

Rethinking Australia's Education System-Equity, Fairness & Choice

The Issue: Inequity in the Australian School System.

Australia has one of the most segregated school systems in the OECD. Its hybrid public private framework is unlike anywhere else in the world, and it is not fit for purpose. Our education system is failing our young people.

Once, the overall social mix in Australian public schools was similar to the total population; now almost twice as many government school students come from low-income families as from high income families. Taxpayer-fuelled resource advantages help some schools attract high-performing students, while unregulated enrolment practices and ever-increasing fees exclude children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The result is we are increasingly creating winners and losers amongst our children and families.

Many similar countries have ensured a more equitable education for every student, while allowing a diversity of schools to best meet student needs. The experience of these countries, and their success in international education rankings, suggests alternatives for Australia.

Background:

Ten years after the Gonksi Review into school funding we have still not implemented the recommendation that all students are supported with the resources they need to succeed.

However, there are new perspectives emerging in debates about schools, in part due to mounting concerns about student achievement. Recent concerns, (including from the [Federal Government's Review paper](#)), refer to the increasing segregation of school enrolments; and unequal access to quality resources by level of student advantage.

Inequity and enrolment segregation are seen as contributing to a disproportionate impact of student peers on overall student outcomes. These are systemic issues and point to the need for solutions beyond the individual school level. They are becoming increasingly prominent.

We need to know what policies and strategies might slow and then reverse this segregation trend. Some will emerge in 2024 as the next National Schools Resource Agreement is proposed and debated. A number of publications and think tanks, including [Choice and Fairness](#) from Australian Learning Lecture (ALL), are working on solutions.

The Solution:

To turn Australia's educational performance around and close the unacceptable gaps between students from different backgrounds, we need to effect three changes.

First, we need to fund all schools based on educational need.

Second, we need to ensure children from disadvantaged backgrounds be given a chance to thrive in more socio-economically mixed schools.

Third, we need to create a system where schools compete, not on their ability to attract additional resources and the right students, but on their capacity to help each child achieve a full year of learning, every year, and to realise their full potential.

A solution to these three essential changes is to establish a common framework of responsibilities and obligations to ensure that **all** schools have public obligations in return for public funding from Commonwealth and state governments.

Australia can learn from high performing comparable countries including New Zealand, Canada, Scotland, Belgium and the Netherlands. These countries show that it is possible to provide choice and diversity of schools to parents and students while limiting segregation and maximising equity and effectiveness.

In these countries:

- it is common for faith-based and other non-government schools to be fully publicly funded and free;
- public funding must be accompanied by public obligations to maximise equity;
- public monies do not provide some children with privileges which are not available to others; and
- the public does not fund schools that are only available to the few.

The Ask:

To drive the conversation and stimulate policy change Leading Educators Around the Planet (LEAP) is developing a ten-day study tour from 6 – 15 October to several Canadian provinces (Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia) to learn more and experience how other countries and jurisdictions have managed the challenge of choice, equity and effectiveness.

It is being developed in association with Australian Learning Lecture, and will be linked to other participating organisations, in part through online and face-to-face meetings with key educators.

Tour participants will explore how other countries and jurisdictions are managing efforts to achieve a greater mix of students in each school, improvement, or at the very least no decline, in student outcomes, a sustainable balance between schooling equity and parental choice, and a widely supported framework of schools and school funding policy.

Outcomes and outputs

The tour will conclude with the development of a policy communique and other policy briefing materials. Media will be sought during the tour and afterwards. Daily blogs and social media posts will occur. A roundtable of research leaders, policy makers and educators will be held in late 2024 to further build on *Choice and Fairness: A common framework for Australian schools* using lessons learned from the tour.

Attendees

Participants will include leaders from schools, principals' associations, and policy leaders.

Projected tour and post tour costs

Projected costs – 12 attendees	
7 participants @\$10,000 pp <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - internal airfares - accommodation - transfers 	\$70,000
2 participants \$5,000 pp (partially self/ organisation funded)	\$10,000
Study tour management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - flight and transfer arrangements - liaising with accommodation 	\$4,000
Design and printing tour program and briefing materials	\$1,000
Blogs, social media and other publicity on tour	\$2,000
Communique <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - design, development and printing - distribution - communication 	\$4,000
Post-tour roundtable – 20 people maximum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - hybrid online and face to face - event management - catering - venue 	\$8,000
Panel/ forum for public and other interested stakeholders Hybrid/ online and face to face <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - venue - catering - audiovisual management 	\$4,000
Total projected costs	\$103,000
GST	
Total plus GST	\$10,300
	\$113,300

Note:

All participants will book and pay for their international flights to and from Canada.

All participants will pay for own meals and sundries.

An estimated 3 participants will be fully paid to undertake the tour.

The figures are based on 12 participants.

About the Australian Learning Lecture and Koshland Foundation

The Australian Learning Lecture is a ten-year initiative by Koshland Education Innovation designed to bring big ideas and new approaches in education to national attention. ALL acts as a hub and a catalyst, working with the world's leading knowledge shapers to drive impact in key areas of need for change. It draws on the input of multiple voices and stakeholders to strengthen the importance of learning for all Australians. ALL is not politically or commercially aligned.

OUR IMPACT PROGRAM

Each lecture introduces a big new idea which is supported by an impact program. The program is designed to show that big ideas are possible in practice, to create awareness of the need for a learning culture and to build engagement with learning.

KOSHLAND EDUCATION INNOVATION

Koshland Education Innovation Ltd is an incorporated association with charitable status committed to research in education to benefit all children. The Australian Learning Lecture is proudly supported by the Koshland Innovation Extension Fund, a sub fund of Australian Communities Foundation.