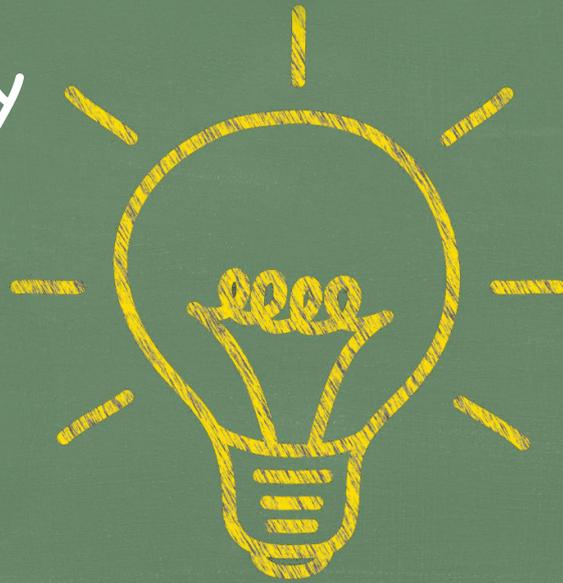


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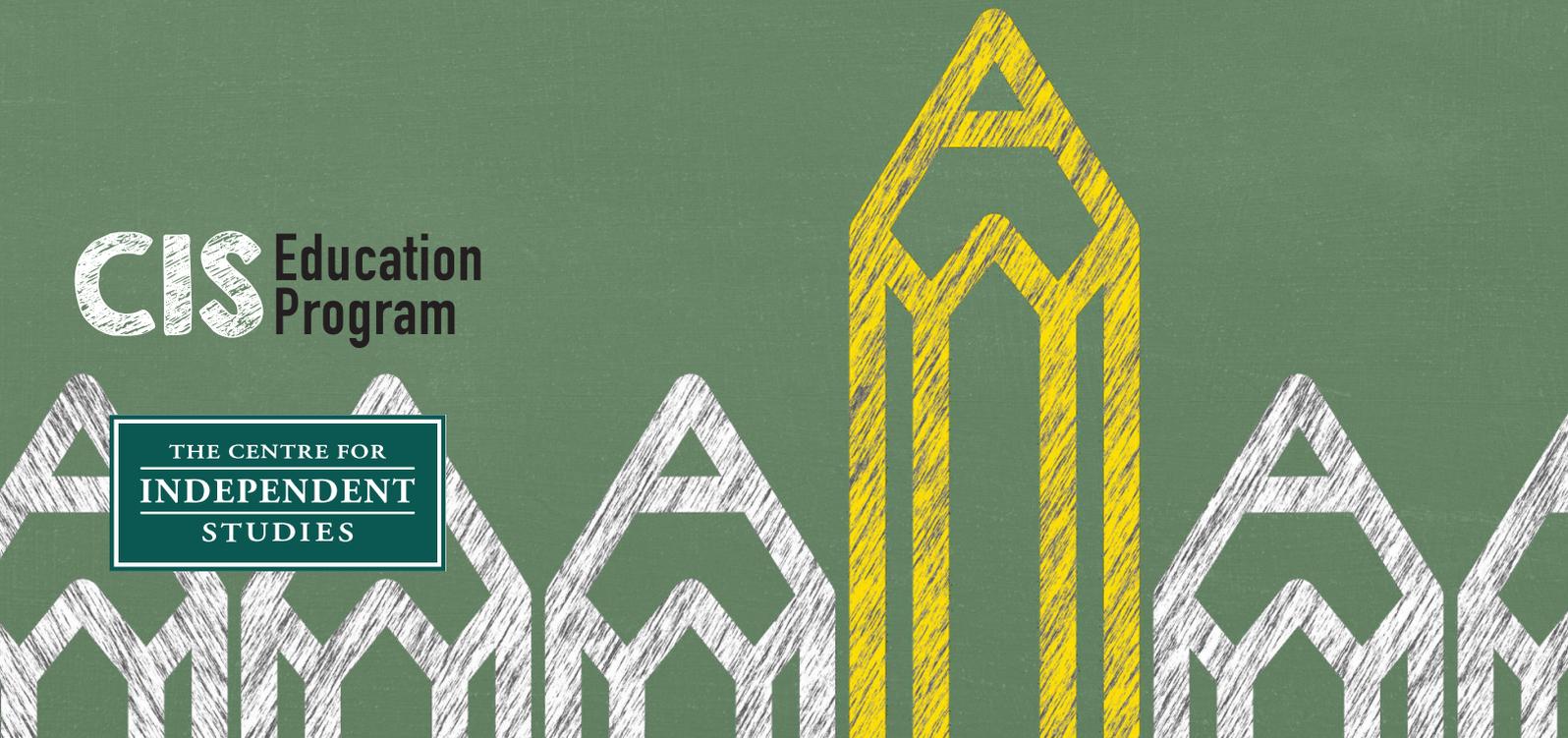
What Do Parents Want From Schools?

Glenn Fahey



CIS Education
Program

THE CENTRE FOR
INDEPENDENT
STUDIES





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POLICY Paper 26

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Executive Summary

Educational freedom and proper use of resources are both crucial in delivering the best outcomes for school students. This paper provides an insight into parental perspectives of the current state of school choice and resourcing. The research results reveal the areas of importance to parents and how they and their children could be better served by our education system.

The CIS commissioned YouGov to survey Australian parents with school-aged children. The data from the 1,010 surveyed parents relates to 1,394 children. In summary:

Parents believe their schools have enough resources

- 88% of parents think their child's school is at least adequately resourced. This includes 86% of the parents whose children attend government schools.
- A majority of parents across each school sector—government, Catholic, and Independent—think their child's school is 'well resourced' or 'very well resourced'.

Schools use resources well, but parents favour more flexible spending approaches

- A majority of parents across each school sector are 'very confident' or 'extremely confident' that their child's school uses its resources well.
- Parents with children in non-government schools are more likely to report high levels of confidence in how school resources are used (70%) than parents in government schools (56%).

Parents believe that system spending priorities are wrong

- The most common funding priority for parents is infrastructure and facilities (29%), followed by offering more extra-curricular activities (24%). These options are more popular than hiring more support staff (18%), increasing teachers' pay (15%), and hiring more teachers (14%).

