

Briefings

Thought leadership for the independent schooling sector

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IS SECTOR-BLIND SCHOOLS FUNDING ACHIEVABLE?

From the Executive Director

Politicians, media commentators and policy makers all support sector-blind needs-based schools funding. What does this really mean and is it achievable within Australia's complex funding arrangements for schools?

Sector-blind and needs-based funding could be assumed to mean that a student is funded by governments on the same basis, no matter which school they attend. Taking this approach, a student with the same needs would receive the same funding whether in a state, Catholic or independent school.

This would require that no schooling sector be the subject of any special arrangements in terms of government funding for its students. This would be reflected at the local school level.

Recent data suggests that despite some improvements through the Gonski funding models, there is still a long way to go before Australia has sector-blind funding for schools.

There are three sectors of schooling in Australia – state schools (which educate about 67% of students), Catholic

Table 1: Average Government Recurrent Funding per Student (\$)

FINANCIAL YEAR	2006-07 \$	2007-08 \$	2008-09 \$	2009-10 \$	2010-11 \$	2011-12 \$	2012-13 \$	2013-14 \$	2014-15 \$	2015-16 \$
NATIONAL										
Government school	11,874	12,639	13,544	14,380	15,000	15,770	15,703	16,180	16,670	17,280
Catholic school	6,442	6,607	6,850	7,427	8,340	8,650	9,362	9,750	10,200	10,670
Independent school	5,810	6,076	6,100	6,450	6,820	7,200	7,522	7,940	8,450	8,850
Source: ISCA Snapshots	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
QUEENSLAND										
Government school ¹	11,881	12,426	13,233	14,148	14,853	15,526	15,538	15,563	16,198	16,867
Catholic school ²	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	8,461	9,000	9,295	9,602	10,182	10,737
Independent school ²	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	7,206	7,636	7,931	8,302	8,915	9,443
1 Source: Report on Government Services	2009(t4A.08)	2010(t4A.08)	2011(t4A.08)	2012(t4A.08)	2013(t4A.12)	2014(t4A.14)	2015(t4A.14)	2016(t4A.14)	2017(t4A.13)	2018(t4A.15)

2 Source: MySchool (FinanceData tab) – various years

schools (20%) and independent schools (15%). These three sectors operate in each of state and territory.

State schooling is fully funded by governments in Australia. This is unlike non-government schooling where the capacity of parents to contribute to the costs of schooling is considered when determining government funding.

Parents pay a price for exercising school choice. If you send your child to the local state school, governments will cover the full costs of educating that child. But if you choose to send your child to a non-state school you won't get that same level of support – it will be discounted by a measure of your financial capacity to contribute to the costs.

This is even though state schools are increasingly either charging non-compulsory fees or imposing charges or levies on parents. However, there does not appear to be any support for a policy that would see funding for state schools discounted by the capacity of parents to contribute to the costs or to meet fees or charges.

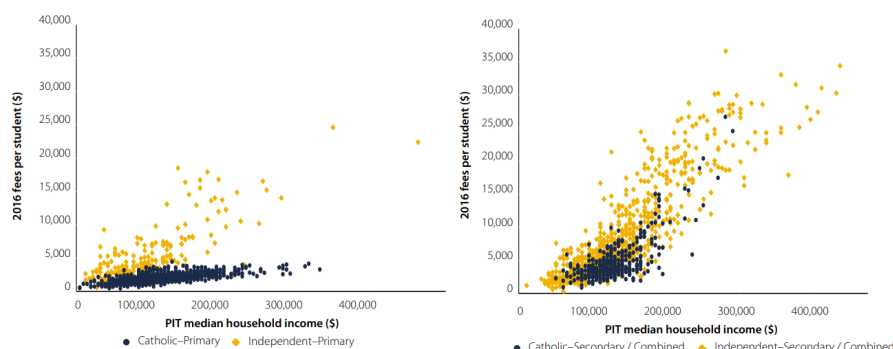
Given non-government schools account for over one-third of enrolments in Australia¹, sector-blind funding is not achievable whilst governments continue to discount funding for non-state schools based on parental capacity.

As outlined in Table 1, the average government funding for a student in a government, Catholic and independent school is different.

¹It is often claimed that Australia is unique in the share of enrolments attending non-state schools. This is not true with OECD data showing that seven other countries have a higher percentage of students in private schools than Australia – Macao – China, Hong Kong – China, Dubai, Netherlands, Ireland, Chile and Indonesia. Further, Korea, Argentina, Chinese Taipei and Spain have similar proportions of students attending non-government schools as Australia.

