My School Australia Case Study

Graduate Capstone Project

School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University

Diana Engel Gerbase
Chiara Lawry
Sarah Lux-Lee
Surya Kiran Palukuri
Hannah Poquette
Vincent Lee Quan

Adviser: Dr. Hans-Martin Boehmer

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Authors' Biographies

Diana Engel Gerbase is graduating with a Management Specialization. She is currently launching a social venture in Brazil called Praxis in the field of civic education and youth civic engagement. She has a background in business development, management and strategy consulting and holds a Bachelor's Degree in Economics from Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil.

Chiara Lawry is graduating with a Master of Public Administration, concentrating in Urban Policy. Chiara will be returning to the Boston Consulting Group where she is a core member of the Public Sector Practice Area. Prior to consulting, Chiara worked as a policy adviser at the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet Australia. She holds a Bachelor of Laws (Hons) and a Bachelor of Arts from the Australian National University.

Sarah Lux-Lee is an Australian lawyer and policy adviser graduating with a Master of Public Administration as a Monash Scholar and Cummings Fellow. She previously advised the Australian state, territory and federal Departments of Education on the impacts of copyright policy on access to education. She was also an Adjunct Lecturer at the University of New South Wales, from which she holds degrees in Law (Hons) and Mathematics.

Surya Kiran Palukuri is graduating with A Master of Public Administration in Urban Policy. Prior to attending Columbia SIPA, he was a middle school teacher, and before that, a technology and strategy consultant. He graduated from UCLA with a Bachelor's degree in Economics.

Hannah Poquette is graduating with a Master of International Affairs, concentrating in Human Rights and Humanitarian Policy with a Management Specialization. She has a background in education, having worked as a high school English teacher for six years in the United States with a Bachelor's Degree in Secondary Education from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

a Management Specialization and will be working as a Policy Manager at J-PAL at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He has a background in education and social policy research and holds a Bachelor's Degree in History from the University of California, Berkeley.

Hans-Martin Boehmer has worked in international development for more than 20 years. He received his undergraduate degree in Economics from the University of Bonn, and his Ph.D. in Economics with Distinction from Georgetown University. Hans began his professional career at the Institute of International Finance, Inc. before joining the World Bank. He has worked on countries in Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, and South-East Asia. He has also held corporate positions as Head of the World Bank's Corporate Strategy and Integrated Risk Management Group and Advisor to the Managing Directors. He is a Visiting Professor at Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy and an Adjunct Professor at Columbia SIPA.

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2010, the Australian Commonwealth Government, in partnership with the Australian states and territories, created an online tool called *My School.* The objective of *My School* was to enable the collation and publication of data about the nearly 10,000 schools across the country. Effectively offering a *"report card"* for each Australian school,[1] *My School* was designed to "*give parents and the wider community more information than they have ever had before about their local school and how it is performing."*[2]

My School is best understood within the broader Australian education context, in which the Australian states and territories have primary responsibility for the delivery of school education. The Commonwealth Government can exercise considerable influence over education priorities since it provides funding to all Australian schools – both government and non-government.

My School was designed to enable a better understanding of school performance across Australia by collating and publishing comparative school data. The website provides three categories of data on Australian schools: operational context, finances and resources and student performance. The platform enables stakeholders to compare this data across similar schools. An important element of *My School* is ICSEA (the Index of Community Social-Education Advantage), a score that enables the identification of similar schools based on socio-educational advantage, designed to enable fair comparisons. *My School* is accessed by a wide range of stakeholders including parents, policymakers, school leaders and education commentators. In 2013, approximately 1.45 million total users visited the website.

There were a number of important enabling factors that led to the successful development and implementation of *My School*. *My School* was developed as part of a broader suite of education reforms, driven by then-Deputy Prime Minister and Education Minister and subsequently Prime Minister Julia Gillard. There were strong Commonwealth-State relationships at the time of *My School's* development, with Australian Labor Party governments at both federal and state/territory levels across the country, and robust intergovernmental structures for education policy decision-making. Furthermore, much of the data published on *My School* was already being collected, and the focus of the initiative was on how to centralize and publish the data, rather than how to create it. As a tool delivered online, high internet penetration in Australia was also critical to *My School*'s success.

As with all policy initiatives, *My School* faced a number of challenges. These included the need for coordination across school sectors and levels of government, limited school choice, and opposition from some stakeholder groups, primarily teachers' unions. The unions were concerned about *My School* being used to identify and shame poorly performing schools, and that it would place undue pressure on teachers and create a high-stakes learning environment. There were also challenges around how to protect data on the site from republication in league tables.

My School was ultimately implemented following intense stakeholder engagement and communication, led by Julia Gillard, to build consensus and support for the initiative. Its practical implementation was led by ACARA (Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority), a central body established to oversee the collection of national education data and to operate the *My School* website, among other roles. ACARA is a statutory authority, not a department,

allowing the Commonwealth, state and territory governments to collectively contribute to the management of *My School*.

My School has undergone several rounds of revisions since its launch. Between its first and second years in operation, the website significantly improved its functionality. Key revisions included an improved search function, new menu items, and increased data protection measures to guard against misuse of data. In the years since, additional data sets and broader contextual information have been added. Usability of the site has been continually improved as information on user experience has been captured and better understood.

My School has proven to be a useful tool for many parents, policymakers, education researchers and the wider community. While there continue to be opportunities to strengthen and refine *My School*, there appears to be little risk of it being abolished. Stakeholders broadly agree that it is now *"part of the furniture"* of the Australian education system, and is here to stay. Lessons from the Australian experience can assist in the development of similar information-based tools in other parts of the world.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The Center for Universal Education (CUE) at the Brookings Institution is investigating the adaptation of *My School* to improve learning outcomes in other countries, through increased access to school-level information. To better understand the processes that enabled the development and implementation of *My School* in Australia, CUE has engaged a team of graduate student consultants from the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) at Columbia University to develop a case study on *My School*, as part of SIPA's Capstone program.

The case study is built on a foundation of 24 interviews with diverse stakeholders representing parents, teachers, policymakers, education experts and data specialists, as well as the key individuals directly involved in designing and implementing *My School*. It provides a 360° view of a policy that placed access to information at the heart of the education agenda.

The case study is organized to facilitate understanding of the key elements that led to the development of *My School.* Following a brief discussion of the background and methodology for this case study in Part 2, Part 3 provides an overview of *My School*'s content, functionality and objectives. Part 4 then sets out the enabling factors that led to the successful implementation of *My School*, while key implementation challenges are discussed in Part 5. Part 6 maps the Commonwealth Government's implementation strategy and ongoing improvements to *My School*. The conclusion sets out lessons from the Australian experience that may be valuable to those implementing similar tools in other country contexts.

2.2 METHODOLOGY

As requested by CUE, the case study was developed in accordance with the methodology described in The World Bank's Science of Delivery (SoD) manual. Central to SoD is the notion of revisiting past interventions to apply knowledge about the implementation process for future operations. The Capstone team was asked to describe the enabling factors that allowed *My School* to come to fruition in Australia, and the challenges facing implementation. To do so, the team gathered research from two distinct sources: interviews and desktop research.

Interviews: The case study is informed by interviews with 24 stakeholders, from a wide range of relevant stakeholder groups (see Appendix A). Interviewees included the individuals and organizations responsible for developing and implementing *My School,* leaders of educational organizations, state and federal public servants, education researchers, education consultants, teachers and parents, among others. Key insights gathered from the interviews are provided as Appendix B, and vignettes from interviews are interspersed throughout the report to provide more detailed insights. Interviews were conducted in confidence and direct quotes have approved for inclusion.

Desktop research: Although CUE excluded a literature review from the project scope, where relevant, interview insights have been supplemented with desktop research from a variety of sources. These include government reports, think tank publications, industry reports, official Australian government websites, media commentary, press releases, and surveys (see Bibliography). Some materials were also provided directly by interviewees for review by the team.

As instructed by CUE, the scope of this case study has been managed through reliance on a series of simplifying assumptions. It should be noted, however, that these assumptions continue to be the subject of debate in the literature. They include:

- Greater transparency in education leads to greater accountability, which in turn leads to better educational outcomes.
- Parents are actively engaged in their children's education, and want to make informed schooling decisions for their children.
- School choice is inherently positive, and tools that facilitate school choice are therefore beneficial.
- Gains in NAPLAN scores is indicative of a school providing a better education to its students.

2.3 AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION CONTEXT

Australia's schools are organized by sector, into government schools, which are managed by the Department of Education of each state and territory; and non-government schools, which are either managed by the Catholic Church or considered independent. Unlike in many other countries, the Commonwealth Government provides funding to all schools - government and non-government. In 2015, there were 9,404 schools operating in Australia, enrolling a total of 3,750,973 students. Of these, 6,639 (70.6 percent) were government schools, 1,737 (18.5 percent) were Catholic schools and 1,028 (10.9 percent) were independent schools.[3] Australia's schools are also divided into primary schools, which serve students aged approximately 5-12, and secondary schools, with students aged approximately 13-18. Some schools offer combined primary and secondary schooling.

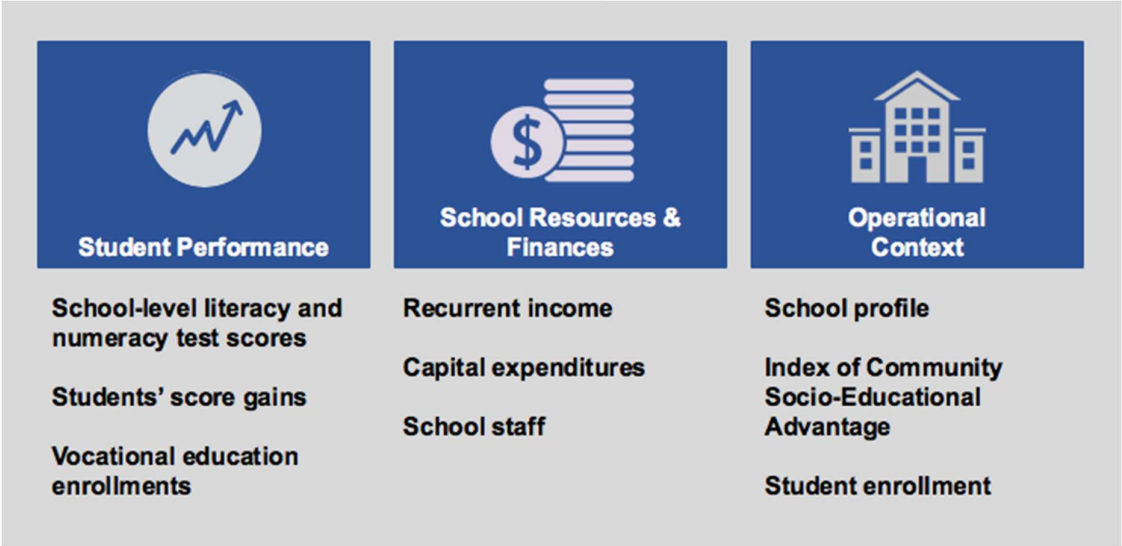
The Commonwealth Government has a limited operational role in the Australian school system, with limited legislative authority over the way in which schools are run.[4] Primary responsibility for the operation of schools rests with the states and territories.[5] However, the individual state and territory education systems are broadly consistent, and are becoming more so with the introduction of the National Curriculum that is currently being rolled out.[6] Further, the Commonwealth Government provides overarching policy leadership, setting delivery standards for education, promoting and finance national education reform, and representing Australia in global school initiatives. Finally, since the Commonwealth Government provides funding to all Australian schools, this also provides an important lever for influence over the nature and delivery of education in the states and territories.