Location is a key priority in choosing a school, but it's not the only one

- The most common priority reported by parents in choosing a school is location (61%), followed by facilities (48%), academic standards (47%), cost (39%), discipline (32%), interests (28%), special needs (13%), religion (12%), and whether a school is co-ed or single-sex (8%).
- 65% of parents choose the school closest to their home or work.

Most parents seek information when choosing a school

- Family and friends are the most common resources used by parents in making their school choice (53%), followed by school visits (52%), school websites (39%), school staff (32%), and the MySchool website (24%).

Many parents are limited in their choice a school

- 66% of parents report being limited in the school choices available to them.
- 81% of parents report having a government school option available to them, but only 42% have a Catholic school option and 43% have an Independent school option.

A significant proportion of parents regret their choice of school

- About 40% of parents say they would not choose the same school, or are unsure if they would.

- Parents with children in Catholic schools are most likely to say they would make the same school choice again, followed by parents with children in Independent schools, and then parents with children in government schools.

Implications for policy makers

- There should be less focus on *how much* school funding is spent, and more attention paid to *how* it is spent—since most Australian parents think their child's school is at least adequately resourced.
- School funding could be less tied to staffing decisions (remuneration and workforce numbers) and more focussed on ensuring the best facilities and learning activities are available to students.
- School spending decisions could be more devolved and transparent, as a way to increase parental confidence in their school's use of resources, particularly for government schools.
- State and territory governments should consider removing school location constraints on parents—such as restrictive zoning regulations.
- Strategies to make government school alternatives more affordable should be considered.
- Governments should assist parents in accessing helpful information to choose schools, such as by increasing awareness of the MySchool website, so more parents can make a better informed choice of school.

Introduction

Choice of school is among the most formative decisions for a student's education — and beyond: to their future job prospects, contribution to society as a citizen, and their interest in further learning. As consumers of education and guardians of their children's best interests, parents are central to education, especially when it comes to school choice; placing it among the core foundations of a free and open society.

Australians generally consider there to be a high degree of choice in the nation's schooling, thanks largely to the alternatives offered by the relatively large non-government sectors of schools. Around a third of Australian school students attend a non-government school, with proportionately more choosing this option for secondary education. In Australia, the unique tripartite system of schooling — with government, Catholic, and Independent sectors operating side-by-side — is enshrined in legislation and enjoys bipartisan political support. Unlike in some comparable countries, many non-government schools in Australia are relatively affordable, including the offer of many low-fee non-government school options.

Even so, for many parents the choices can be quite limited — particularly as a consequence of location and cost, which make some options prohibitive.

Other barriers are artificially imposed by government policies. For instance, within the government sector of schooling — responsible for educating around two-thirds of Australian school students — children are assigned to a school based on a family's place of residence under zoning regulations. This can make it very hard for parents to select schools other than the one that is closest to home, irrespective of their personal preferences.

Despite the promise of choice, many of the decisions about schools are made centrally and enforced on individual schools and school sectors. In addition, too many policy decisions in education are made to appease or satisfy the demands of vested interests — denying the interests of parents, and made at the expense of children's learning.

The CIS has long been committed to advancing educational freedom in Australia. This paper provides an insight into parental perspectives of the current state of school choice and resourcing, based on a survey of 1010 Australian parents that reveals the areas of importance to them — and how they and their children could be better served by our education system. Further CIS research will explore in greater detail options for policy makers to extend school choice in Australia.

Parents believe their schools have enough resources

Schools are funded by around \$60 billion in combined federal, state and territory public funding, for running expenses alone (that is, before funding for capital works).¹ This has been on a steep upward trajectory, particularly in terms of federal funding, in recent years.

Despite this, stakeholders and commentators routinely claim that schools in Australia are chronically under-resourced, which has led policy makers at federal, state and territory levels to deliver increases in public expenditure year on year. In the main, this has been spent on reducing class sizes (that is, by hiring more teachers) and increasing remuneration of teachers over recent decades.

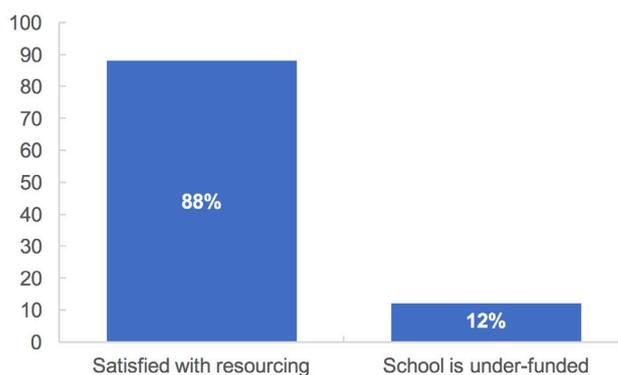
Advocacy for increased public funding has been driven by the union movement in particular, and has been fuelled by the 2011 Gonski Review. Its principal finding was that the school system required significant additional public funding — a view that has subsequently been endorsed with bipartisan political support, and particularly vocally during election campaigns.

The findings of this paper suggest that the overwhelming post-Gonski consensus among policy

makers is inconsistent with parents' perspectives, and they are giving little or no credence to claims that the government has allegedly 'cut' funding to disastrous levels.

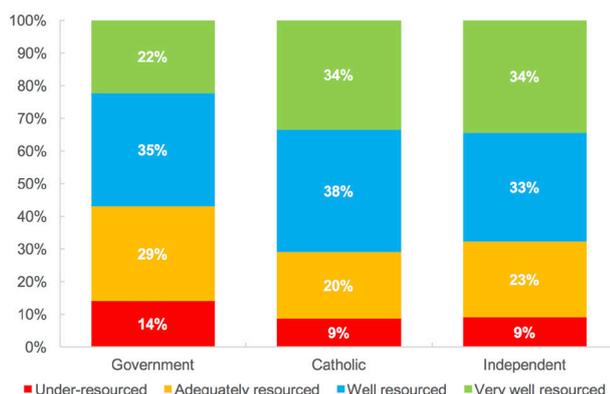
On the contrary, a vast majority of parents (88%) think their child's school is at least adequately resourced.