IS SECTOR-BLIND SCHOOLS FUNDING ACHIEVABLE? CONTINUED

Figure 1: School fees do not reflect median household incomes for schools



Source: Board analysis of 2016 My School data and 2015-16 income tax data linked through MADIP

At the national level, on average an independent school student receives 51% of what a child in a government school receives and 83% of what a child in a Catholic school receives. Some of this variation will result from the needs of students, but currently a child with the same needs profile will receive different levels of support depending upon whether they attend a state, Catholic or independent school.

There has been progress in ensuring consistency of federal funding for state schools between states and territories with the amendments to the *Australian Education Act 2013* in 2017. The arrangements struck between the Australian Government and State and Territory Governments under the original Gonski funding model in 2014 were less than transparent (only three states and territories signed onto the original Gonski funding model).

At least from 2018, all states and territories are treated the same by the Australian Government, receiving 20%

of their loaded Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) calculated under the Gonski 2.0 formula from the Commonwealth.

However, the bulk of funding for government schools is provided by State and Territory Governments. Although the *Australian Education Act 2013* requires them to fund 80% of the loaded SRS, it is up to each State and Territory Government how, and to what level, they fund state schools.

It should be easier to achieve sector-blind funding in the non-government sector. Yet recent data released by the National Schools Resourcing Board (NSRB) would indicate much still needs to be done to achieve sector-blind funding for non-state schools.

Figure 1 outlines Exhibit 23 from the NSRB's *Review of the socio-economic status score methodology: final report* (2018)² which was headed, *School fees do not reflect median household incomes for schools*³.

It shows, as expected, for independent

schools as parental income increases so does the level of fees paid. For the Catholic sector, the same relationship is not apparent, particularly for primary schools.

Given that the amount of government funding received by a school is a key factor in determining fee levels, it would be expected that a sector-blind funding model would see similar outcomes for Catholic and independent schools in terms of the relationship between school fees and incomes.

One of most common queries of independent school principals is how do Catholic schools operating in their area, serving similar communities, have fees that are so much lower than their school? Exhibit 23 of the NSRB report illustrates this issue that confronts many independent schools.

The Gonski 2.0 funding model (and before it the Gonski funding model) only directly applies at the school level to non-systemic independent schools. School systems, such as Catholic Education, are not funded based on the socio-economic status (SES) score of each individual school, but receive a system weighted average SES. The system is provided with a block grant of funding for all its schools and may redistribute funding between its schools, albeit in accordance with needs-based funding arrangements.

Under amendments to the *Australian Education Act 2013* in 2017, system weighted SES was abolished. However, it remained in place for 2018 pending the outcomes of the SES review by the NSRB. The Australian Government

² Commonwealth of Australia. (2018). *Review of the socio-economic status score methodology: final report*. Retrieved from www.education.gov.au/national-school-resourcing-board

³ The NSRB used Exhibit 23 to support its recommendation that school fees not be used to determine the capacity of parents to contribute to the costs of schooling.

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has not yet indicated whether it will continue this arrangement for 2019.

The Federal Minister for Education and Training, the Hon Senator Simon Birmingham recently wrote in relation to the Gonski 2.0 funding model introduced in 2018 that “we have moved to apply the model to everybody even-handedly – once fully implemented, if you lifted a government school school from one state to another but retained all of the same students and families, then the level of federal funding would be the same” and “if you changed the name on the gate of a non-government school from being an independent Christian school to a Catholic systemic school but had the same students and families attending, the level of allocated federal funding would be the same.”⁴

The Gonski 2.0 funding model introduced in 2018 was a significant step towards achieving a sector-blind funding system for Australian schools. However, it is yet to be applied to all schools as legislated. Whilst there is hope for a long-term policy position that every student will be treated equitably in terms of government funding no matter which school they attend, there is still a long way to go.



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⁴The Australian, 12 July 2018

HAS THE HYPE AROUND GROWTH MINDSET OUTPACED THE EVIDENCE?



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When the concept of 'growth mindset' started to circulate in education circles it was embraced by many teachers because it seemed to provide a research and evidence base that validated the messages teachers give students about the importance of effort. An entire industry has now grown around the concept.

The growth mindset concept is an idea that is not only influential in schools but also now influential in educational policy. As pointed out by Buckingham and Joseph (2018) in the *Through Growth to Achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools* 'Gonski 2.0' report, mindset is referred to twenty times.