3 WHAT IS *MY SCHOOL*?

Launched in January 2010,[7] *My School* is a website that provides access to information for approximately 10,000 schools across Australia.[8] On *My School*, parents, educators, and other users can access a range of information about schools in their community and compare them with similar schools across Australia, including in relation to a school's mission, staffing, finances, resources, characteristics and performance.

3.1 DATA

Figure 1: Information Available on *My School*



As summarized in Figure 1, users can access three main categories of information on the *My School* website: student performance, finances and resources, and operational context:[9]

- **Student performance**: users can obtain information on performance as measured by the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) standardized tests. These national tests assess students in reading, writing, language (spelling, grammar, and punctuation), and numeracy.[10] To facilitate meaningful comparison of student performance across schools, the website uses an index of student and school characteristics to identify schools serving statistically similar communities (this tool is discussed further in section 3.2.2 below). The site also displays qualifications completed by students in schools with vocational and educational training courses.
- **Finances and resources**: the site provides a summary of a school's financial information, including the recurrent income available to support the operation of a school, as well as a school's annual capital expenditure. It also provides information on the number of teaching and non-teaching staff.
- **Operational context:** users can access general school facts including the school type (e.g. government, Catholic, or independent), school-level data about students' backgrounds, total student enrollment, and student attendance broken down for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Schools also have the option to provide a short profile that includes further contextual details.

3.2 FUNCTIONALITY

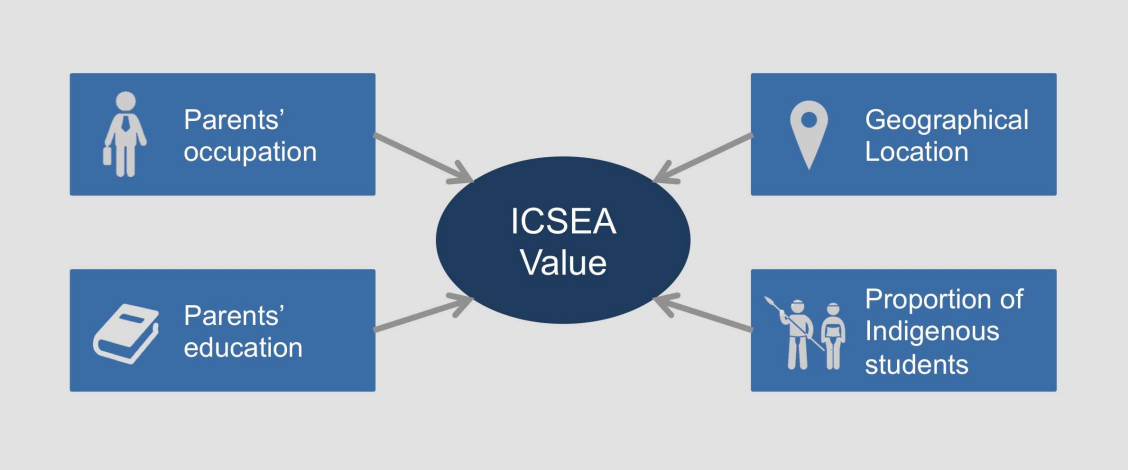
3.2.1 Search & Navigation

Users can search for data by school location, sector or name.[11] Once a school has been selected, the user is taken to the school profile page, which displays a basic school summary with information on staff, finances, background and enrollment.[12] Users who seek more detailed information can click on tabs corresponding to School Finances, NAPLAN, Vocational Education Training in Schools, Local Schools, and Student Attendance.[13] Users can view changes over time, such as for the amount of government funding or student performance on national standardized tests.[14] Data is displayed both numerically and graphically.[15] In addition, the *My School* website maps other schools that are located near the selected school.

3.2.2 Comparison of Similar Schools: ICSEA

Crucial to *My School's* functionality is the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA), which was created to enable users to compare schools that serve students of similar socio-educational backgrounds, as summarized in Figure 2.[16] Designed specifically for *My School*, ICSEA creates a value for each school that indicates the level of advantage of its students as defined by factors outside of a school's control.[17] ICSEA takes into account a combination of student factors, such as parents' occupation and education, as well as contextual factors, such as the school's geographical location (metropolitan, regional, or remote), the proportion of Indigenous students, and the proportion of students with language backgrounds other than English.[18] ICSEA was designed to enable the isolation of a school's impact on student performance, as distinct from these socio-educational factors. Further details regarding ICSEA are included as Appendix C.

Figure 2: Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA)



3.3 OBJECTIVES

My School was developed to address a clearly defined policy problem: a lack of clear and consistent public information on Australian schools.[19] Before the creation of *My School* in 2009, public information was limited to what schools chose to make available, and even state, territory and federal governments (let alone the general public) had difficulties accessing

comparable information about school performance and resources.[20] As Australia's then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education, Julia Gillard aimed *"to make sure that everything we did in education better responded to need".*[21] *My School* was a tool to help to meet that goal, enabling the Australian government to centralize and publish data that would help to understand the needs of schools, and better address them.[22] The *My School* website describes itself as "*a resource for parents, educators and the community to give readily accessible information about each of Australia's just over 10,000 schools and campuses."*[23]

Box 1: Solving a Policy Problem

***My School* was designed to solve a clear policy problem: lack of information about Australian schools**

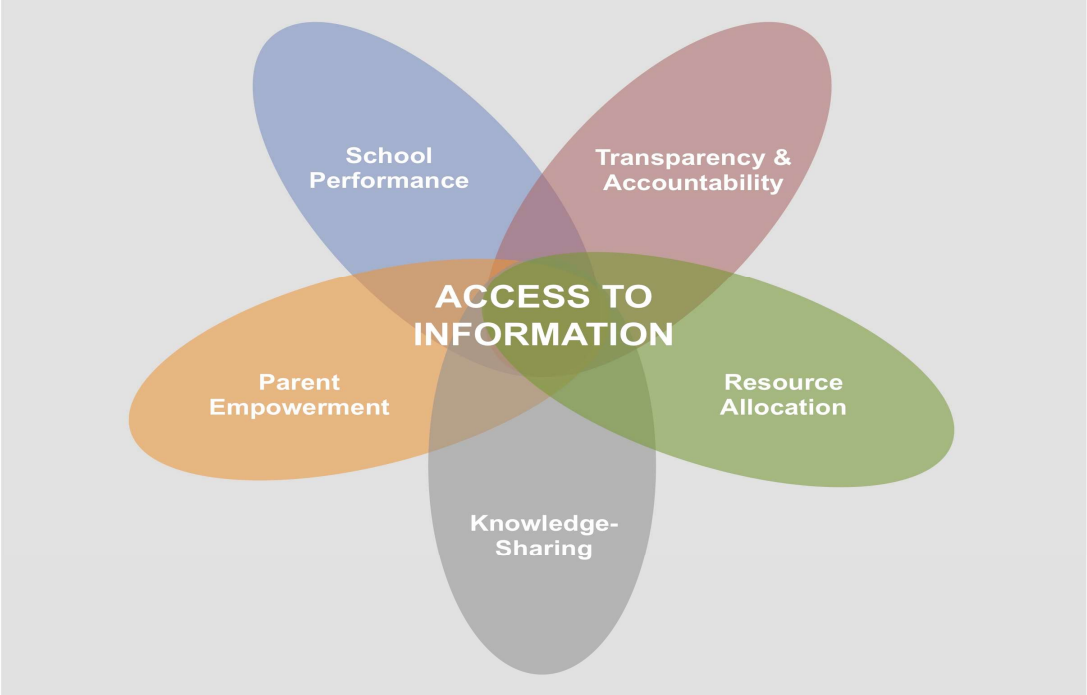
Former Senior Policy Adviser to Julia Gillard, Tom Bentley, describes the challenge and frustration associated with being unable to obtain consistent data on Australian schools. Prior to the introduction of *My School*, state and territory governments collected and reported different information in different formats, making it almost impossible to meaningfully compare data for Australian schools. The States of Victoria and New South Wales had existing school reporting systems, but these were different and were not available to the general public. Bentley describes *My School*'s objective as enabling the public sharing of consistent school-level data, in order to facilitate informed conversations on effectiveness and need: *"My School was intended to be a tool to start and support conversations about Australian schools."*

In addition to this core purpose of increasing access to information about schools, various wider objectives and audiences have been articulated. In a press release announcing the launch of *My School*, Julia Gillard described the site as "*an important step in the Government's Education Revolution – providing unprecedented transparency and helping drive vital improvements in school education."*[24]

In agreeing to the implementation of *My School* in September 2008, the then-Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) identified three key purposes for *My School*: to enable evaluation of school performance by governments and researchers; to increase transparency and accountability of schools in order to support school improvement; and to facilitate better resource allocation to schools in need.[25] The *My School* website also identifies the additional objectives of enabling educators to share information about school achievements, and helping parents to make informed decisions about their children's education.[26]

The key objectives that have been identified in interviews and research for this case study are set out in Figure 3. As *My School* evolves, different stakeholder groups will continue to utilize the website to meet different objectives.

Figure 3: *My School*'s Objectives



3.4 EARLY EVALUATIONS

It is too early to comprehensively assess *My School* for causal impacts on educational outcomes. This is particularly the case since 2016 is the first year in which there will be a full set of NAPLAN performance data for students who have been tested throughout the complete span of testing from grade three to grade nine.[27] There have been some early qualitative evaluations of *My School*, as well as two Senate Committee reviews, which are summarized in Appendix D.

4 ENABLING FACTORS

After years of strategic planning, collaboration, and negotiation among Australia's education leaders, the Commonwealth Government officially launched the *My School* website on January 28, 2010. Stakeholders point to several enabling factors that led to the creation of *My School*. These included strong top-down political leadership and support, positive intergovernmental relations, policy alignment in the education sphere, well-functioning governance structures, and relatively high access to technological infrastructure across the country. A discussion of the key enablers follows, and is summarized in Figure 4.

Figure 4: *My School*'s Key Enabling Factors

Area	Essential	Helpful	Potential Obstacles
Policy Window	• Consistency with broad policy agenda • Strong top-down political leadership • Strong Commonwealth-state relations	• Some support from parents and schools	• Stakeholder resistance • Coordination of state and territory policy interests • Limited school choice
Structural Advantages	• Existing intergovernmental structures for education decisions • Centralized funding mechanism • Availability of existing data sources	• Ability to disaggregate school level data • Access to growth data • Early support from a large state within COAG process	• Decentralized governance of education
Access to Technology	• Internet connectivity • Access to computers and Information Communication Technology • Digital literacy	• Government-led initiatives to expand internet access	• Low computer or data literacy among some communities

4.1 POLICY WINDOW

4.1.1 Consistency with a Broad Policy Agenda

My School was created amidst the backdrop of significant policy reforms that were taking place around the country in the late 2000s. Its introduction was made more politically feasible by its consistency with two major policy platforms of the Commonwealth Government at the time: first, the 'Education Revolution,' which would involve sweeping education reforms from early childhood education through to the tertiary level, and second, a move to increase transparency and accountability across all levels of government and policy areas.[28]

The most visible elements of the 'Education Revolution' for the school sector were 'Building the Education Revolution,'[29] a policy designed to provide new and refurbished infrastructure to all eligible Australian schools, and the 'Digital Education Revolution,' which provided laptops, broadband connectivity and other information and communication technologies to schools across the country.[30] The implementation of standardized testing through NAPLAN

and the publication of results on *My School* was a third key element of this system-level reform of Australian education.