Parental perspectives on the adequacy of school resourcing



Beyond the adequacy of funding, most parents across each school system feel their chosen school is 'well resourced' or 'very well resourced'. More than four times as many parents of children in government schools report that their school is 'well resourced' or 'very well resourced', compared to those who responded that theirs was under-funded.

Parental perspectives on level of resourcing, by school sector



This should serve as a warning to policy makers that school resourcing policy decisions—for some time committed to constant increases in public

spending—do not reflect parents' views of the school system. Yet for almost all of the last decade, the education policy debate has been premised on the allegation that government schools, in particular, are significantly under-resourced. This stands in stark contrast to the finding that just 14% of parents with children in government schools agree with this claim.

Of course, this is not the same as saying that parents don't want, or wouldn't like, more funding for schools—as is the case with almost every area of government, the desire for more money is more or less unlimited—but there is no evidence of a broad-based dissatisfaction with current levels of school resourcing.

Two potential explanations for these findings should be dispensed before drawing conclusions about this data. The first is that the massive increases in funding in recent years have made a significant difference in parents' perceptions of resourcing. This is possible; however, there has been no diminution in the level of advocacy for more funding by those in the sector—which makes this conclusion unlikely.

The other possibility is that parents are simply ignorant about the state of the education system. However, there is little reason to accept this conclusion—and there is plenty of evidence that the problems in the education system are not the result of inadequate funding.

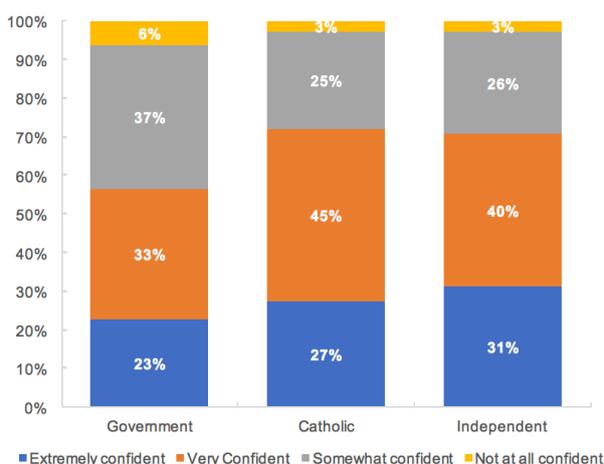
Schools use resources well, but parents favour more flexible spending

Parents' perceptions of the use of school resources is key to accountability. However, there is little transparency at the school level, particularly in government schools, in relation to spending decisions—in part due to the greater level of centralised decision-making undertaken by education departments. In this survey, parents were asked to reflect how confident they are about how their chosen school uses its funding.

While, overall, a majority of parents are 'very confident' or 'extremely confident' that their chosen school uses funds well, there is a significant difference between the government and non-government school sectors.

Only 56% of parents with children in government schools report high levels of confidence with the use of resources. By contrast more than 70% of parents in the non-government sector are 'very confident' or 'extremely confident' that their chosen school uses their funds well. And though the numbers are small, twice as many parents in the government sector suggest they are 'not at all confident' their school uses resources well—meaning there is little confidence

Parental confidence in resource use, by school sector



in the use of around \$3 billion of public funding for government schools and around \$0.5 billion for non-government schools. Since most government schools receive considerably higher taxpayer funding than most non-government schools, confidence that funds are well dispensed in the government school system is especially important.

These findings also run counter to community and political concerns that are sometimes raised with respect to the relatively opaque distribution of funding in Catholic systems.

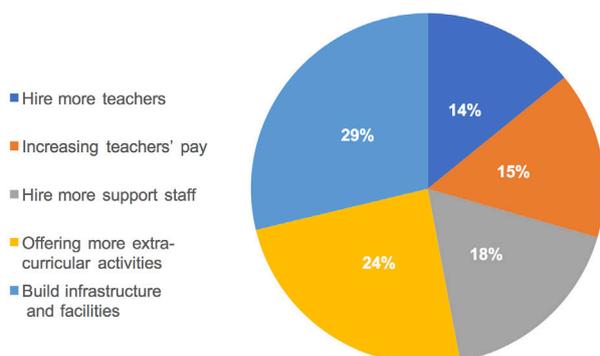
In addition, parents who chose an Independent school were most likely to report being 'extremely confident' in the use of the school's resources. Given that Independent schools are mostly run and administered outside a 'system'—affiliated schools that are collectively and more centrally administered—this may reflect parents having greater confidence in this model of more localised governance.

In some other school systems, parents (through their representative school boards) play a greater role in assisting spending decisions. However, this is not particularly common in Australia. Greater involvement of parents in schools' decision-making—particularly government schools—would make spending more transparent and accountable. The popularity of independent public schools² in Western Australia and Queensland in recent years demonstrates there is a willingness of parental communities (and school leaders) to be more engaged in school governance—rather than relying on education departments to make centralised expenditure decisions.

Parents believe that system spending priorities are wrong

Parents were asked to rank (from 1-5) possible areas for schools to spend money: hiring more teachers; increasing teachers' pay; hiring more support staff; building infrastructure and facilities; and offering more extra-curricular activities. This is an important consideration, since much policy discussion of education finance tends to be preoccupied with funding *amounts*, rather than *how* funds are to be spent.

Parental spending priorities of schools, by first ranking



Vocal stakeholders—such as teachers' unions and their supporters—have long been outspoken in advocating for increasing teachers' pay and boosting the school workforce (particularly teachers, and to a lesser extent, support staff). This is despite international evidence³ that has repeatedly concluded that Australian teachers are generally well-remunerated in comparison to their international peers, and that class sizes do not need further reductions (implying little need for additional teachers).

Among the drivers of a larger school workforce has been a mistaken belief that reducing class sizes

would remedy poor educational achievement of students—again contrary to international evidence that has concluded that there is no association between the two.⁴ Reducing class sizes over recent decades has increased the number of teachers—in most school systems in Australia there are expected student-teacher ratios that are responsible for this employment growth. However, contrary to this trend, hiring more teachers is the least popular spending priority of parents surveyed (14%)—followed narrowly by increasing teachers' pay (15%).