There can be little doubt as to how pervasive this concept has become when you consider that one of the first of Dweck's studies in 1998 has been cited by more than 1,200 other papers. It has also led to TED talks and best-selling books. It has even expanded from education to the point that government and private organisations recommend hiring for growth mindset. "NASA looks for, and tries to instil, a Growth Mindset in its top engineers, saying that fixed-mindset people feel 'threatened by the success of others' and 'plateau early and achieve less than their full potential', while growth-mindset people 'find inspiration' in others' success and reach 'ever higher levels of achievement'. Google looks for a Growth Mindset in new hires. The *Harvard Business Review* offers tips for how companies 'can profit from a growth mindset' (Chivers, 2017, para. 5).

Given the claims of growth mindset and the extent to which it has been enthusiastically adopted by many teachers, it would be expected that the evidence supporting its use and effectiveness would be similarly extensive and robust. It appears however that the evidence is mixed.

What is it?

Dweck (2006, as cited in Zander, 2017) explains that the growth mindset is based on the belief that "growth-minded people embrace challenges, persist in the face of setbacks and learn from their failures. Academic challenges are not perceived as a threat to one's ability, but rather an opportunity for learning and improvement" (p. 2). This is contrasted with the fixed mindset which instead of approaching academic challenges with a desire to learn, "fixed minded people want easier problems that will make them look and feel smart" (p. 2). Challenges will be avoided instead of embraced and effort is seen as something needed in order to look smart.

Lack of replication and Dweck's response

While growth mindset was taking the world by storm, by 2015 some statisticians and psychologists were becoming increasingly worried that the findings of Dweck's 1998 study had never been replicated in a published paper. In an article by Tom Chivers, Timothy Bates, a professor of individual differences in psychology at the University of Edinburgh, said that he had been trying unsuccessfully to replicate Dweck's findings in that key mindset study for several years. In response Dweck said that attempts to replicate can fail because the scientists haven't created the right conditions. "Not anyone can do a replication," she said. "We put so much thought into creating an environment; we spend

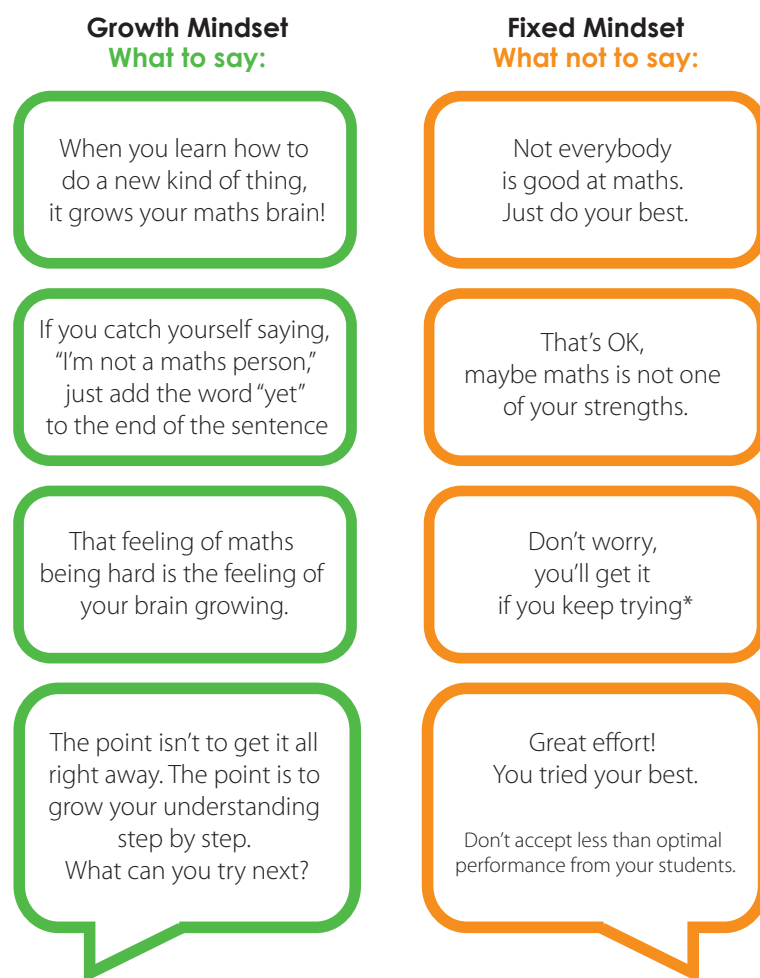
hours and days on each question, on creating a context in which the phenomenon could plausibly emerge. Replication is very important, but they have to be genuine replications and thoughtful replications done by skilled people. Very few studies will replicate when done by an amateur in a willy-nilly way” (Chivers, 2017). In the same article, Nick Brown, a PhD student in psychology at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, responded: “The question I have is: If your effect is so fragile that it can only be reproduced [under strictly controlled conditions], then why do you think it can be reproduced by schoolteachers?” (Chivers, 2017).