My School also reflected the Commonwealth's broader push toward transparency and accountability across policy areas. In the health sector, the Commonwealth unveiled *My Hospitals*, an online scheme similar to *My School* intended to enable communities to rate their local health outlets and access funding information to increase transparency and accountability.[31] Similarly, there was a push in the not-for-profit sector to increase transparency through the creation of the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profit Commission (ACNC) and tightening of tax concessions for unrelated business profits.[32] In 2011, the Gillard government established transparency in free trade negotiations as one of its five key principles driving trade.[33]

It is worth noting that although the Commonwealth's primary focus was on transparency as a tool for better policymaking, this transparency and accountability agenda, including in the context of *My School*, was also perceived by some stakeholders as an attempt to increase Commonwealth control over policy areas traditionally within the purview of the states and territories.[34]

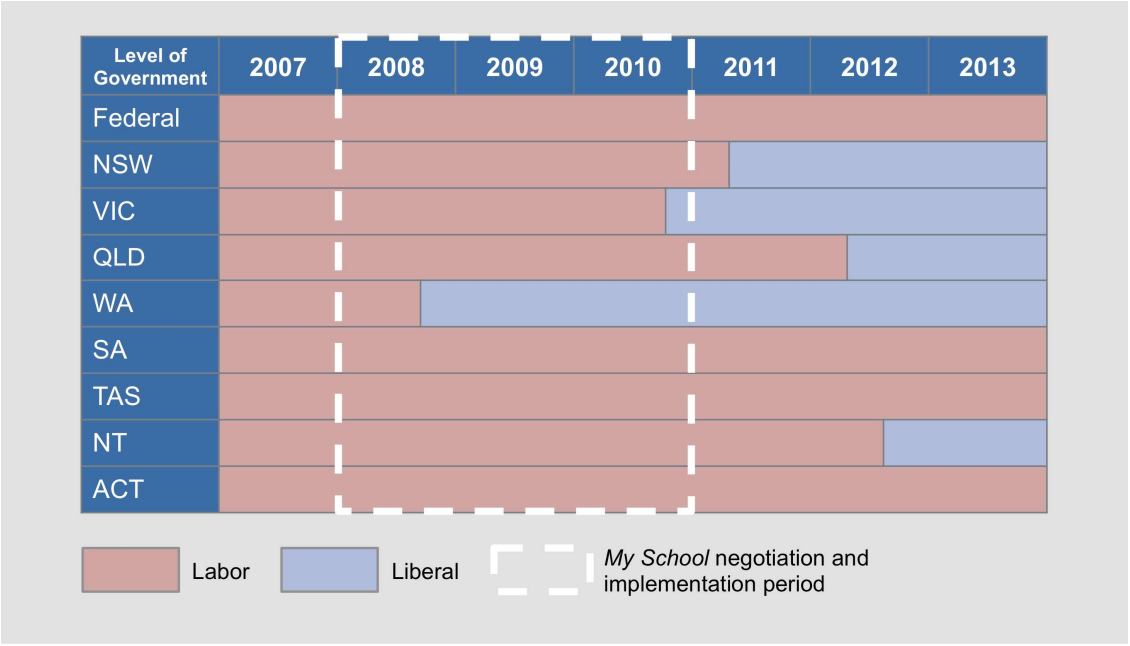
4.1.2 Strong Top-Down Political Leadership

The development of *My School* benefited from the strong support of highly influential policy leaders of national stature. *My School* had a powerful advocate in Julia Gillard, who transitioned from Education Minister and Deputy Prime Minister to Prime Minister during *My School's* implementation, and is widely acknowledged as the driving force behind *My School*.[35] Gillard later stated: *"I fought a ferocious battle as Education Minister to create My School and to get each of us, all of us, more information than we have ever had before on the education of our children."*[36] Gillard is consistently identified by stakeholders as the *"face of My School,"* with many crediting the successful passing and implementation of the policy to her unfaltering leadership and commitment.[37] Gillard had a strong and focused goal for education in Australia: *"By 2025, Australia should be ranked as a top 5 country in the world in Reading, Science and Mathematics - and for providing our children with a high-quality and high-equity education system."*[38] *My School* was one piece of the plan to achieve this goal.

4.1.3 Strong Commonwealth-State Relations

The advancement of the Commonwealth agenda for education reform and increased transparency, with *My School* at their intersection, also benefited from a time of particularly strong Commonwealth-State relations. During 2007-2010, when *My School* was first negotiated and implemented, the federal Labor government enjoyed the support of Labor governments in seven out of eight states and territories, an unusual scenario in Australian politics that provided a unique window for policies dependent on strong Commonwealth-State collaboration.[39] This consistent political landscape is reflected in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Governments During Rudd/Gillard/Rudd Prime Ministerships



The 2008 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians reflected this unique period of consensus.[40] Agreed upon by state, territory and Commonwealth ministers, the Declaration established the goals and directions for Australian schooling and included a 'Commitment to Action' in eight interrelated reform areas, which included strengthening transparency and accountability.

This period of consensus also built upon an earlier architecture for collaboration established by the Council of Australian Governments—the country's peak intergovernmental body—in December 2007, which improved funding arrangements and established in-principle support for greater transparency and accountability in education through sharing and publication of school-level information.[41]

4.1.4 Some Support from Parents and Schools

Initial support from some of the intended users of *My School* also facilitated the successful launch of the website. Early commentary notes that *"[p]arent groups were highly supportive of the initiative, expressing a desire to be provided with more information*."[42] The results of a government survey of parents showed 96.9 percent of parents were in favor of being provided with more information on school performance.[43] This early support from parents was important as a starting point in the push for increased transparency. It should be noted, however, that parents were not uniformly in support of *My School*. Some parents' councils expressed concern regarding the potential impacts on students of making school performance results available to the general public, suggesting that only those directly involved in the process such as teachers, principals and parents should have access to NAPLAN results.[44]

The Catholic school sector was also an early supporter of *My School*. Sydney Archdiocesan Executive Director of Catholic Schools, Dr. Dan White, supported the website as *"providing rich, meaningful data about schools' achievements that would generate constructive dialogue between schools and parents."* Ross Fox, the executive director of The National Catholic

Education Commission more recently reaffirmed *My School*'s importance, saying that a recent update in NAPLAN scores show that *"schools of all sizes… are providing quality teaching and learning that is making a real difference in student care."*[45]

4.2 Structural Advantages

4.2.1 Existing Intergovernmental Structures for Education Decisions

The existence of intergovernmental structures through which to coordinate national education decisions assisted the Commonwealth Government to build consensus around *My School*. Two intergovernmental bodies provide the formal mechanisms for collaboration between the Commonwealth Government and the states and territories in national education reform. As Australia's primary intergovernmental body, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) initiates, develops, and monitors the implementation of nationally significant policy reforms. COAG is comprised of Australia's Prime Minister, the state and territory Premiers, Chief Ministers, and the President of the Australian Local Government Association. Situated within COAG is the Education Council,[46] which coordinates strategic policy on early childhood, school education and higher education and draws its membership from state, territory, Commonwealth and New Zealand Ministers with portfolio responsibility for education. These intergovernmental structures facilitated the sharing of information and the collaborative use of resources, mitigating the decentralized nature of the Australian education system to enable relatively swift progress in securing the cooperation necessary to make the initiative work.

Box 2: COAG Negotiations

The support of a large state is critical to successful COAG negotiations

COAG negotiations typically require the early support of a large state to be successful. In her book *My Story*, Julia Gillard notes with regard to National Disability Insurance Scheme negotiations at COAG that *"everyone knew that the most populous state signing on meant the only way this was going to end was with everyone signing on."*[47] With regard to *My School*, early support from the Victorian Government was critical to COAG negotiations: *"Bronwyn Pike, Victoria's Education Minister, and Peter Dawkins, the secretary of her department, were outstanding in their support at the Ministerial Council meetings and associated discussions between public service officials… state Ministers [accepted] that school funding would be tied to transparency and the teaching of a national curriculum."*[48]

4.2.2 Centralized Funding Mechanism

The centralized nature of education funding in Australia was an important enabling factor for *My School*. As noted, primary responsibility for the delivery of education in Australia rests with the states and territories. However, the states and territories have limited revenue-raising capacity.[49] Both government and non-government schools are reliant to varying degrees on the Commonwealth Government to provide funding for the operation of schools.[50] In past years, up to 50 percent of total funding for public schools has come from the Commonwealth Government, with the share reaching as high as 65 percent for non-government schools.[51]

The Commonwealth Government was able to use this considerable funding as leverage, by tying the provision of data for *My School* to the continued allocation of education funding. This financial influence was derived from a series of funding laws, including the *Schools Assistance Act 2008* (Cth), the *Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations 2008* (Cth), and the *National Education Agreement 2009* (Cth) (see Appendix E). These financial agreements required that government and non-government schools report on school enrollment, school demographics, school finances, and school performance among other indicators as a condition of continued federal funding.

Box 3: Using Funding as an Incentive

How did the Commonwealth use funding as an incentive? An example from New South Wales.

In 2009, the New South Wales Parliament proposed a bill to permit the public reporting of school results from new national student tests. The bill was in direct response to the National Education Agreement of 2009 (NEA), which required states to report data on school results for publication on the *My School* website. Under the NEA, the Commonwealth would provide NSW with $4.8 billion in education funding over the next four years, so long as the state complied with national reporting requirements. This funding would cover approximately 20 percent of the annual cost of employing public school teachers and other school staff. Parliament members in NSW emphasized the significance of this arrangement, stating that *"If the state does not provide the data in accordance with the agreed time line, it will not satisfy the conditions for receipt of the funding. In short, failure to pass this bill would place this funding in jeopardy."*[52]

4.2.3 Availability of Existing Data Sources

To facilitate the development of *My School,* the Commonwealth Government relied on the ready availability of reliable data sources. Most of the data to be made available on the *My School* website was already being compiled by schools or state and territory governments. The focus of *My School* was how to centralize this data and ensure consistency and comparability.[53] Key sources of existing information were:

- **Australian census:** The Commonwealth Government runs a census every five years, data from which is used as a basis for part of the ICSEA calculations. Relevant data for *My School* included socioeconomic status, remoteness, and information about Indigeneity.