This goes against claims that increasing teacher salaries and numbers are of concern to Australian parents. The fact that, of the five available responses, hiring more teachers and boosting pay were the least supported options suggests that while parents are satisfied overall with the spending of funds at a school level, there is far less support for the system wide spending priorities.

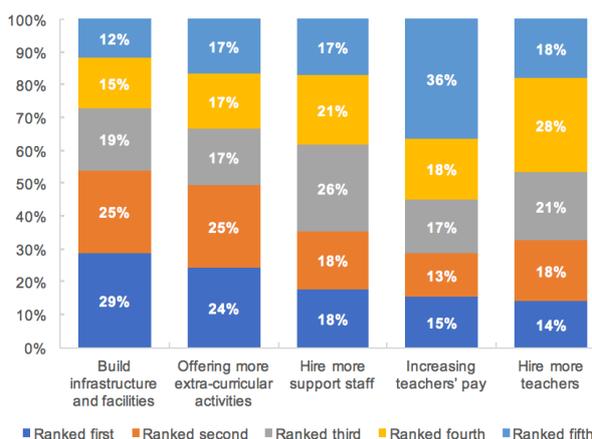
Of course, this is not to imply there aren't a great many teachers who ought to be better rewarded (high performers, for instance) and that there aren't particular areas in which more teachers are in high demand (particularly those with subject area shortages and filling positions in 'hard-to-service' locations).

Regardless of that point, there appears to be a stronger case that parents wish to see resources committed to ensuring schools are better equipped to support learning opportunities for students—including more facilities and activities. In contrast to the relative lack of support for teacher resourcing, 73% of surveyed parents ranked building infrastructure and facilities in their top three preferences, while 67% had offering more extra-curricular activities in their top three preferences.

However, in some ways this is consistent with the findings above regarding the adequacy of resourcing. Additional infrastructure and facilities, and especially extra-curricular activities, enhance and supplement the core offerings of the school. If schools were significantly under-resourced, there would be more support for additional staff to fulfil the core roles of the school.

Taken together, polling results reveal little evidence that Australian parents are concerned that schools are generally under-resourced. They also do not appear to believe that increasing teachers' pay and numbers represent the best use of schools' available resources—instead, supplying facilities and activities for students are more highly rated. While confidence in how schools use resources is generally high, it is lower in government schools than in non-government schools, and in schools perceived to be relatively well-resourced, rather than those perceived as relatively under-resourced.

Parental spending priorities of schools, by ranking (1-5)



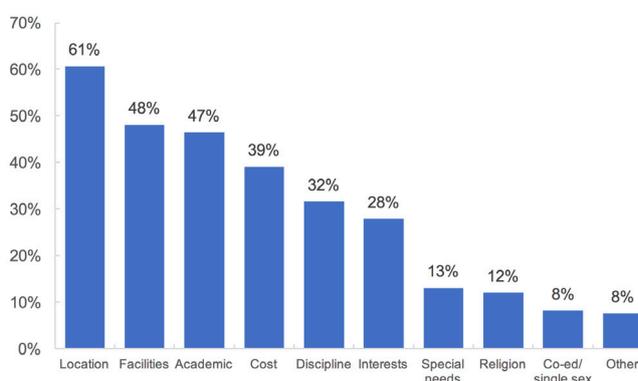
Location is a key priority in choosing a school, but it's not the only one

Parents were asked to report the top priorities (ranking up to three) in choosing a school based on common considerations.

By far the most important priority reported by parents is a school's location. Being at a school that is close to home can mean shorter commutes and better proximity to local amenities such as recreational activities and children's social networks. However, location convenience may not exclusively mean the closest school to home; it can include schools that coincide with a parent's trip to work, location of other family members, or convenient public transportation routes.

Almost half of surveyed parents reported school facilities (48%) and the academic focus (47%) among their top three priorities in searching for a school. Other commonly reported priorities of parents were cost, approach to discipline, and fit with their child's interests.

Reasons selected by parents for choosing school



Most parents are engaged in choosing a school, but not all search extensively

Choosing a school is not a decision taken lightly by most parents. It often involves considerable time, effort, and consideration. For many parents, the search for a school is not only time-consuming, but one where decisions are made well in advance of actual attendance. Previous surveys⁵ of parents have reported that 42% parents started to explore their options for secondary school prior to their children commencing primary school. Another poll of parents⁶ with children in Independent schools found that 65% started their decision-making process at least two years before their child commenced school—including 24% who started before or from their child’s birth.

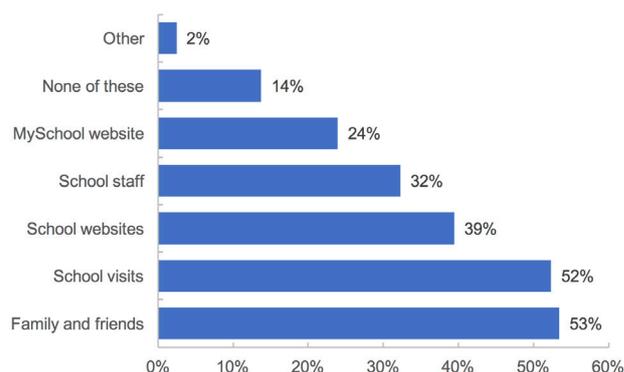
Parents now have many more resources to support their decision-making than in the past. With more access to such support, parents are empowered to make more informed choices. But not all parents have equal access or opportunities to use resources in supporting their choice—due in part to time, geographic, knowledge, or financial constraints.

Survey respondents were asked to report which of a range of common resources they used during their search for a school. Only a minority of parents (14%) reported not using any of the listed resources. Analysis of polling data revealed that parents living outside major cities, those with a child attending a government school, those who selected the local school, and those with more than one child, are more likely to report not using any of the listed resources in aiding their choice.

A majority of parents (53%) consult their friends and family and/or make school visits in informing their

choice. Many parents also consult school websites and meet with school staff. Only 24% used the MySchool website⁷—which may suggest that concerns about excessive reliance on that source of information may be exaggerated.

Resources used by parents to support choosing a school



Polling results reveal that parents in lower income households and those with an adult out of work conduct less extensive searches when it comes to choosing a school—particularly reporting lesser reliance on the MySchool website, school websites, school visits, or on family and friends in making choices. A lack of school choice can be a potential source of inter-generational education disadvantage; so assisting families in conducting an informed search for school is a matter of significance for policy makers.