Perhaps in response to these concerns and possibly to fears that growth mindset had taken on a life of its own, Dweck increasingly made clear what she thought mindset was and wasn't. In an article in 2015 Dweck said,

“A Growth Mindset isn't just about effort. Perhaps the most common misconception is simply equating the Growth Mindset with effort. Certainly, effort is key for students' achievement, but it's not the only thing. Students need to try new strategies and seek input from others when they're stuck. They need this repertoire of approaches—not just sheer effort—to learn and improve. Recently, someone asked what keeps me up at night. It's the fear that the mindset concepts, which grew up to counter the failed self-esteem movement, will be used to perpetuate that movement. In other words, if you want to make students feel good, even if they're not learning, just praise their effort! Want to hide learning gaps from them? Just tell them, 'Everyone is smart!'

“I also fear that the mindset work is sometimes used to justify why some students aren't learning: 'Oh, he has a fixed mindset'. We used to blame the child's environment or ability. In many quarters, a Growth Mindset had become the right thing to have, the

Figure 1: Carol Dweck - How to Encourage Students



* If students are using the wrong strategies, their efforts might not work. Plus they may feel particularly inept if their efforts are fruitless

Adapted from Dweck, 2015

right way to think. It was as though educators were faced with a choice: Are you an enlightened person who fosters students' well-being? Or are you an unenlightened person, with a fixed mindset, who undermines them? So, of course, many claimed the growth-mindset identity. But the path to a Growth Mindset is a journey, not a proclamation.

“My colleagues and I are taking a growth-mindset stance toward our message to educators. Maybe we originally put too much emphasis on sheer effort. Maybe we made the development of a Growth Mindset sound too easy. Maybe we talked

too much about people having one mindset or the other, rather than portraying people as mixtures. We are on a growth-mindset journey, too” (Dweck, 2015).

She also provided an illustration for teachers (see Figure 1).

In 2017 Dweck again sought to clarify the importance of context and delivery when implementing growth mindset in classrooms.

“Although we were originally optimistic about teachers' ability to readily apply Growth Mindset in their classrooms, we began to learn things that tempered this optimism. We began to see and

HAS THE HYPE AROUND GROWTH MINDSET OUTPACED THE EVIDENCE? CONTINUED

accumulate research evidence that the Growth Mindset concept was poorly understood by many parents and educators and that adults might not know how to pass a Growth Mindset on to children, even when they reported holding it for themselves. We cautioned that mindsets are not 'magic bullets' but depend critically on context and delivery, we argued for more evaluation before scaling mindset programs, and we have argued against including mindset in school accountability systems.

More than that, we became deeply committed to learning more about when and how adults can communicate a Growth Mindset effectively to children and we are researching this vigorously. This is not easy work. A recent survey found that teachers have many misunderstandings about mindset work and want more resources to communicate mindsets more effectively" (Dweck, 2017).

Latest Research

This year, two large and sophisticated pieces of research on growth mindset were released and, depending on your perspective, the results were described as either *growth mindset replicates or the nail in growth mindset's coffin*.

One piece of research tested a growth mindset intervention in 65 randomly chosen schools with over 12,000 students representative of the United States Year 9 population, titled *Where and For Whom Can a Brief, Scalable Mindset Intervention Improve Adolescents' Educational Trajectories?* In this research Year 9 students assigned

to the growth mindset intervention, which consisted of two online survey/interventions of 25 minutes each, earned slightly higher Grade Point Averages (GPAs) in core classes at the end of the school year, compared with the controlled group with no intervention. On a 4-point grade metric ("A" = 4.0, "B" = 3.0, etc.), the average treatment effect was 0.03 grade points. Tabarrok (2018) concedes that though this is a small, positive effect it is coming from a small intervention that could be easily scaled to the entire country or even worldwide. Further, "the improvements in the gateway outcome of 9th grade GPA were concentrated among adolescents who are at significant risk for compromised well-being and economic welfare: those with lower levels of prior achievement attending relatively lower achieving schools. The finding that an intervention can redirect this adolescent outcome in this sub-group, in under an hour, without training of teachers, and at scale (i.e. in a random sample of nation's schools), represents a significant advance" (Tabarrok, 2018).