- **Schools:** The states and territories already collected much of the data directly from schools that is used in *My School*, including attendance, disability data, the school profile, senior secondary outcomes, student progress after graduation, and vocational education information.
- **NAPLAN:** ACARA has administered NAPLAN directly in schools since 2010, and collects and analyzes the data from these tests. This data did not need to be created for *My School,* but existed independently from 2010 onwards. The states, territories, Commonwealth, and ACARA were all partners in administering NAPLAN and collecting relevant data during NAPLAN's first two years in existence, after which ACARA took exclusive ownership of NAPLAN.[54]

In addition to these existing sources, some data sets needed to be developed specifically for *My School*. For example, schools asked parents to provide information regarding their occupation, school education level, and other proxy data for education in order to facilitate socio-educational comparisons through ICSEA.[55]

My School is constantly evolving, and has regularly incorporated new data sets. For example, *My School* was updated in 2015 to include more consistent school attendance data and average student attendance rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.[56] More recently, it was agreed that students' disability data would be included in *My School*,[57] after a recent Senate Inquiry found that students with disabilities are severely undeserved and recommended that parents be better informed about schools' abilities to effectively include children with disabilities.[58]

4.3 ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY

4.3.1 Internet Connectivity

Without the ability of the public to easily access the internet, *My School* would have been limited in its reach and efficacy. When *My School* went live in 2010, approximately 79 percent of Australian households had access to the internet at home,[59] with an even higher proportion of connected homes in capital cities and in households with children under the age of 15.[60] Data from 2015 show that approximately 86 percent of Australians had home internet access.[61] Among those without internet access, 63 percent of those surveyed stated they had "no need" for internet connectivity.[62] According to the International Telecommunication Union, Australia ranks highly in terms of account speed, bandwidth, internet subscriptions, and household connections.[63]

4.3.2 Digital Literacy

Relatively high digital literacy was another key enabling factor. In a 2013 report, the OECD and Australian Bureau of Statistics compared the level of computer skills of adults across OECD countries and concluded that 38 percent of adults in Australia were highly proficient with computers; and almost 70 percent of adults in Australia have at least a basic understanding of internet and computer applications.[64] This ranked Australia sixth out of 19 OECD countries that were reviewed.[65]

5 CHALLENGES

In addition to a host of enabling factors that facilitated the launch of *My School*, the Commonwealth Government also faced several challenges that threatened to undermine the successful development of the initiative. These included: opposition from vocal stakeholder groups, disagreements regarding the types of data to be included and the protections to be applied to that data, coordination of state and territory interests, and limited school choice in Australia.

5.1 STAKEHOLDER OPPOSITION

The most visible challenge to *My School* was the significant opposition it drew from stakeholders. Despite some support from parents and educators, the announcement of *My School* was not uniformly welcomed by the education sector. Strong resistance to the publication of school-level data came in particular from teachers and principals and their unions and associations, as well as independent schools. According to the OECD, *"the My School story shows the importance of policy makers considering conflicting stakeholder interests and views regarding empowering parents with potentially sensitive information."*[66]

5.1.1 Teachers and Unions

Among stakeholder groups, teacher unions have been the most opposed to *My School,* with the *"most vehement opponent of My School"* being the Australian Education Union (AEU), which represents teachers of government schools.[67] While unions agreed that school performance data is a useful internal diagnostic tool, they strongly disputed that it should be made available to the general public.[68] In its submission to the 2010 Senate Inquiry, the AEU argued that *My School* would *"unfairly stigmatize schools"*,[69] and that publication of performance data would create a high-stakes learning environment, with negative impacts on curriculum choices, pedagogy, collaboration, and student-teacher relationships.[70]

The AEU reacted with *"extreme hostility"*[71] to *My School*, launching complaints soon after the website launched.[72] The launch of *My School* rekindled many of the same criticisms that accompanied the launch of NAPLAN in 2008. Both the AEU and the New South Wales Teachers Federation voted to boycott NAPLAN testing, effectively threatening to shut down *My School*, which is heavily dependent on NAPLAN data.[73]

Concerns among teachers beyond the AEU centered on the need to teach to the test and achieve strong results, and the risk that this would lead to a distorted curriculum and superficial learning experiences.[74] Publication of performance data may make classrooms more competitive, less inclusive, and less able to cope with a diversity of students and performance levels.[75] Teachers were also concerned about potential negative impacts on students' confidence and self-esteem as a result of the pressure to do better than other schools.[76] There have also been equity concerns, as the negative impacts of testing are likely to be most pronounced in disadvantaged schools and schools where many students are using English as a second language.[77]

Box 4: *My School*'s Impact on Teaching and Learning

How did *My School* affect teaching and learning in the classroom?

Anticipating the public scrutiny of school performance that would come with the launch of *My School*, some schools made changes to instruction and curriculum in an attempt to mitigate negative public opinion. Marianne Scholem, a high school English teacher at a struggling school during the time of *My School*'s release, experienced this response. Scholem's school served 60 different migrant communities and included many students who did not have strong English skills.

During the lead up to *My School's* launch, Scholem noted an increase in pressure on the school and its teachers to raise the anticipated low NAPLAN scores. Teachers were instructed to use one of their three 90 minute classes per week for test preparation, and were given lesson plans and worksheets to use for this purpose. Scholem noted that her students experienced test fatigue and that she saw some buckle under the pressure, storming out of the room and crumpling their papers. She reflected, *"it was awful for them to be told that what they should be achieving is beyond what they could do."*

Ultimately, Julia Gillard successfully persuaded the AEU, and other vocal opponents, to back down despite early opposition: *"the strike and boycott were averted in exchange for a commitment… to include the AEU in consultations about what would be added to My School."*[78] Gillard wrote publicly to then-President of the AEU Angelo Gavrielatos, noting the Rudd Government's commitment to stakeholder consultation and offering to incorporate the concerns of the AEU and other stakeholders. A working party was established by ACARA, which comprised nominees from the AEU, teachers, principals' and parents' associations, and independent experts, to capture and respond to stakeholder concerns. The Working Party's findings were used to inform modifications to the site's content and functionality in 2011.[79] The Australian Commonwealth also addressed the strike and boycott through legal means, with an application to the industrial court at the time arguing that to supervise NAPLAN was part of a teacher's duties.[80]

5.1.2 Independent Schools

The independent school sector was another early opponent of *My School.*[81] The independent schools were primarily concerned about the publication of NAPLAN and financial data.[82] However, the negotiation of *My School* coincided with the renewal of independent school funding from the Commonwealth Government.[83] As such, the Commonwealth Government had significant leverage over the independent school sector and were able to bundle *My School* within the broader agreement.

5.1.3 School Leadership

Principals expressed mixed views on the publication of school-level information on *My School*.[84] Some saw *My School* as a useful source of information for parents and the community.[85] For high-performing schools, *My School* comparisons could provide a positive

marketing message. However, principals and principals' associations also expressed various concerns about *My School*. For example, in its submission to the Senate Inquiry, the Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA) voiced its concern that decontextualized NAPLAN scores were being used to create league tables to crudely rank schools,[86] which could then have harmful effects on the learning environment and processes in schools.[87] They also echoed the unions' concerns that publication of NAPLAN results on *My School* create a high-stakes learning environment with further negative effects on teaching and learning.[88]

Principals also pointed to potential for misinterpretation or misuse of *My School* by parents, such as comparison of NAPLAN results without an understanding of the broader context in which a school is operating, or the interpretation of financial data without a full and accurate view of school finances. *My School* results could also cause low morale at disadvantaged schools, which often do not perform well when ranked against other schools.[89] Principals also noted the need for more information than what is available on *My School*, including school assessments, performance relative to the curriculum and professional development.[90] Some saw *My School* as not particularly relevant as there is other, more comprehensive information available.[91] They also noted that there are other accountability systems in place, limiting *My School*'s value add.[92] The opposition of principals to *My School* was managed through the inclusion of principals' associations and representatives in the ACARA Working Party.[93]

5.2 Disagreement Regarding Inclusion of Data Types

From the inception of *My School*, disagreements arose regarding the type of information that should be included on the site. Parents wanted information such as details about teaching staff, final year student results,[94] and special programming offered by schools,[95] while principals called for the addition of information such as school size and location, characteristics of the student body and whether a school is selective in admitting students based on academic performance or other criteria.[96] Some of these indicators, specifically those addressing areas of learning disadvantage or teacher quality, have been highly controversial.[97]

My School's reporting of school finance data has also been contentious.[98] Unions have argued that to accurately calculate school-level financial resources, *My School* should include information regarding trusts, foundations, bequests, and share of property portfolios. Similarly, principals' associations have supported the inclusion of school assets such as real estate in the financial data on *My School*.[99] The independent schools sector has strongly resisted such inclusions, however, arguing that this information would be difficult to compare across schools and would not be relevant in measuring school resources used in the education process.[100] In particular, non-government schools have argued that measuring the ownership of assets would be too complex given varied accounting standards across jurisdictions. Other stakeholders have added that a plausible solution to professionally value assets would have been far too costly for more than 10,000 schools and campuses.

Two additional types of data that have been proposed but face disagreement are the inclusion of longitudinal studies across grades, and Indigenous performance data. Providing information regarding student progress across school levels would require student-identifier data, which is unlikely to gain consensus across sectors and jurisdictions.[101] Additionally, while data on Indigenous student performance would aid in measuring progress in closing the gap in access

to high-quality educational opportunities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, including such sensitive information is likely to raise opposition.[102]

Efforts to include new indicators on *My School* can be challenging and time-consuming because they need to be applied across all states and territories. Since ACARA reports to the Education Council, each new indicator must be approved by all state and territory Ministers and the Commonwealth Minister. Building consensus around the type of indicator and how to measure it can be a large undertaking, even for less controversial indicators.[103]

5.3 Disagreement Regarding Appropriate Data Protections

Throughout *My School's* development and continued revision, stakeholders have strongly debated the extent to which the website's data should be protected from unauthorized or undesired uses. Much of the stakeholder opposition to *My School* was related to potential misuse of data by media outlets and other third parties, whom schools and teachers feared would use *My School* to create crude league tables that unfairly compared schools without contextualizing their performance.[104] In response, the Commonwealth Government agreed to implement tight controls to prevent such misuse of the data. These included technical controls, such as preventing data scraping on the site; legal controls, such as legislation prohibiting the use of *My School* for the purpose of creating league tables and the use of copyright restrictions to prevent unauthorized use of content; and bureaucratic controls, such as the complex process required to obtain the underlying data behind *My School*.[105] Although these restrictions mitigated some of the concerns of teachers and unions,[106] they led others, especially in the open data community, to criticize *My School* for being unduly restrictive. Some have suggested that these strict data controls contravene *My School*'s stated objective of opening up data about Australian schools for use by the general community.[107]

Box 5: *My School* as an Open Data Platform

Is *My School* an "open" platform?

When it was first introduced, *My School* was welcomed by researchers who regard transparency and openness as a critical element of good policymaking. However, restrictions subsequently implemented in order to address concerns about potential misuse of data have led some to query whether this is a genuinely open platform. Baden Appleyard, who has advised Australian governments on implementing open data practices through the Australian Governments Open Access and Licensing Framework (AusGOAL), said that the site does not reflect open data principles: *"The Prime Minister made it very clear in her speeches that this was to be open data. However, it is locked up… It is not open. It doesn't permit individuals to draw their own conclusions using their own analysis of raw data, and it doesn't foster innovation."*

5.4 Coordination of State and Territory Interests

For *My School* to be established, the Commonwealth Government needed agreement from all state and territory governments to share school level data. Several of the enabling factors identified previously helped to manage this – such as the Commonwealth's ability to use

funding as an incentive; the leadership of an influential state; and existing intergovernmental frameworks such as the Education Council. Nevertheless, the decentralized nature of the Australian education system meant that an unusually high level of coordination and consensus were required to establish a national education policy such as *My School* in Australia.

5.5 Limited School Choice in Australia

In many cases, Australian parents have no alternative than to send their children to one of the local public schools due to the cost of non-government schools and restricted catchment areas for public schools. School choice may be particularly limited in rural areas where density is low and there is only one public school. Where school choice is limited in this way, the utility of a performance monitoring and comparison tool like *My School* decreases. However, for the one third of all students who attend non-government (Catholic or independent) schools, *My School* may be of greater value.[108] In addition, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) net interstate migration figures indicate that in 2013 more than 50,000 school age children moved interstate, requiring decisions to be made regarding schooling.[109]

Box 6: School Choice in Australia

Is school choice available to all families in Australia?

One of the intended purposes of *My School* is to assist parents in choosing the best schools for their children. However, the extent of school choice available to parents is questioned by many in the Australian education context.