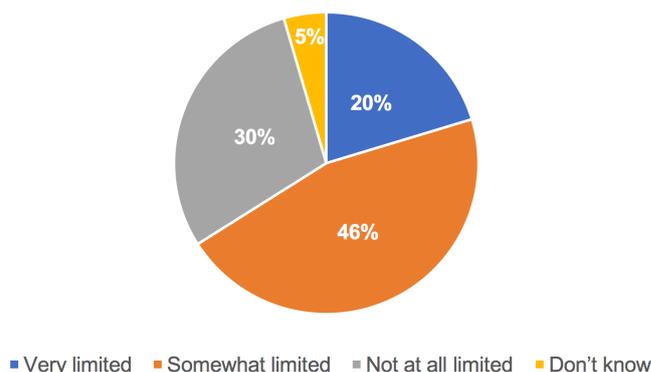
Most parents are limited in choosing a school

Having considered the decision-making process taken by parents in choosing a school, parents were also asked to reflect on the level of choice they experienced during their search for a school, and how happy they are with their chosen school.

The responses reveal that choice in schooling is a luxury enjoyed only by a minority—just 30% of parents report not facing any constraints, while 66% report facing limitations in the choices available to them—including 20% that report being ‘very limited’ in choice of school.

Parents are primarily limited by location and, in the case of non-government schools as an alternative, by cost.

Level of constraint in parents’ choice



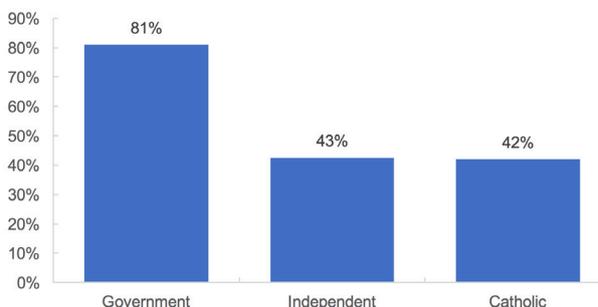
While most parents report having access to a government school, they were around half as likely to report having non-government school alternatives to choose from. This may be due to lesser availability of non-government schools in some regions, financial constraints to meet the expense of fees, waiting lists for enrolments, or religious affiliation mismatches that limit families' choices.

However, limited availability of schools is far from unique to the non-government sectors. In some jurisdictions, some government schools may be unavailable to families because they are partially or fully selective (due to academic or other ability exclusions). For others, their assigned local school may not necessarily be the most suitable—such as having an inconvenient commute, or being inconsistent with a child's interest and/or needs, or a family's values.

Residence-based school assignment can also limit diversity by segregating students according to their place of residence, because local areas tend to share similar demographics. This has implications for urban policy because parents who are wealthier, and more mobile, tend to make housing decisions in order to reside in better-off areas and enrol in local schools*—a process referred to as 'social stratification'.

In combination with the high levels of parents reporting limited choices, poll results indicate that parents are far more constrained within the tripartite system of school options than is sometimes assumed.

School sectors available to parents



Households with higher incomes are more likely not to be constrained in their choice, however most parents express being limited, irrespective of income. The research found 68% of parents in households with incomes of under \$100,000 and 64% in households over \$100,000 are limited—including 60% households of over \$150,000. Catholic schools, in particular, appear to be the most out of reach for parents that are concerned about cost, as well as those in single parent households and those with a parent out of work.

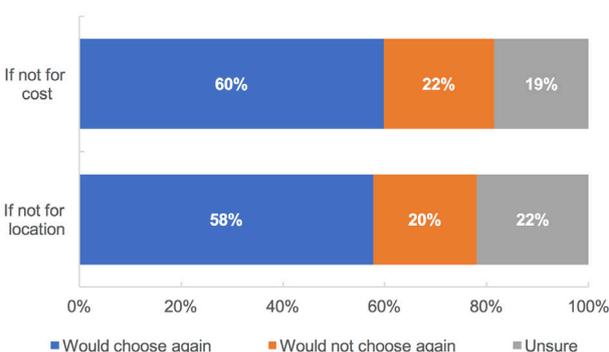
Many parents regret their choice of school

Parents were asked to respond whether they would choose the same school again if they did not face cost or location constraints. This provides a more accurate indication of the degree of satisfaction that parents have with their chosen school than is employed in other generic surveys of satisfaction levels (where there is no alternative presented). It is also relevant because cost and location constraints are potentially within the capability of policy makers to address.

If not for the barriers presented by cost and location, a majority of parents would choose the same school again—however 42% are either unsure or would not choose the same school again regardless of location, and 41% regardless of cost. This indicates both that cost and location may limit parents from choosing their desired school, and that parents are not always satisfied with the experience at the chosen school.

This means that there is a considerable cohort of parents who are cost- and/or location-constrained and are not happy with their choice of school. There are nearly 3.9 million children in Australian schools⁹, which means that around 1.6 million are in a school that their parents either outright regret choosing or are hesitant to endorse.

Parents' intentions to select the same school if they had their time again



Parents who chose a Catholic school were most likely to choose the same school again (70%), compared to government schools (57%), if it weren't for cost.

Policy implications

The parents surveyed for this research into school choice and school funding have provided comprehensive data that explains their decision-making and identifies numerous policy implications. Key findings from this survey, combined with further research material, will inform specific policy recommendations in papers subsequent to this one.

Implications for school funding levels

A significant majority of parents regard their chosen schools as having enough or more than enough funding. The findings suggest that for policy makers to argue for increased school funding would not reflect the priorities of parents—or, by extension, voters and taxpayers. Moreover, despite claims of some stakeholders, such as trade unions, parents do not appear to be in favour of increasing teachers' pay as a priority—including those who perceive their schools to be under-funded.

Spending priorities nominated by most parents are school facilities and school-based extra-curricular activities. This may indicate that parents would prefer to see any further funding increases—and changes to local decision-making—directed towards these two areas instead. This means parents would support a reduction in the close nexus between overall school funding and staffing expenditure—which accounts for up to three-quarters of a school's total expenditure.¹⁰

Implications for devolution and transparency of school spending decisions

Parents who chose a government school reported that they were less confident about their school's use of resources. This could be because government schools, compared to their non-government counterparts, tend to have less transparent practices with respect to school-level expenditure decisions.