Conversely, those not convinced about growth mindset see the same results as suggesting that "students

who have previously underachieved improve when told that if they took more responsibility and worked harder they might do better, and that good behaviour makes a positive difference to any intervention. Neither of which are all that surprising" (Didau, 2018). Stuart Ritchie, a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Edinburgh and author of *Intelligence: All that Matters*, said of the paper that it "shows that 'Growth Mindset' interventions have a real, but very, very modest effect; and it undercuts the hugely overblown statements about Growth Mindset that some of these authors have themselves made/encouraged in the past" (Ritchie, 2018).

The second study *To What Extent and Under Which Circumstances Are Growth Mind-Sets Important to Academic Achievement? Two Meta-Analyses*, was a two-part meta-analysis that reviewed over 229 studies on growth mindset research. The first meta-analysis examined the correlation between growth mindset interventions and academic achievement on standardised tests. The second looked at the effectiveness of specific interventions, noting which teaching strategies showed the most impact on student outcomes. Brooke Macnamara, an assistant professor at Case Western Reserve University and a co-author of the study, said in an interview that "we looked at the Growth Mindset interventions to try to see what the overall effectiveness of them are. And here we get a very tiny effect. The effect was 0.08. To put that in perspective, a typical education

We cautioned that mindsets are not 'magic bullets' but depend critically on context and delivery, we argued for more evaluation before scaling mindset programs, and we have argued against including mindset in school accountability systems. (Dweck, 2017)

intervention effect is 0.57. So again, this was significant but very, very small" (Abamu, 2018).

Further, the authors of the study caution that:

"Some researchers have claimed that mind-set interventions can "lead to large gains in student achievement" and have "striking effects on educational achievement" (Yeager & Walton, 2011, pp. 267 and 268, respectively). Overall, our results do not support these claims. Mind-set interventions on academic achievement were non-significant for adolescents, typical students, and students facing situational challenges (transitioning to a new school, experiencing stereotype threat). However, our results support claims that academically high-risk students and economically disadvantaged students may benefit from growth-mind-set interventions. Regardless, those seeking more than modest effects or effects for all students are unlikely to find them. To this end, policies and resources targeting all students might not be prudent" (De Bruyckere, 2018).

Again, Ritchie (2018) argues that, "yes, there does seem to be an effect of teaching children to hold a Growth Mindset, and this effect is a little bit bigger in children who are from poor backgrounds or who are at risk of academic failure, but it's more like a tiny nudge in the right direction than a life-changing panacea. The benefits appear to have been substantially oversold" (Beall, 2018). Conversely, David Yeager, the lead researcher of the *Where and For Whom Can a Brief, Scalable Mindset Intervention Improve Adolescents' Educational Trajectories?* study, argues that "The fact that such light touch interventions can ever have any effect on important, multiply-determined outcomes is somewhat amazing, especially when you consider that many, or even most very extensive and expensive educational programs have no effect at all" (Beall, 2018).

Conclusion

John Hattie writes that in discussions with Dweck "we discussed our mutual disappointment, not surprising, that so many took her work and applied it in many haphazard ways. Educators, pundits, and researchers have over promoted Growth Mindset with no evidence of impact, and she noted how so many critics never bothered to read her academic work"; additionally, "Carol said that in every session she talked about under what conditions Growth Mindset can work, what kinds of people it best works with, and she noted that developing a 'Growth Mindset is the most fixed mindset idea' of the lot" (Hattie, 2017). Furthermore, Hattie argues that "The same popularisation has occurred for related notions, such as mindfulness, positive psychology, and well-being. At times, over stated claims are made about how these programs can enhance academic achievement, help develop world peace, and are foundational to 21st century skills. Many schools advertise they are growth schools, parents are seduced by this new set of skills, and well-being and positive psychology are great brands to market schools to parents. Like many seductive claims, the hype precedes the evidence, but that evidence is now coming in – fast. And it is not all pleasant" (Hattie, 2017).

With all of that said, even if growth mindset strategies don't have the huge effect some initially promoted or hoped for, if selected thoughtfully and implemented with fidelity, they seem to have little downside.

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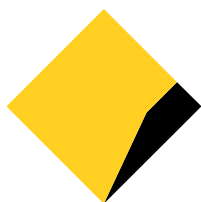
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