Interviewees indicated that families of lower socioeconomic status have a different school selection process than their higher socioeconomic counterparts. Families with lower education and socioeconomic levels generally choose schools based on proximity and connection to the school community, whereas families of higher education and socioeconomic levels generally select schools based on performance and pedagogy. This difference means that families of higher education and socioeconomic levels are more likely to use the information provided by *My School* for school choice purposes than those who are more disadvantaged.

Where school choice does exist, it is informed by a range of factors, not all of which are captured by *My School*. These include the 'feel' of a school, relationships and behavior management, extra-curricular activities and other qualitative factors that are best determined by visiting a school and talking to teachers and other parents. Parents have indicated that they need more contextual information than is available on *My School* to help them form a rounded, holistic view of a given school.[110] In a 2010 survey, 8.2 percent of parents cited *My School* among the three sources of information most likely to influence their choice of school.[111] The site was ranked eighth of 14 factors in a list of the most influential sources used by parents.[112]

6 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

6.1 *MY SCHOOL* SET-UP

6.1.1 Creation of ACARA

The Commonwealth Government needed a central body to oversee the collection of national education data and to operate the *My School* website. During the October 2008 COAG meeting, the Commonwealth, state and territory governments agreed to establish the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). Established under an Act of federal parliament in 2008, ACARA is an independent statutory authority that operates *My School,* administers NAPLAN, and has developed the national curriculum.[113] As an independent authority, ACARA has a clear and consistent mandate, as outlined in its authorizing Act and Charter, which provides for its longevity: this clarity and independence enabled ACARA to maintain focus even as governments and policies have changed.[114]

Funding of ACARA is shared between the Commonwealth Government (50 percent) and the states and territories (50 percent).[115] The four-year budget for ACARA approved by ministers in 2011 totaled $109.2 million and covered the years 2012 through 2016.[116] The total ACARA budget for 2015-16 is estimated at $25.220 million,[117] with staffing of 93 employees.[118] Total expenses for the National Data Collection and Reporting arm of ACARA, which houses *My School*, are estimated for 2015-16 to be $2.525 million.[119]

6.1.2 Costs of My School

To finance the first version of *My School,* ACARA spent a total of $2.1 million in 2010 for website development and maintenance, security testing, legal services, focus groups, and staffing costs.[120]

As an example of the breakdown of *My School* costs, in 2012-13, the largest proportion of *My School* expenditures covered staff salaries and superannuation. During this time period, total National Data Collection and Reporting costs were budgeted at $6.66 million, with *My School* totaling $2.363 million.[121] Of the total *My School* cost, staff salaries and superannuation made up 63.43 percent. This segment included an allocated proportion of reporting and IT staff incorporating web developers and data analysis, totaling $1,498,790.[122] A smaller proportion of the total *My School* costs, 36.57 percent, covered project expenses. These expenditures totaled $864,000 and included web hosting and infrastructure, IT contractors, travel, meeting costs, financial data assurance, website testing, and staffing the help desk for user support.[123]

The operating costs of *My School* have decreased since the site's initial release. These costs include the main site and disaster recovery site hosting, financial assurance, web development, maintenance and testing provided by external suppliers.[124] Annual operating costs are shown in Figure 6:[125]

Figure 6: *My School*'s Operating Costs

Year	Total Operating Costs
2010-11	1,577,907
2011-12	747,000
2012-13	705,000
2013-14	726,000

Web development and maintenance were brought in-house in 2011, which contributed to the reduction in costs between 2010-11 and 2011-12.[126]

The number of staff required to support *My School* fluctuates throughout the year according to site needs, with more needed from January to March and August to December when data is published.[127] The annualized Full Time Equivalent staffing required to support *My School* is shown in Figure 7:[128]

Figure 7: Full Time Equivalent Staffing

Role	Staffing
Policy and data collection, analysis and management (not including NAPLAN work stream)	5.4 x FTE
IT design, development and testing framework	1.9 x FTE
Communications	0.6 x FTE
Total *My School* staffing needs	**7.9 x FTE**

The staffing levels do not include external website hosting by a third party provider, or the work of the General Manager Assessment and Reporting, Chief Executive Officer, the Board Secretariat, and the ACARA board in advising the standing council on School Education and Early Childhood before the release of *My School* every year.[129]

6.2 USE OF MY SCHOOL

In 2013, approximately 1.45 million total users visited the *My School* website, of which 0.79 million were unique visitors.[130] Disaggregated data gives some insight as to who is using the information and who may find it valuable. Initially, the site was used by states and territories with performance levels below the national average, but over time usage has shifted such that there is no substantial difference across states.[131] There is some qualitative evidence indicating that parents in the independent schools sector use *My School* more frequently than those in the government school sector.[132] Due to limitations of the publicly available data,[133] the level of usage among different stakeholder groups (parents, policymakers, principals, lower SES, rural) remains unclear. However, it appears likely that parents remain the primary user group.[134]

Early evaluations of *My School* have found that usage has been limited by unnecessarily complex presentation of content and navigation tools.[135] This was reiterated by several stakeholders interviewed for this case study who indicated that, in light of this complexity, typically only highly educated and well-informed stakeholders use the site.[136] Meaningful access may be particularly difficult for those with disabilities, or those with English as a second language.[137] Parents and other stakeholders have noted particular difficulties in understanding and using ICSEA due to its technical complexity.[138] Some NAPLAN data is also identified by users as difficult to interpret,[139] and the financial data requires an understanding of how the education sector is financed in order to fully utilize the information presented.[140] In order to understand school performance over time or to compare types of schools, the user must manually navigate between pages and manipulate the data by hand.[141]

Box 7: Access Challenges

What challenges do parents and teachers face when trying to obtain *My School* information?

Sarah Goss is an education researcher who has also used *My School* in the school selection process for her own children. Goss reflects that the site is valuable for educated parents, particularly as a tool to shortlist potential schools. However, the information is sometimes presented in a complex format that may be challenging to understand for those without strong data and computer literacy. In her view, the value of the data available on *My School* is limited by its presentation. This is an area to which Goss points as an opportunity for improvement, as continuing to refine and simplify data presentation would strengthen *My School* as a tool for parents.

6.2.1 Communications strategy

In the lead-up to the launch of *My School*, ACARA was tasked with developing and implementing a communications strategy to inform stakeholders about the purpose and functionality of the site.[142] This process included appointing a public relations advisor, identifying audience groups and their key messaging needs, developing timelines, key activities, and an issues and risks register, and utilizing appropriate communication methods and channels.[143]

The initial communications strategy for parents and the broader community included the development of TV and radio commercials,[144] online fact sheets, brochures, and Frequently Asked Questions documents.[145] The *My School* landing page was also shared prior to release, and e-Alerts with site information were disseminated through a registration facility on the ACARA website.[146] Media attention and advocacy also played a large role in informing potential users about *My School*: ACARA utilized media interviews with key spokespeople, media conferences and school tours with the Deputy Prime Minister and the Chair of ACARA to further inform the public about the site.[147] Introductory information sessions on the My School website were also planned during February and March 2010.[148]

To assist in preparing the education sector, including teachers, for the launch of *My School* in 2010, ACARA provided website information to state and territory jurisdictions to foster better connection, preparation, and assistance for schools.[149] Communication materials were also sent to state and territory education authorities ahead of release.[150] At the school level, communications included a presentation on *My School* delivered at a principals' forum by the Deputy Prime Minister, as well as information packets and supporting materials including a DVD which were sent to principals, primarily to explain the purpose of ICSEA.[151] Additionally, principals were granted access to their school's page 24 hours before the site launched.[152]

The communications campaign addressing subsequent improvements to the site was also extensive. The updated site was publicly previewed by Prime Minister Julia Gillard, Minister for School Education Peter Garrett, and Chair of ACARA Barry McGaw to demonstrate the changes.[153] Also utilized were fact sheets and presentation slides providing information on site changes such as those in the school profile, school finances, NAPLAN results, student progress, ICSEA, and security features.[154]

ACARA's role in communicating *My School* information to the general public has continued through the work of ACARA's Communications and Strategic Relations team.[155] During 2014-15, ACARA released a video on *My School* 2015, which was among their most-viewed videos. ACARA also sent letters to principals explaining updates, and utilized social media posts and newsletter articles to hosting media and stakeholder briefings to communicate information about the 2015 *My School* release, the independent evaluation of the site and the subsequent government report.[156]

6.2.2 Parents

Parents' usage of *My School* as an informational tool has been mixed. Consumer research undertaken on behalf of ACARA showed that of the 1001 people in the quantitative sample, 83 percent were aware of the *My School* website with 42 percent actually visiting the site.[157] Parents interviewed for the purpose of this case study, as well as those canvassed for earlier reviews of *My School*, indicate a variety of perspectives on the website's usefulness. The site

is used most by parents who are in the process of making decisions about schooling, for example when students are first commencing school, moving from primary to secondary school or changing schools or neighborhoods.[158] It is particularly useful as a monitoring tool for parents who have chosen a non-government school with high fees.[159] Some parents use it to follow the progress of their children's school scores over time or to contextualize their children's scores.[160] Some have said that *My School* empowers them by providing information they can take to school meetings to demand answers about poor performance.[161]

Box 8: Use of *My School* by Parents

How is *My School* being used by parents as a tool to hold schools accountable?

Interviews conducted for this case study revealed early anecdotal stories of parents using *My School* to hold school leaders accountable for performance. At a primary school in Victoria, parents have brought *My School* data from comparable schools to Parent Council meetings, asking school leaders why results aren't higher at their child's school.

The value of *My School* can be seen even in areas where connectivity and data literacy levels may be low: in remote Indigenous communities, for example, there have been some reports of community leaders sharing school profiles from *My School* with parents, who have subsequently asked school leaders why their child's school isn't performing as well as like schools.

6.2.3 Teachers

Interviews for this case study and other early evaluations of *My School* indicate that individual teachers do not use *My School* extensively.[162] Some administrators have suggested that teachers could use the site to identify similar schools with strong performance and seek guidance on practice and pedagogy.[163] However, although there is a strong culture of shared practice within the Australian teaching community, this is not typically facilitated through *My School*.[164] The data provided on *My School* is generally regarded by teachers as too high level to be able to inform classroom practice.[165] Rather, teachers tend to use the more detailed NAPLAN data provide at student level to schools.[166]

6.2.4 Policymakers

My School data is being used by policymakers to varying degrees to generate evidence for analysis and public discussion of school funding. For example, *My School* data has been used to confirm assertions made by communities regarding unequal investment in capital and infrastructure in schools.[167] It has also been helpful in identifying possible inequities in school funding: data from 2009-2013 shows funding increases were greater for more advantaged schools.[168] The data has helped to facilitate the allocation of extra funding to schools that have not been performing as well as expected. Soon after the release of *My School,* certain schools identified as having below average student outcomes were allocated additional funding of $11 million in total to aid in improving their performance.[169] It is worth noting, however, that efforts to change funding based on *My School* data may be constrained by the rigidity of the school funding formula, which prescribes funding based on number of students, school type, capacity

of the school community and loading for factors such as disability and low socioeconomic backgrounds.[170]

Importantly, *My School* data has aided in the development of school finance reform in the *Review for Funding for Schooling* (commonly known as the Gonski Review). *My School* data helped to facilitate the creation of the schooling resource standard, a tool that would allow policymakers to develop school funding mechanisms that allocate funding based on need.[171] *My School* data was very important to this process, as school-level data must be comparable.[172] Julia Gillard's former policy advisor Tom Bentley describes the Gonski changes as *"the biggest achievement of My School"*, on the basis that this funding reform would not have been possible without the centralized and transparent publication of data provided by *My School*.[173] *My School* enabled comparison and investigation of school funding across states and sectors.