Government schools belong and report to a centralised system, with lower fees; whereas parents with children enrolled at non-government schools typically make a greater financial contribution. Fees and other charges are well publicised and annual reports include statements of expenditure on facilities, staffing, activities and other costs.

There are implications for the expectations of government schools and the support provided to principals in relation to budgetary decisions and reporting. Government schools could replicate some of the practices of non-government schools that enjoy greater autonomy in decision-making and have school-level staff (rather than department-level) dedicated to managing finances.

Greater transparency in this area is likely to give parents greater confidence in schools' use of resources. Policy makers might consider expanding the application of governance models such as the Independent Public Schools Initiative, which offers school leaders and parent bodies greater authority over how their schools are run and resources are allocated and spent.¹¹

Implications for location-based constraints to parental choice

A majority (61%) of parents nominated location amongst their priorities in choosing a school, but the results also indicate that zoning may be constraining parents' choice of school.

If school choice is a genuine policy commitment, and the special role of parents and guardians is paramount in decision-making, the location of a preferred school should not be a barrier. Relaxing zoning rules and improving transportation are obvious solutions, as is government support for the construction of new schools that offer sectoral alternatives.

Implications for access and affordability

Better provision of financial support for parents—particularly through more direct linkage between students and funding, rather than through block arrangements—would enable greater choice and less reliance on government-run schools.

The CIS has previously proposed¹² offering bursaries for students in low income households to use at non-government schools, which would reduce the burden of additional fees on parents who would otherwise not be able to make payments. This policy would not only address parents' concerns identified in our polling that low income families face greater barriers to school choice but—if properly targeted—would not

increase the burden on taxpayers. Though taxpayer subsidies for non-government schools already partly reduce their school fees, governments provide substantially more financial assistance to government schools—which means moving students from the government sector into the non-government sector saves money.

In other areas of public policy, such as health insurance, government recognises there is a benefit from encouraging consumers to lessen the burden on the public system provider and provides means tested assistance to maximise that benefit. Bursaries to incentivise parents to choose an alternative to the government system would be a more efficient strategy for improving affordability than increasing subsidies.

Implications for assisting parents with choosing a school

Analysis of the data found that confident decision-making is about more than just location, cost and availability of schools—the search process undertaken by parents also plays an important role.

Parents who make more informed choices for schools are more likely to be satisfied with their choice. In particular, parents who utilise the MySchool website are much more likely to choose the same school again. Despite concerns from some sections of

the community about possible adverse impacts of parents being informed by the information offered by MySchool, the CIS polling results indicate that it does aid in school decision-making and leads to satisfaction with the choice of school.

Many parents reported low levels of satisfaction with their choice of school—indeed, without cost and location constraints, many said they would not choose the same school again. A greater understanding of the choices and better access to resources to inform decisions around schooling could reduce the incidence of parents making choices that they later regret.

Feedback from the respondents indicates that additional support for some parents to make decisions about schools for their children would be beneficial. For example, additional decision-making support could be provided to parents experiencing employment stress, because households experiencing such difficulties appear to be less engaged in decisions about schools, and this has clear implications for their children. Job search programmes and similar initiatives could identify households with children approaching school age, offering support for parents to engage more fully in the process of choosing schools.

One significant, potential outcome of greater parental involvement in children’s schooling—including in the school search process—is a reduction in intergenerational educational disadvantage.

Appendix 1: Polling methodology and school sampling

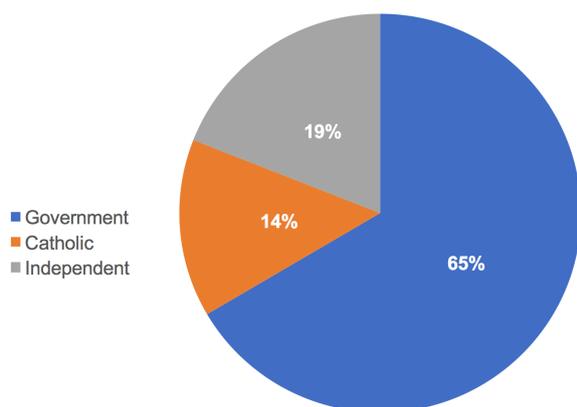
The Centre for Independent Studies (CIS) commissioned YouGov to survey Australian parents with school-aged children over the period 14-17 October 2019. Respondents were geographically distributed to ensure representativeness across the Australian population. 1,010 parents responded to this survey and their responses were related to 1,394 children — as parents with more than one child were permitted to provide responses for at most two children.

The poll conducted surveyed families across Australia, across each school sector and with representation of both parents in major (72%) and non-major cities (28%). The number of respondents in each state or territory was restricted so that each was represented proportionally to the population. Results from the polling are more fully detailed in the sub-sections below.

School sector chosen

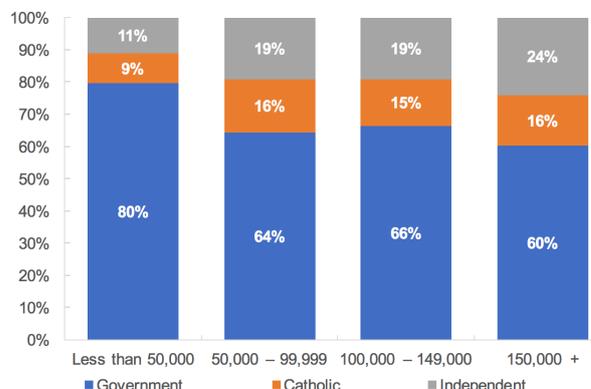
The sample returned a relatively high proportion of respondents who had chosen an Independent school for their child, and relatively few that had chosen a Catholic school — compared to official enrolment numbers nationally. There were also a relatively high number of respondents in non-major cities from the Catholic sector (19 per cent), compared to in major cities (13 per cent).

School selected by parents, by sector



Government schools were chosen across all household income levels. Three in five children in surveyed households earning over \$150,000 are in government schools, while four in five are in households earning under \$50,000.

