving matching rates of 80%. This will need to be addressed before PIT can be confirmed as a valid and reliable measure.

Independent schools rightly need to take a cautious approach to assessing

the implications of PIT on their future funding. There is much work to be done to validate that PIT, as currently proposed, is appropriate and the best measure available to determine parents' capacity to contribute to school costs in the non-government sector.

Independent Schools Queensland will be engaging with the Australian Government around these issues. The PIT methodology is too important to simply ignore significant policy and technical questions which ultimately have a significant impact at the school level in terms of Australian Government funding.



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3 See page 7 of the Australian Government's response to the NSRB report – available at <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/51416>

COULD PARENT POWER RAISE AUSTRALIA'S EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE?



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Parents and teachers should be natural allies in a child's education. Ultimately, they both want what's best for the child.

With schooling accounting for just 20 percent of a child's waking hours in a school year, there's an untapped opportunity in that remaining 80 percent for parents to add substantial value to their child's educational experience, achievements and wellbeing.

Decades of international and national research have confirmed that when parents use their time to engage with and support their child at every stage of their 13-year school journey, school attendance, academic achievement and overall wellbeing are optimised.

The research is also resoundingly clear: it is the engagement of parents and carers in a child's learning, and not their involvement in school-related fundraising or volunteering activities, that has the greatest impact on student aspirations and achievement.

That's not to say that developing strong parent-school relationships and communities aren't valuable or beneficial. They play a vital role in creating a positive, mutually respectful and welcoming school culture.

However, according to research undertaken by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) "the key to facilitating positive change in a child's academic attainment is the engagement of parents in learning outcomes in the home" (Emerson et al, 2012, p. 8). In practical terms it includes the value parents place on education, the expectations they hold for their child and the stimulating home environment they create as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Parental engagement conceptual model

WHAT ASPECTS OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT MATTER MOST FOR CHILDREN'S OUTCOMES	SHORT TERM OUTCOMES FOR THE CHILD	LONGER TERM OUTCOMES FOR THE CHILD
FAMILY-LED LEARNING		
High expectations	Belief in the importance of education Self-efficacy Academic competence/confidence Motivation and engagement in learning Persistence Skills for learning Social and emotional wellbeing	Academic achievement – literacy – numeracy Mental health and wellbeing Mitigating the impacts of disadvantage on educational outcomes
Shared reading		
Parent/child conversation, especially around learning, social issues, family stories		
Homework support that provides an appropriate environment, encourages autonomous learning, and fosters positive parent-child interactions		
Cognitively stimulating environment		
Support for social and emotional wellbeing, peer relationships, teacher relationships		
FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP		
Communication about child's wellbeing and progress		
Communication about what children are learning and specific information about what families can do to help		
Engagement in the school community and positive attitudes to school		

Source: Fox & Olsen (2014).

A range of studies has sought to quantify the impact of the “parent factor” on student achievement.

University of Melbourne Laureate Professor John Hattie’s extensive meta-analysis of educational research into factors that improve student achievement found parental engagement (described as “parent involvement” in his study) had an effect size of 0.50, which classified it as having the potential to “accelerate student achievement” (Visible Learning Plus, 2017).

A study by American-based researchers Karen Smith Conway and Andrew Houtenville (2008) used economic modelling to examine the impact of parental engagement. The study found that “the magnitude of the effect of parental effort” was “substantial” (p. 450). Conway told *ScienceDaily*: “We found that schools would need to increase per-pupil spending by more than \$1,000 in order to achieve the same results that are gained with parental involvement” (University of New Hampshire, 2008, para. 3).

Based on this extensive body of evidence, are schools doing enough to maximise parental engagement for the benefit of student learning?

Challenges for Effective Parent Engagement

Well documented changes in parenting styles, heightened “customer” expectations and greater transparency of school performance through My School, have created new tensions in the traditional parent-school relationship.

The increased complexities of parent-school relationships and the expertise required to deal with them saw the

creation of Australia’s first Independent Office for School Dispute Resolution by the Victorian Government in March 2017. The Office’s mandate is to resolve “the most complex and difficult school disputes” between parents and Victorian state schools (Merlino, 2017, para. 1).