6.2.5 Education Researchers

My School has also become a helpful tool for education researchers. It is particularly beneficial for researchers looking to identify the types or characteristics of individual schools, or as a tool to verify the impacts of interventions in schools.[174] Tom Bentley noted that research such as the 'Data in Schools' report published in March 2016 by the Grattan Institute *"is exactly the type of conversation we hoped My School would enable."*[175] Without *My School,* such stakeholders would not have access to nationally consistent data at the school level.

However, there are limitations to use of *My School* as a research tool. The infrequency of NAPLAN makes it difficult to discern gains quickly, and the depth of research is currently limited by the data, which will become richer with time.[176] Many researchers find that there is insufficient access to data and comparison functionality on the site, and consequently seek access to the data that sits behind *My School.*[177] This involves submission of a data request to ACARA, which can be a lengthy and complex process with no guarantees that the required data will be provided (see Appendix F). Researchers have remarked that it would be valuable to gain easier access to the information sitting behind the site.[178] The data access protocols are currently being revised to facilitate better and more timely access to *My School* information for researchers.[179]

Box 9: Use of *My School* by Researchers

How is *My School* being used as a research tool in the education sphere?

Comparing school-level data allows researchers to analyze the education system at many levels and across several areas such as finance, demographics, and performance. Education researchers Jennifer Buckingham and Trisha Jha at the Center for Independent Studies utilize the data sets behind *My School* for such purposes. In their current publication, *One School Does Not Fit All*, the researchers identified several individual schools to look at more closely, including two schools with high ICSEA scores over 1300. Jha notes that *"we were able to use the My School website to dig a bit deeper to see how that's changed over time. Now it has five years of data; as My School continues to be updated, it will become stronger as a tool."*

6.3 REVISING *MY SCHOOL*

The *My School* website has undergone several rounds of revisions since its launch. Between its first and second year in operation, the website significantly improved its functionality. Key revisions included an improved search function, new menu items, and increased security measures to guard against misuse of information. Perhaps the most significant improvement to *My School* during this stage was an enhancement to ICSEA that improved the accuracy of the index.[180]

In September 2015, the Education Council agreed to implement a number of usability improvements.[181] These planned changes are in response to recommendations made by an independent consultant engaged by the Australian government to review *My School*.[182] Several of the planned changes relate to the usability and readability of the site, including:[183]

- Clarification of the site's purpose, with an increased focus on student progress;
- The inclusion of animated videos explaining the site's general purpose;
- Simplification of content on the homepage and introductory sections;
- Refinement of tools explaining the data, including explanatory fact sheets, a clearer glossary, and a video providing a better visual explanation of ICSEA;
- Improved site accessibility on mobile devices; and
- Improved access to data for researchers.

The functionality of the site will also be enhanced. Agreed changes include real-time updates of information as well as improvements in the school comparison function to allow users more choice in comparing schools.[184] Additionally, a broader set of school-level information will be included, moving beyond data on literacy and numeracy and allowing schools to add more information relevant to their school communities.[185] Along with these changes, *My School's* 2016 release will also include eight years of performance data and an additional measure of student attendance.[186] Moving forward ACARA plans to incorporate disability data at the school level as well.[187]

7 CONCLUSIONS

My School was created as a central repository of information about Australian schools, and in this sense it has succeeded. The extent to which it has met broader goals of fostering a culture of transparency and accountability, affected funding decisions about schools, empowered parents to make better decisions about their children's education and ultimately improved learning outcomes for Australia's children, is a matter of debate by the various stakeholder and user groups interviewed for this case study.

One thing about which stakeholders agree is that *My School* is here to stay. The site has been described as *"part of the furniture"* of the Australian education system.[188] Although at the 2013 federal election the Liberal Party's policy was to abolish *My School*,[189] the site has survived the transition through to two Liberal Coalition governments. Stakeholders have suggested that this is because there is little demand for change – at least some parents are effectively using *My School* to keep track of school performance, and operating costs are low in the context of Commonwealth Government and state education budgets.

In the six years since *My School*'s launch, ACARA has worked hard to improve the platform, regarding it as a *"living site"*[190] that can constantly be made more useful to parents, schools and communities through improved functionality, usability and access to data. With each iteration of NAPLAN, *My School* becomes a richer data source that can assist not only parent decision-making, but also broader analyses of the Australian school system by policymakers and researchers. Further improvements can continue to be made to open up the data for more sophisticated analysis and research, and to make it more user-friendly for parents, schools, researchers and other stakeholders.

In Australia, *My School* was a key component of a system-wide approach to improving the performance of Australian schools. Its development was enabled by several factors, including strong political leadership, positive intergovernmental relations, a consistent policy approach, access to technology and the availability of existing, well-organized data sets. These enabling factors helped to overcome a number of challenges to the site's implementation, including school choice limitations in Australia, vocal stakeholder opposition, and disagreements regarding the data. Overall, the Australian experience offers valuable insights for the global agenda to increase school-level information as a tool to improve education outcomes.

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APPENDIX A - STAKEHOLDER MAP

The following is a list of organizations and individuals whose views have been incorporated into the development of this case study. It represents stakeholders along the full range of the site's lifecycle including those involved in its creation, development, or use. The list has been compiled from stakeholders interviewed for this case study as well as those who contributed submissions and testimony to the 2010 and 2014 Senate Inquiry on the Administration and Reporting of NAPLAN Testing.

Please note that the titles included relate to the capacity in which the interviewee spoke with the Capstone team – in some cases, these are former titles if the interviewee has subsequently moved out of the role relevant to *My School*.

POLICYMAKERS

Organization	Individual	Title (as relevant)	Type of Engagement
AusGOAL	Baden Appleyard	National Program Director	Interviewed
Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)	Anthony Mackay	Inaugural deputy chair	Interviewed
	Barry McGaw	Inaugural Foundation Chair	Interviewed
	Peter Hill	Inaugural Chief Executive Officer	Senate Inquiry
	Peter Adams	Former General Manager, Assessment and Reporting (now Senior Manager of PISA at OECD)	Interviewed
	Rob Randall	Current Chief Executive Officer	Interviewed
	Stanley Rabinowitz	General Manager, Assessment and Reporting	Interviewed
Commonwealth	Amanda Lampe	Former Chief of Staff to Julia Gillard	Interviewed
	Christopher Pyne	Former Minister of Education (Liberal Party)	Senate Inquiry
	Peter Garrett	Former Minister of Education (Australian Labor Party)	Senate Inquiry
	Tom Bentley	Former Senior Policy Adviser to Julia Gillard	Interviewed
Council of Australian Governments (COAG)			Senate Inquiry
Australian Department of Education	Gabrielle Phillips	Branch Manager for National Data Reform	Interviewed

Organization	Individual	Title (as relevant)	Type of Engagement
		Evidence and Assessment Group	
	Lisa Paul	Former Department Secretary	Interviewed
	Peter Stanistreet	Director of Performance Reform and Measurement Team	Interviewed
Department of Education Tasmania	Sharyn Lidster	General Manager Strategic Policy and Performance	Senate Inquiry
NSW Department of Education		Policymakers	Interviewed

TEACHERS AND UNIONS

Organization	Individual	Title (as Relevant)	Type of Engagement
Australian Association for the Teaching of English			Senate Inquiry
Australian College of Educators			Senate Inquiry
Australian Education Union	Angelo Gavrielatos	Former President	Interviewed
New South Wales Teachers Federation	Robert Lipscombe	Former President	Senate Inquiry
Independent Education Union of Australia	Chris Watt	Federal Secretary	Senate Inquiry
Junee Teachers Association			Senate Inquiry
Kandos Public School	Rosey Nelson	Teacher representative	Senate Inquiry
New South Wales Teachers Federation			Senate Inquiry
Pomona State School	Sharon Melink	Teacher representative	Senate Inquiry
Queensland Teachers Union			Senate Inquiry
Teach for Australia	Teachers	Teachers	Interviewed
Victorian Association for the Teaching of English			Senate Inquiry
Individual teachers	Helen Stearman	Teacher	Senate Inquiry
	Jenny Cullen	Teacher	Senate Inquiry
	Marianne Scholem	Teacher	Interviewed
	Mailee Ross	Teacher	Interviewed

SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS

Organization	Individual	Title (as Relevant)	Type of Engagement
Bouldercombe State School	Dianne Stace	School representative	Senate Inquiry
Canley Vale Public School		School representative	Senate Inquiry
Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy	Danielle Toon	CEO	Interviewed
Chatswood Hills State School	Christine Turner	School representative	Senate Inquiry
Eastern Creek Public School		School representative	Senate Inquiry
Epping Heights Public School		School representative	Senate Inquiry
Girraween Public School		School representative	Senate Inquiry
Moggill State School		School representative	Senate Inquiry
Spensley Street Primary School		School representative	Senate Inquiry
Association of Independent Schools NSW	Geoff Newcombe	Executive Director	Senate Inquiry
Lutheran Education Australia		Non-government	Senate Inquiry

PRINCIPALS AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Organization	Individual	Title (as Relevant)	Type of Engagement
Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA)	Phillip Heath	Director and Incoming chair	Senate Inquiry
Australian Primary Principals Association	Leonie Trimper	Former president	Senate Inquiry
	Norm Hart	Former president	Senate Inquiry
Australian Secondary Principals Association			Senate Inquiry
New South Wales Primary Principals' Association			Senate Inquiry
New South Wales Secondary Principals Council			Senate Inquiry
Queensland Association of State School Principals			Senate Inquiry
WA Primary Principals Association	Stephen Breen	President	Senate Inquiry
Mt Druitt Campus of Chifley College			Senate Inquiry

Organization	Individual	Title (as Relevant)	Type of Engagement
Australian Council for Educational Leaders			Senate Inquiry

EDUCATION RESEARCHERS

Organization	Individual	Title (as Relevant)	Type of Engagement
Brookings Institution	Joshua Muskin	Researcher	Interviewed
Centre for Independent Studies	Trisha Jha	Researcher	Interviewed
Grattan Institute	Ben Jensen	Director of School Education	Senate Inquiry
	Pete Goss	Strategy Consultant /School Education Program Director	Interviewed
Whitlam Institute	John Polesel	Researcher	Senate Inquiry
	Nicky Dulfer	Researcher	Senate Inquiry
	Suzanne Rice	Researcher	Senate Inquiry
Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)	Geoff Masters		Senate Inquiry
	Glenn Rowley		Senate Inquiry
	John Ainley		Senate Inquiry
	Siek Toon Khoo		Senate Inquiry
	Ray Adams	Director, Centre for Education Monitoring	Interviewed
	Sara Goss	Independent Education Consultant	Interviewed
Need to Succeed	Chris Bonnor	Researcher	Interviewed
Grahame Cook Consulting	Grahame Cook	Director	Interviewed

PARENTS AND PARENT ASSOCIATIONS

Organization	Individual	Title (as Relevant)	Type of Engagement
ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations	Elizabeth Singer	President	Senate Inquiry
	Megan Bagworth	Policy Officer	Senate Inquiry
	Warren Muller	P&C Delegate	Senate Inquiry
Australian Parents Council Inc			Senate Inquiry
NSW Parents' Council			Senate Inquiry
Queensland Council for Parents and Citizens' Associations			Senate Inquiry

EDUCATION COMMENTATORS

Organization	Individual	Title (as Relevant)	Type of Engagement
Sydney Morning Herald	Anna Patty	Journalist	Senate Inquiry
	Amy McNeilage	Journalist	Senate Inquiry
	Alexandra Smith	Journalist	Senate Inquiry
The West Australian	Andrew Tillett	Journalist	Senate Inquiry

TEACHER EDUCATION

Organization	Individual	Title (as Relevant)	Type of Engagement
School of Education, Deakin University			Senate Inquiry
University of Western Australia	David Andrich	Professor	Senate Inquiry
James Cook University	Peter Ridd	Professor	Senate Inquiry

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Organization	Individual	Title (as Relevant)	Type of Engagement
Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)			Senate Inquiry

APPENDIX B - INTERVIEW INSIGHTS

The following are the main insights from 24 interviews conducted for the case study. The thoughts included represent views from a variety of stakeholders who were involved in the establishment of *My School*, in its ongoing operation or as users. Stakeholders include parents, teachers, researchers, government officials, union officials, and administrative officials, among others.