Sector of school attended, by household income



School type chosen

The research found that 31% of parents enrolled their child is in a school that has some religious affiliation. This is especially high for those in years 7-10 (around 38%, compared to 27% for primary and 30% for senior secondary).

Nearly a quarter of parents (24%) reports that their child is in a school that is partly or fully selective.

Partly selective schools are most popular for K-6 (16%, compared with 10% for senior secondary). The research showed that fully selective schools are most popular for years 7-10 (16%, compared to 6% in senior secondary and 8% in K-6), and that households with only one child in school are much more likely to have a child attending a selective school (31% compared to 18%).

15% of parents report that their child is in a school with a specialisation (for instance, in sports, arts, technology, and the like). This is especially high for 7-10 (19 per cent, compared to 13% in senior secondary and 14% in K-6).

11% of parents report that their child is in a school chosen in order to address their special needs.

Compared to those not in the five major capital cities, the polling showed that children in major cities are:

- More than twice as likely to attend a selective school
- Nearly twice as likely to attend a specialist school
- Around 50% more likely to attend a special needs school

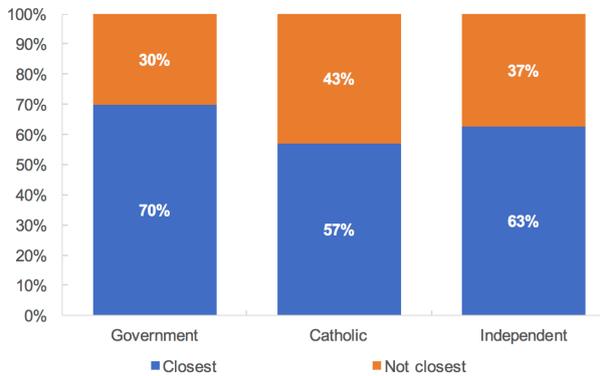
School commute

The research showed that 65% of students attend their closest school to home or work. The rates are particularly high for students at government schools and lower for students attending Catholic schools.

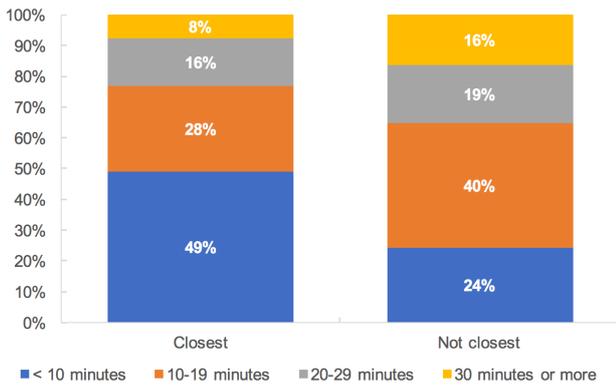
Nearly half (49%) of children covered in the polling who attend their local school commute for under 10 minutes, but only 24% of students not attending the local school are within a 10 minute commute. However, 64% of those not attending the local school commute for under 20 minutes (compared to 77% for those attending the local school). This suggests that attending a school other than the closest one does not mean that children are generally taking on an excessively long commute.

A short commute is more likely outside of major cities—51% of students outside of major cities commute for under 10 minutes.

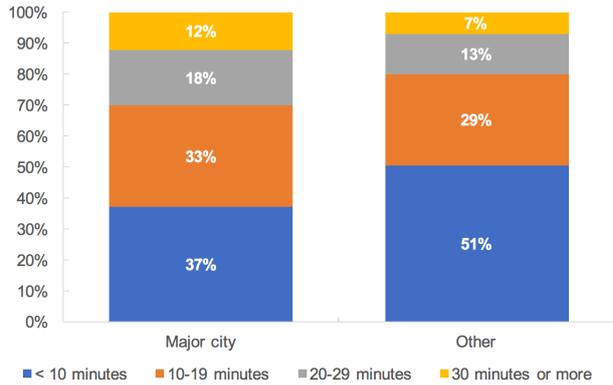
Attendance at local school, by school sector



Average travel time to school, by school proximity



Average travel time to school, by major city or other city



Appendix 2: Research demographics

Demographics of respondent (%) by school sector

	Gender of parent	
	Male	Female
Government	61	69
Independent	21	16
Catholic	16	13
None of the above	2	2
N	666	728

	Age of parent			
	18-29	30-39	40-49	50+
Government	53	67	65	69
Independent	32	19	18	16
Catholic	13	12	16	13
None of the above	2	2	2	3
N	87	547	600	160

	State				
	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA
Government	62	67	67	77	64
Independent	22	15	20	14	22
Catholic	15	16	13	8	8
None of the above	1	2	0	1	6
N	425	376	261	112	144

	Major city	
	Yes	Other city
Government	65	66
Independent	21	13
Catholic	13	18
None of the above	1	3
N	1011	383

	Household size (number of people)			
	2	3	4	5 or more
Government	63	62	67	67
Independent	20	20	18	18
Catholic	11	16	14	14
None of the above	6	2	1	1
N	94	352	610	338

	Working Status		
	Full time	Part time	Not working
Government	60	73	75
Independent	22	13	13
Catholic	17	12	7
None of the above	1	2	5
N	852	233	309

	Highest Education Level		
	No tertiary	Trade/ TAFE	University
Government	75	73	59
Independent	11	9	25
Catholic	11	16	14
None of the above	3	2	1
N	245	337	812

	Annual Household Income			
	<\$50k	\$50k - \$99k	\$100k - \$149k	\$150k+
Government	75	64	66	60
Independent	10	19	19	24
Catholic	9	16	15	16
None of the above	6	1	1	1
N	240	479	391	193

	School year		
	K1 - Year 6	Year 7 - 10	Year 11 & 12
Government	70	56	69
Independent	16	24	16
Catholic	12	18	12
None of the above	2	1	3
N	685	472	237

	Child's position in family		
	Older child	Younger child	Only child
Government	65	66	65
Independent	18	18	19
Catholic	16	14	13
None of the above	1	2	2
N	384	384	626

	Religion				
	No religion	Anglican	Catholic	Other Christian	Other religion
Government	82	67	40	60	66
Independent	12	14	21	30	26
Catholic	4	17	39	9	5
None of the above	2	2	0	1	3
N	550	138	321	210	175

	Household type: parents' employment status					
	All in paid work	One in paid work, one not	None in paid work	Single in paid work	Single not in paid work	None of the above
Government	64	70	57	61	72	84
Independent	18	17	22	24	15	5
Catholic	17	11	15	14	8	0
None of the above	1	2	6	1	6	11
N	648	354	87	197	89	19

Appendix 3: Survey questions

Important reasons for choosing school

Q: What were the most important reasons that influenced your decision in choosing this school?