In its first 15 months of operation the office dealt with 56 complaints – 1 in 5 of which had not been raised with the school first (Argoo, 2018). According to Office Chair Frank Handy when an issue escalates to his office the focus is generally on “the fight” and the actions of the players in the dispute, rather than being on the needs and welfare of the student (Cook, 2018, para. 10).

Mr Handy told the *Sunday Herald Sun* (Argoo, 2018) schools were operating in an environment where there was less connection between families and schools, where the “concept of a community is now more challenging” (para. 15) and where parents were more likely to question school decisions.

A study by Edith Cowan University researchers Ellis, Lock and Lummins (2015) provides an insight into the different ways parents and teachers prefer to deal with each other and their views on the biggest factors that impact their ability to collaborate. The study found “parents wanted to build a personal relationship with the teachers, while, teachers wanted to maintain their professionalism and work together”. Not surprisingly, it also concluded “parents wanted teachers who were not stand-offish and teachers wanted parents who were not aggressive towards them” (p. 170).

For different groups of parents and carers within the schooling system, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, families for whom

English is an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D), families from low-socioeconomic backgrounds and families of children with disability, there are more complex issues at play impacting their engagement in their child’s education.

According to ARACY (2016) barriers can include: culture and language; parents being unaware of the role they can play in their child’s learning; low levels of parental confidence; difficulty navigating the complexity of the school system; time constraints; perceived mixed messages about feeling welcome in their child’s school; and past negative schooling experiences.

A recognised expert in parent engagement, Professor in the Department of Curriculum Studies at the University of Saskatchewan in Canada Debbie Pushor, has called for a shift in the “current worldview of education” to one that values and acknowledges “parent knowledge in teaching and learning” (Pushor, 2018, para. 25).

COULD PARENT POWER RAISE AUSTRALIA'S EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE? CONTINUED

Policy Frameworks Guiding Parent Engagement in Schools

Parent engagement has been a consistent policy focus for the Australian and Queensland Governments, with both producing evidence-based frameworks to guide schools in their approaches to developing respectful, meaningful and effective partnerships with parents as shown in Table 2.

The frameworks outline a whole-school approach, with research confirming that “attempts by schools to engage parents in their children’s learning are unlikely to be successful if they represent a ‘bolt-on’ to mainstream activities” (Goodall et al, 2011, p. 5).

Parent engagement has also been enshrined in the Australian Professional Standard for Principals and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) as shown in Figure 1.

A 2016 Australian study investigating how final year pre-service teachers rated their performance against the APST at the graduate career stage found more than 30 percent lacked confidence in their ability to engage with parents and carers to support student learning (Hudson et al, 2016).

Similarly, a National Mapping of Teacher Professional Learning Project found 82 percent of teachers nominated further professional learning in the area of parent and community engagement as their most pressing need (Doecke et al, 2008).

Table 2:
Australian and Queensland Government parent engagement frameworks for schools

AUSTRALIAN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION & TRAINING NATIONAL FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS FRAMEWORK	QUEENSLAND DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION PARENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK
7 KEY DIMENSIONS FOR PLANNING PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITIES	5 KEY ELEMENTS OF PARENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
<p>Communication School leaders and teachers build relationships that encourage, facilitate and leverage parent and family engagement in learning through effective communication.</p>	<p>Communication Effective communication is an exchange between students, parents, communities and schools that is inclusive and involves information sharing and opportunities to learn from each other.</p>
<p>Connecting learning at home and school School staff, parents and families recognise and appreciate the overlaps between home, school and community learning environments, and work collaboratively.</p>	<p>Partnerships with parents Partnerships between parents, students and schools promote student learning, wellbeing and high expectations for student success.</p>
<p>Build community and identity Welcoming and inclusive schools holistically support students to develop their sense of identity, personal competence and belonging.</p>	<p>Community collaboration Relationships between the school and wider community strengthen the ability of schools and families to support student learning, wellbeing and developmental outcomes.</p>
<p>Recognise the role of family When school staff, parents and families appreciate their complementary roles in children’s learning and schooling, they increase their collective positive influence.</p>	<p>School culture Respectful relationships between students, parents and the school community are valued and enhance the promotion of student learning and wellbeing.</p>
<p>Consult on decision-making Inclusive school decision making generates shared responsibility and school accountability.</p>	<p>Decision-making Parents, students and community members play meaningful roles in school decision-making</p>
<p>Collaborate beyond the school Community engagement enriches student learning and wellbeing, and expands school and family resources.</p>	
<p>Participate Families participate in schools in a wide variety of ways and make many valuable contributions. Participation includes involvement in school-based activities, engagement in school-based learning, as well as activities that are not directly related to schooling.</p>	