RATIONALE FOR *MY SCHOOL*

- *My School* was part of a broader national agenda of education reform; its power comes from being part of a coherent approach to system-wide reform.
- Transparency and nationally consistent data supported the Commonwealth Government's policy goal to create an education system that fosters equity and provides a productive workforce.
    - Transparency was an explicit objective behind the conceptualization of *My School*.
- *My School* was designed to address a clear problem - a lack of access to consistent information on Australian schools.
- My School was designed to help start the conversation on issues in education.
- *My School* was established to provide increased access to information in a consistent format to foster a shared understanding of the issues facing Australian schools and the broader education system.
- Public reporting about schools on *My School* serves as an important component of accountability in the Australian educational context both at the school and the system level.
    - However, accountability in the Australian context must be understood differently than in other countries such as the US, since there is no practice of closing schools that are poorly performing.
- *My School* was part of the broader school choice movement that sought to raise education quality and address the needs of parents.

STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES

Teachers and unions

- Teachers generally do not talk about or use *My School* because the information is too high level to provide meaningful, classroom-level analysis. There are alternative ways for teachers and school leaders to get information such as student-level NAPLAN data.
- While there is a strong practice of sharing pedagogical best practices between schools, this is primarily facilitated by relationships and networks rather than by *My School*.
- While *My School* cannot inform detailed practice at the classroom level, it may be able to provide comparative snapshots that foster important conversations.
- Teachers may have difficulty accessing the information on the site due to insufficient levels of data literacy and the at-times confusing presentation of data on the site.
- The publication of NAPLAN results raised concerns among schools and teachers about the creation of league tables and the inappropriate use of aggregated NAPLAN scores as a measure of school performance.
- Teachers and unions expressed concern that publication of school-level results on *My School* could result in a high-stakes learning environment, placing undue pressure on students.

- The boycott of the NAPLAN test by the Australian Education Union, which arose because of these concerns, resulted in the creation of a working group to review the site. From this work, *My School* was revised, limiting the site's information, functionality, and data accessibility. The process was successful in addressing the union's key concerns.
- A key component that brought stakeholders to the negotiating table was limiting school comparisons on the site to those between statistically similar schools.
- *My School* places pressure on schools with low standardized test scores to try and limit the negative perceptions of the school that result from the publication of NAPLAN scores. There is anecdotal evidence of schools including more test prep during instruction and negative effects of testing burnout and stress on students.
- Concerns have been raised about low morale of students, parents, and teachers resulting from the publication of low NAPLAN scores.

Parents and Community Leaders

- *My School* is useful to parents who possess the literacy and numeracy skills to understand the information. These tend to be parents who are more informed and educated, often from a higher socioeconomic background and often parents in non-government school communities.
- Parents of higher performing students seem to use *My School* more frequently to monitor the progress of their child's school and identify alternative schools for their children if necessary.
- Parents who pay higher school fees are more interested in *My School* as a tool to aid in accountability.
- The site is inaccessible to disadvantaged parents who do not possess the skills necessary to interpret the data. As a result, some teachers at disadvantaged schools report having had no conversations with parents about *My School*.
- Indigenous communities in particular have lower levels of internet access and education, likely limiting their ability to use the website.
- For those parents who are able to use the site, it is useful as one of several tools in the school choice process, as for example, to compare schools in the area. Visiting possible schools to gain a better sense of the school culture is still seen as highly necessary and valuable in the process.
- If a family can't afford to move or pay for independent school fees, school choice is limited to 2 or 3 schools in Australia. This limits *My School*'s usefulness as a tool for school choice.
- Some parents have used *My School* to push for accountability by using information comparing a school's performance to that of similar schools, in order to call for improvements from school leadership.
- Some community leaders, especially in remote areas, have used information from *My School* about similar schools achieving better educational outcomes to push school leaders for improvements.
- *My School* is not a stand-alone guide to school quality; it is just one of a number of sources.

Researchers

- Some education researchers have used the site for fact checking, stating, however, that the data provided on the site is usually not strong enough to cite as conclusive.

- ICSEA is a key feature of *My School* which allows researchers to compare between different groups of schools and the performance of their students.
- The information on *My School* has been used by education researchers to analyze levels of school funding. Issues such as unequal funding between school sectors and inefficiencies in funding models have been identified through this research.
- Many education researchers would like greater access to the data sets that sit behind *My School*, so that they can run their own analyses on the data rather than being restricted to the way in which it is presented on the site.
- Members of the open data community have expressed concern that the restrictions on data access introduced to mitigate the concerns of teachers and unions undermine the objectives of transparency and openness that *My School* was intended to address.

Policymakers

- *My School* enables more informed policymaking.
- *My School* fosters debates on school funding, and one of its greatest contributions was providing the centralized information necessary to enable the Gonski reforms to school funding.
- Some policymakers perceived *My School* as a strategy of the Commonwealth government to increase visibility and control over policy areas traditionally in the purview of the states and territories.
- Although state-level policymakers previously had reasonable access to data on schools in their own states, *My School* enabled meaningful comparisons across states, which was a helpful tool for policymaking.

Journalists

- Journalists use *My School* to highlight good and poor performance in schools, particularly those that receive more or less funding than average.

ENABLING FACTORS

Policy Window

- *My School* resulted from the strong leadership of Julia Gillard who made a personal commitment towards promoting *My School* as a tool to increase transparency about the performance of Australian schools.
- The unique time of political alignment between the Commonwealth, States, and Territories helped to pave the way for *My School*'s implementation.
- It should be noted, however, that since *My School* was poorly received by the teachers' unions, which are influential stakeholders in Australian Labor Party politics, the strong Labor alignment across all states and territories and the Commonwealth was also in some ways a challenge.
- Differences between political parties are less acute than in other country contexts, which may also have allowed for *My School's* negotiation and continuation.
- However, although *My School* was an Australian Labor Party policy, it angered the unions and did not reflect the traditional liberal approach to education; as a result, the nationwide alignment of Labor governments was in some ways a challenge as well as an enabler.
- Education was a policy focus at the time *My School* was developed with a significant amount of energy and money being poured into the sector.

- Accountability and transparency were being promoted across all sectors by the states, territories and Commonwealth at the time of *My School*'s development.

Structural Factors

- The implementation of *My School* depended largely on the centralized education funding structure that exists in Australia.
- Involvement of states and territories was ensured by predicating federal funding on their participation in NAPLAN and reporting of *My School* data. Without this leverage, it is unlikely the Commonwealth would have been able to convince independent schools and state governments to participate.
- The structure and legal nature of ACARA was important in fostering state buy-in of *My School*. The statutory authority includes state representatives and representatives from Independent and Catholic school sectors.
- The delivery of *My School* is made easier by ACARA's establishment as an independent agency whose responsibilities are prescribed by legislation rather than as a department.
- It was helpful but not a precondition that NAPLAN had been set up under the previous government and did not have to be created along with *My School*.
- *My School* was predated by a long history of the government developing and sharing data.
- The data used by *My School* is information schools already produce from their daily operations, which helped to facilitate the development of the site.

TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- For most schools, there is a centralized data system that is able to process the necessary information. A small group of schools do not have the necessary technological capacity; for these schools, support is provided as through, for example, help desks.
- Connections with software companies also enable the development and management of the data.
- To assist in data management and indicator development for *My School*, there is cross-over between ACARA and the Australian government within working groups and committees.
- ICSEA relies heavily on the parental background variables, which may not be available in other countries.

TRANSFERABILITY OF *MY SCHOOL* TO OTHER COUNTRY CONTEXTS

- *My School* was a unique Australian creation; however, the concept behind *My School* regarding educational performance is transferable in its basic components. The tool would need to be carefully calibrated to the circumstances in each individual country.
- The issues in the Australian educational context for which *My School* was designed differ from those in developing countries, and a system such as *My School* may be limited in its relevance in a different context.
- In transferring the *My School* concept to other country contexts, care should be taken to ensure fairness of the data and functions provided.
- A tool like ICSEA to enable comparisons of like schools should be a priority feature to ensure meaningful information is provided when transferring the *My School* concept to other contexts.
- Good management and expertise is critical to a similar *My School* setup. The platform design, data analytics can all be outsourced if necessary.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Discussion and engagement on potential indicators to include on the site continues, as for example with disability data. Ministers have raised concerns regarding privacy issues with the inclusion of this information.
- The process for including additional data on the site can take a large amount of time and stakeholder involvement due to an expectation in the Australian context that to be a fair measure, an indicator must be applied to all jurisdictions. Thus all indicators must be universal and reach full agreement.
- ACARA has shifted its focus on *My School* to being one of gain and growth of schools rather than only focusing on achievement. This highlights schools that show improvements, providing the opportunity for more "winners" in the education system and for more constructive conversations.
- Currently the debate around *My School* has quieted as the site has been revised over time and priorities have shifted to other areas.
- *My School* does not provide a holistic view of how schools are doing or their efforts to support students. Adding more information to provide a more holistic view of the school would improve *My School's* relevance. This could include information on school culture and satisfaction, or further testing data such as PISA or science testing.
- *My School* could provide information on value added and how much a school improves the lives of its students over the course of several years rather than a single year's results (although this would of course raise its own set of challenges.)
- *My School* could be better adapted for teachers' needs as a tool to improve classroom-level practice.
- Making the data easier to understand and more accessible would improve *My School's* usability.
- *My School* could be improved for research by enabling greater access to the underlying data.
- Nevertheless, *My School* is now part of the furniture of the Australian education system and is unlikely to be dismantled in the future.

APPENDIX C - ICSEA

ICSEA values are calculated on a scale that has a median of 1000 and a standard deviation of 100.[191] A value on the index corresponds to the average level of 'socio-educational advantage' of the school's student population relative to those of other schools. This captures and separates out the likely benefits to a child of coming from a well-educated family, in order to better isolate the distinct causal effect of the child's school on their academic performance.

On *My School*, a school's ICSEA value is used to select a comparison group of up to 60 schools serving students from statistically similar backgrounds. The schools may be geographically diverse and may have different facilities and resources. The important thing is that, on average, the students have a similar level of socio-educational advantage.

ACARA has put substantial effort into improving ICSEA over time to make it more robust and stable. Various stakeholders were sensitive to unfair comparisons of schools through league tables. ICSEA was developed to help ensure 'fair comparisons' between schools. In 2010, the construction of the index was based on two data sources: (i) student enrollment records; and (ii) the Australian Bureau of Statistics census data.