Reasons for choosing school (top 2)	% of respondents
Location	49
Academic focus	34
School facilities	29
Cost	25
School discipline	19
Child's interest	18
Catering for special needs	9
Religion	8
Single sex/co-education	5
Other	3
N	1370

Resources used to help in choosing school

Q: Did you use any of the following to help you with your decision?

	% of respondents
Family, friends, colleagues, etc...	53
School visits	52
School websites	39
The school staff	32
The MySchool website	24
None of these	14
Other	2
N	1370

Parents' limitation to choice

Q: Would you say you were limited or not limited with the amount of choices available to you?

	Total
Very limited	20
Somewhat limited	46
Not at all limited	29
Don't know	5
N	1370

Parents' satisfaction with choice

Q: If cost was not a factor to you, would you have enrolled your child in the same school?

	% of respondents**
Yes	60
No	22
Don't know	19
N	545

** only respondents that indicated that cost was a priority in choosing school were asked this follow up question.

Q: If location was not a factor to you, would you have enrolled your child in the same school?

	% of respondents***
Yes	58
No	20
Don't know	22
N	846

***only respondents that indicated that location was a priority in choosing school were asked this follow up question

Proximity of chosen school to home or work

Q: Is the school your child is currently attending the closest one to where you live or work?

	% of respondents
Yes	65
No	33
Don't know	2
N	1370

Q: How much time does it normally take for you to travel to this school?

	% of respondents
Less than 10 minutes	41
10 to 19 minutes	32
20 to 29 minutes	17
30 to 39 minutes	8
40 to 59 minutes	2
1 to 1.5 hours	0
More than 1.5 hours	0
N	1370

Parents' perspectives on resourcing

Q: How would you rate the level of resources available at this school to meet your child's needs?

	% of respondents
It is very well resourced	26
It is well resourced	34
It is adequately resourced	26
It is somewhat under-resourced	8
It is very under-resourced	4
Don't know	1
N	1370

Q: How confident are you that the funds available to this school are being well spent?

	% of respondents
Extremely confident	24
Very Confident	34
Somewhat confident	32
Not at all confident	5
Unsure	6
N	1370

Q: If more funding were provided to the school your child is currently attending, which of the following should be prioritised?

	Ranked first	Ranked second	Ranked third	Ranked fourth	Ranked fifth
Build infrastructure and facilities	29	25	19	15	12
Offering more extra-curricular activities	24	25	17	17	17
Hire more support staff	18	18	26	21	17
Increasing teachers' pay	15	13	17	18	36
Hire more teachers	14	18	21	28	18

Endnotes

- 1 <https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia-data-portal/school-funding>.
- 2 Independent public schools are government schools that operate with additional levels of decision-making autonomy and with more involvement of community members and parents. The Australian Government introduced an Independent Public Schools Initiative in 2014 under the Students First package https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/ips_info_for_schools_310114.pdf to provide funding to encourage public schools to become more independent and involve parents and the community in decision making processes. There are around 250 independent public schools in Queensland and 524 in Western Australia that preceded the federal government's program.
- 3 OECD (2019). Education at a Glance 2019, OECD Publishing, Paris, <<https://doi.org/10.1787/f8d7880d-en>>.
- 4 OECD (2012). Education Indicators in Focus – 2012/09 (November): How does class size vary around the world?, <<http://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/EDIF%202012--N9%20FINAL.pdf>>.
- 5 Australian Scholarships Group (2019). ASG Parents Report Card 2018/19: Australian parents' perceptions of the state of education in Australia, Oakleigh, Victoria.
- 6 Independent Schools Queensland (2019). What parents want: An Independent Schools Queensland survey, February 2019, Spring Hill, Queensland.
- 7 The My School website is a resource for parents, educators and the community to find information about each of Australia's schools. The My School website <https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/my-school-website> includes: easy-to-use school profile pages with key facts and figures; a map / school location function; financial information for each school; an indication of students' literacy and numeracy achievement as they progress through school; and students' NAPLAN performance over a number of years.
- 8 See, for instance, Black, Sandra E. and Machin, S. (2011), "Housing Valuations of School Performance", in Eric A. Hanushek, Stephen Machin, L. (ed.), Handbook of the Economics of Education, Volume 3, Elsevier, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-444-53429-3.00010-7>.
- 9 Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019). Schools, Australia, 2018, cat no. 4221.0, released 8/03/2019.
- 10 Productivity Commission (2019). Report on Government Services 2019: School education, Part B Chapter 4.
- 11 On school autonomy, see, for instance, Woessmann, L, Ludemann, E, Schultz, G, West, M, 2007. 'School Accountability, Autonomy, Choice, and the Level of Student Achievement: International Evidence from PISA 2003.' *OECD Working Papers No. 13*. OECD Publishing.
- 12 Buckingham, J. (2009). School funding on a budget, Centre for Independent Studies Target 30 Paper, Sydney < <https://www.cis.org.au/app/uploads/2015/07/t30.09.pdf> >.

About the Author



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Glenn Fahey is a Research Fellow in Education Policy, with a particular focus on education finance and accountability. Prior to joining the CIS, Glenn has held both policy- and research-intensive positions at the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (OECD), Institute for Public Policy and Governance (University of Technology Sydney), and the Australian Treasury. Most recently, Glenn's work has included conceptual development of an accountability framework to support strategic governance of education systems across OECD countries. Glenn's work has been published in academic journals including: *Policy and Politics*, *Public Administration Quarterly*, and *Public Finance and Management*, as well as in the *OECD Education Working Paper Series*. Glenn has been awarded a Master of Economics (University of New England), Master of International Relations (University of New South Wales), Bachelor of Economics (University of New South Wales), and Bachelor of Social Science (University of New South Wales)

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