Adapted from Department of Education, Queensland Government. (n.d.). & Department of Education and Training, Australian Government. (n.d.).

Queensland Independent Schools and Parent Engagement

In Queensland's independent schooling sector there are differences in the levels of confidence teachers report when rating their practice against the two parent-focused areas of the APST.

Analysis of five years' worth of data collected from more than 5,000 independent school teachers through Independent School's Queensland's Professional Growth Tool – an online teacher self-reflection survey based on the APST – reveals that teachers are more confident in their abilities to engage and build relationships with parents (APST Focus Area 7.3) than they are in the more specific practice of consistently engaging parents in planned and relevant opportunities that support their child's learning (APST Focus Area 3.7).

The Queensland Independent Schools Parents Network (QIS Parents Network) is a strong advocate for parent engagement in schools and provides a central point for the dissemination of parent engagement research and resources.

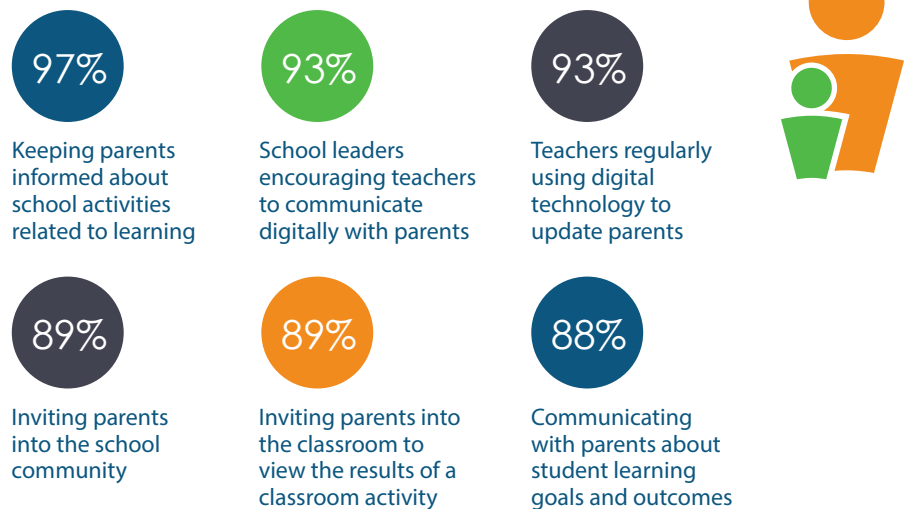
A 2018 survey of Queensland independent school principals commissioned by the QIS Parents Network found schools were undertaking a range of activities to engage parents in their child's education as shown in Figure 2.

Key areas of need identified by principals who responded to the survey included: articles on parental engagement to share with their parent communities; resources to support specific parent groups such as EAL/D parents, as well as time-poor parents; and access to experts to improve parent understanding about the critical role they can play in supporting their child's learning and the value their contribution makes.

Figure 1: Parent engagement is embedded in the Australian Professional Standard for Principals and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST)



Figure 2: Most effective strategies for engaging parents in learning
% of respondents rating the strategy as somewhat/highly effective



Source: QISPN Principal Survey on Parental Engagement (unpublished).

Funding support to power up school parent engagement projects

Queensland independent schools keen to explore innovative approaches to parent engagement can apply for funding support through ISQ's Great Teachers in Independent Schools Research in Schools programs.