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[191] OECD, *Delivering School Transparency,* 28.

APPENDIX D - SELECTED EARLY EVALUATIONS

Several reviews and studies of *My School* have been conducted in recent years. Below is a list of select key publications with a brief summary of their findings. In accordance with the terms of reference from the Brookings Institution, this case study does not include a comprehensive review of the literature.

FORMAL REVIEWS AND ASSESSMENTS

Cook, Grahame. (2014). Review of My School Website: Final Report to the Australian Government Department of Education. Grahame Cook Consulting.

Commissioned by the Australian Department of Education, this review was drafted to determine the effectiveness of the site's usability and its ability to address the needs of the education reform agenda. The review found the usability of the site to be constrained due to the need to limit the creation of league tables from its data as well as being due to the complex nature of the data the site provides. The level of contextual information about schools as desired by parents was also found to be limited. Regarding site usage, the review identified declining but still substantial utilization of the site. The school profile page, NAPLAN results in numbers, and NAPLAN results in graphs constitute the most page views. The review also indicates that some parents use the site to assist in school selection or to contextualize their student's NAPLAN scores, but that only a minority of parents use the site. Recommendations emanating from the review include refocusing the site on the parent/school accountability relationship, making steps to increase the usability of the site, and broadening the amount of contextual information the site provides.

Taig, Carolyn and Cathy North. (2014). *ACARA. Perspectives on the My School Website*. Colmar Brunton.

This review was commissioned by ACARA to qualitatively assess the effectiveness of the *My School* website in serving its target audience and enhancing transparency and accountability. The researchers facilitated ten focus groups including parents, principals, and ACARA partners. The researchers found mixed responses to questions assessing *My School's* effectiveness, both within and among stakeholder groups. Regarding parents, the findings suggest parents view the availability of information on *My School* positively and use the site as a starting point when choosing schools for their children, in addition to other sources of information. Concerns were raised by a variety of focus group members about the accuracy of the information on the site in depicting school level realities in areas of finance and learning. Regarding school-level transparency, there was agreement that having information in one place made it more accessible. *My School* was also generally not seen to facilitate student performance evaluation within schools or parent engagement with schools.

SENATE INQUIRIES

Senate Standing References Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations References Committee. (2010). Administration and Reporting of NAPLAN testing.

This document is a compilation of submissions and testimony from the Senate Standing References Committee hearing on the administration and reporting of NAPLAN testing in response to allegations of cheating and manipulating test results in May 2010. The documentation contains background information on NAPLAN testing and the concerns surrounding its administration; stakeholder perspectives regarding the publication of test results on the *My School* website are also included. Focal topics addressed in the report cover the quality of student and school information provided on the website as well as how teaching quality and students' educational experiences are affected by the publication of test results on *My School*. Also included is discussion of possible safeguards and protocols that may be utilized to mitigate negative effects as well as recommendations from the committee for each topic area. Finally, international approaches to publishing similar types of information is also explored.

Senate Standing References Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations References Committee. (2014). Effectiveness of the National Assessment Program--Literacy and Numeracy Final Report.

This document includes submissions and testimony from the Senate Standing References Committee hearing in 2013 on the effectiveness of NAPLAN testing. An update on the recommendations from the 2010 hearing on the administration of NAPLAN is included as well as discussion of NAPLAN's objectives, whether they have been achieved, and unintended consequences. The effects of NAPLAN testing on students, teachers, and schools are also explored, including the impact of publishing test results on *My School*. The report closes with consideration of possible improvements for NAPLAN testing as well as international best practice of standardized testing.

ACADEMIC STUDIES

Thompson, Greg. (2013). "NAPLAN, MySchool and Accountability: Teacher perceptions of the effects of testing". *The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives* 12:2, 62-84.

This paper discusses results of a teacher survey conducted in Western Australia and South Australia that sought educators' views on the impact of NAPLAN on learning, the impact of NAPLAN on relationships with parents, and any negative impacts of the testing. The study found that NAPLAN and the publication of results on *My School* fostered more focus on and cohesive approaches to literacy and numeracy and pedagogies in the school. Also, increases in student stress and anxiety in addition to less inclusive pedagogies were reported due to the need for schools to be regarded as doing well or improving on *My School*. Survey results also found a negative change in teacher-parent relationships in part because of comparisons on *My School*.

INTERNATIONAL REPORTS

OECD. (2012). Delivering School Transparency in Australia: National Reporting Through My School.

This publication discusses the process of creating and implementing *My School*, including components essential for the policy's success. The educational context of Australia leading up to *My School* is described, including the challenges of achievement and equity. The report then highlights the development of the NAPLAN testing regime and the subsequent government commitment to greater transparency and accountability that led to public debate around publishing school level data on *My School*. In this process, the report enumerates various challenges the site's implementation faced and how they were managed. Moving into the creation of *My School* itself, the report highlights the construction of the policy and its technical details as developed by the working group. Key factors to the policy's success are distilled including strong leadership, preparedness to manage opposition, marshaling the evidence, effective decision making, and long-term planning. To conclude, the report discusses the launch of *My School* and the development of version 2.0.

APPENDIX E - CENTRALIZED FUNDING LEGISLATION

INTERGOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENT ON FEDERAL FINANCIAL RELATIONS (NOVEMBER 2008)[192]

The Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations (IGAFFR) established a new financial framework for federal relations with the states and territories and is often described as the most significant reform of Australia's federal financial relations in decades.[193] The IGAFFR sought to improve the well-being of all Australians through collaborative working arrangements that clearly defined roles and responsibilities and fair and sustainable financial arrangements; focused on long term policy development and enhanced government service delivery; enhanced public accountability through simpler, standardized and more transparent performance reporting by all jurisdictions; and equalized fiscal capacities between States and Territories. Under the IGAFFR, the Commonwealth Treasury processes all payments centrally and then distributes the funds directly to each state treasury. The state treasuries are then responsible for distributing funds within the respective jurisdiction. The IGAFFR also established National Agreements with the States and Territories, which defined the objectives, outcomes, outputs and performance indicators of specific policy areas, and clarified the roles and responsibilities that would guide the Commonwealth and the States and Territories in the delivery of services across a particular sector. One of the National Agreements established under IGAFFR was the National Education Agreement, a plan for all Australian school students to acquire the knowledge and skills to participate effectively in society and employment in a globalized economy.

NATIONAL EDUCATION AGREEMENT (NEA) (JANUARY 2009)[194]

The NEA set out education reporting requirements as a condition of funding for government schools. The NEA sets out nationally agreed upon objectives, outcomes, and performance benchmarks and also provides a performance reporting framework that is designed to measure achievements of objectives and outcomes. Through the NEA, the Australian government would provide states with $18 billion in funding to meet the costs of delivering schooling. As a condition of funding, States and Territories were required to provide the Commonwealth with the school data underpinning *My School.* To secure funding under the NEA, states and territories were required to produce the following: streamlined and consistent reports on national progress, including an annual national report on the outcomes of schooling in Australia; national reporting on performance of individual schools to inform parents and caregivers and for evaluation by governments of school performance; plain language student reports to parents and caregivers and an annual report made publicly available to the school community on the school's achievements and other contextual information. The NEA prioritized accountability and reporting for three specific reasons:

1) to increase accountability to students, parents, caregivers and community;
2) to provide public accountability in support of outcomes by the Council of Australian Governments; and
3) to improve the evidence base to support future policy reforms and system improvements.

SCHOOLS ASSISTANCE ACT 2008/SCHOOLS ASSISTANCE REGULATIONS 2009[195,196]

The Schools Assistance Act 2008 granted financial assistance for independent and Catholic primary and secondary schools from 2009 to 2013. The Act's accompanying School Assistance Regulations 2009 set out school performance and transparency requirements for independent and Catholic schools as a condition of this funding. These reporting requirements mirrored those of the NEA and addressed reporting on student assessments, schooling outcomes, and school information. The Schools Assistance Act also set out how this information was to be publicized to parents and the broader community.

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[192] COAG, *Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations*. Report. 2011. <http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/intergovernmental_agreements.aspx>.

[193] Australian Government, Federal Register of Legislation. Schools Assistance Act 2008. <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2014C00004>.

[194] COAG, *The National Education Agreement*, Report. 2008. <https://www.coag.gov.au/sites/default/files/20081129_national_education_agreement_factsheet.pdf>

[195] Australian Government, Federal Register of Legislation. Schools Assistance Act 2008.

[196] Australian Government, Federal Register of Legislation Schools Assistance Regulations 2009. <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2013C00864>.

APPENDIX F - ACARA DATA REQUEST PROCESS

The process of acquiring data from ACARA has several steps.

APPLICATION

Applicants must review the data protocols and accurately fill out the data acquisition application (http://www.acara.edu.au/acara_data_access_application_process.html). This may require that the applicant becomes familiar with names of data sets used by ACARA and the availability of specific data sets. Data requests can be submitted at any point and may be changed by the applicant. However, amended applications are treated as a new application.[197]

REVIEW

The data request application will then be reviewed either by the ACARA Data Request Panel if it is a general request, or the ACARA Research and Data Committee if it is a request for unpublished data.

Elements considered in the approval process include:

- The applicant having institutional ethics clearance
- The amount of resources ACARA would need to commit to complete the request
- Whether the research would benefit students, schools, and the Australian community
- The ability of the project to maintain confidentiality of the data
- Whether the list of data requested is specified in sufficient detail
- There is sufficient information about the intended use of the data
- Whether ACARA has the technical ability to execute the request
- The possible outcomes of the research
- How the information may be published (in aggregated, de-identified form)
- An applicant's previous history of adherence to data acquisition agreements

This process generally takes between 4-8 weeks; however, this timeframe may be extended if the application is insufficient and must be amended by the applicant, in which case the application is treated as a new application.

AGREEMENT

Upon approval of the data request, a legal agreement between the applicant and ACARA must be completed and signed. This agreement stipulates the data to be delivered, the permitted use of the data, any fees involved in preparation (if the data requires extraction and quality assurance services by ACARA, a fee will be levied to cover this cost), responsibilities of those authorized to use the data, and legal recourse ACARA will follow if the legal agreement is broken.

Once the legal agreement has been sent, the applicant has 3-4 weeks to respond and return a signed copy of the agreement to ACARA. If changes are made to the approved application that involve requesting new data or changing the use of data planned by the project, the application must be revised and resubmitted. It will then be treated as a new application. ACARA's work on the data request will not begin until the legal agreement is signed and all fees are collected.

DELIVERY

Once all of the previously outlined steps are completed, ACARA will begin completing the data request and will deliver it through a secured FTP (File Transfer Protocol).

TIMEFRAME

The timeframe established for delivering the data to the applicant is established on a case-by-case basis. Elements impacting the delivery timetable include how large or complicated the data request is, finalization of the agreement, the availability of the data, the number of applicants waiting for data, ACARA's available resources (for example, there can be significant delays between September and April due to this being ACARA's peak period with *My School*'s release).

***My School* Data Acquisition Timetable**

- Process can begin **6 months** after the data is published on *My School*.
- **4-8 weeks** for ACARA to process the data request
  - This can be extended if the application is not accepted and must be revised.
- **3-4 weeks** for legal agreement signing window
  - Changes made at this point may extend the process if the application needs to be reconsidered.
- **ACARA begins work** on the data request once fees are received and the legal agreement is signed.
- **Delivery** timeframe of the data is dependent upon the request and the availability of ACARA's resources

[197] ACARA. *Data Access Program Guidelines.* Report. 2013.

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