Schools that put forward a project focused on parent engagement may be eligible for an additional grant, in addition to the base amount, from the QIS Parents Network.

Parent engagement research projects that received funding in 2018 investigated:

- how to improve communication and connection between boarding students and their families through the development of an interactive, electronic boarding newsletter
- how to better engage male students and the significant male figure in their education.

2019 Great Teachers in Independent Schools Research in Schools program applications close on 9 November

[learn more](#)

COULD PARENT POWER RAISE AUSTRALIA'S EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE? CONTINUED

Putting Parent Engagement into Practice

Australia's latest national policy reform blueprint for school education, *Through Growth to Achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools* noted the extensive research and policy work that had been undertaken on parent engagement in Australia (Department of Education and Training, Australian Government, 2018).

However, it recommended "the focus should now shift to determining practical and actionable steps: such as developing evidence-based tools and resources to support schools in implementing proven strategies to engage parents and carers and improve student outcomes. Better models are also needed to share successful practices to help schools learn from the leaders" (Department of Education and Training, Australian Government, 2018, p. 25).

There is no definitive parent engagement playbook or checklist for schools. Strategies must be tailored to the needs of the school and its parent population.

The following list of parent engagement ideas and activities, sourced from local and international school case studies and research, may serve as a catalyst to re-examine and re-energise existing school approaches:

- develop a Family School Partnership Statement or Charter that outlines the shared values, vision and commitments of the school, parents and students to learning
- re-conceptualise the traditional school Open Day and parent-teacher interview by incorporating hands-on learning activities for parents that equip them with skills and strategies they can use with their children at home
- use key school events attended by parents, such as the annual Book Week parade, to share effective

reading strategies with parents and tips to use at home

- conduct specific parent-teacher meetings ahead of key transition years such as Prep, Year 7 and Year 12, to discuss student needs
- create digital portfolios that parents can access which identify student learning goals, student progress based on assessment data and which incorporate teacher feedback and recommendations for activities parents can do at home to support their child
- regularly communicate with parents, through blogs/emails/homework book notes, about what students are learning and suggested discussion points or questions
- open the school library or information technology lab for afternoon or evening homework sessions where families can assist their children and obtain support from teachers
- run adult literacy/numeracy classes to help parents support their children's learning at home
- host practical parent workshops with guest speakers on education topics such as developing effective study habits or wellbeing topics such as online safety or developing emotional intelligence in children
- establish an online portal that gives parents access to real-time reporting on their child's academic outcomes, as well as assignment/test deadlines and teacher tutorial notes/videos
- develop relationships with wrap-around community and social services that can support families with complex needs.

Sitting around the dinner table lifts student PISA results

The simplest family activities can positively influence student academic and wellbeing outcomes. According to the latest Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the top activities that have the greatest impact on student outcomes are: families eating a meal together at least once a week and parents and carers spending time talking with their children generally, as well as more specifically about how they are going at school (OECD, 2017).

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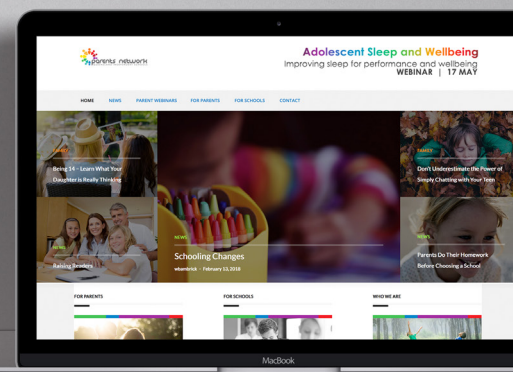
The QIS Parents Network supports positive learning partnerships between parents and their children and their children's schools.

Visit the QISPN website or Facebook page for:

Valuable information on current schooling issues and hot parenting topics

Expert advice on how parents can positively influence their child's education success and wellbeing

Research and strategies that help schools better engage parents in supporting children's learning and development.



www.parentsnetwork.qld.edu.au

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