


# IMPROVING COUNTRY EDUCATION

*From global issues to school improvement*

2022 SAASLA Conference  
Adelaide, South Australia  
19<sup>th</sup> September 2022

 [pasi\\_sahlberg](#)



**Southern Cross  
University**

1: The Big Picture

2: Our Education Nation

3: Your schools

4: Conversation

# **1: The Big Picture**

# THE STATE OF GLOBAL EDUCATION PRE-PANDEMIC



**260 million children are not at school** and only three quarters of 15-year-olds in middle income countries attend school, and just half of them achieve the basic level of proficiency required. – Global Education Monitoring Report 2020



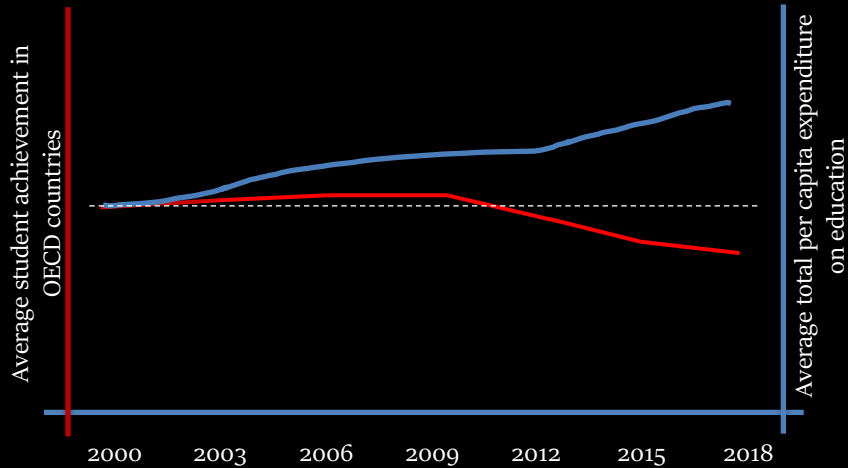
**The performance differences** across the OECD countries between the most socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged students are significant and growing. – PISA 2018



**There is a global learning crisis** that amplifies educational inequalities that severely hobbles the disadvantaged youth who most need the boost that a good education can offer. – World Bank Human Development Report 2018

Crisis!

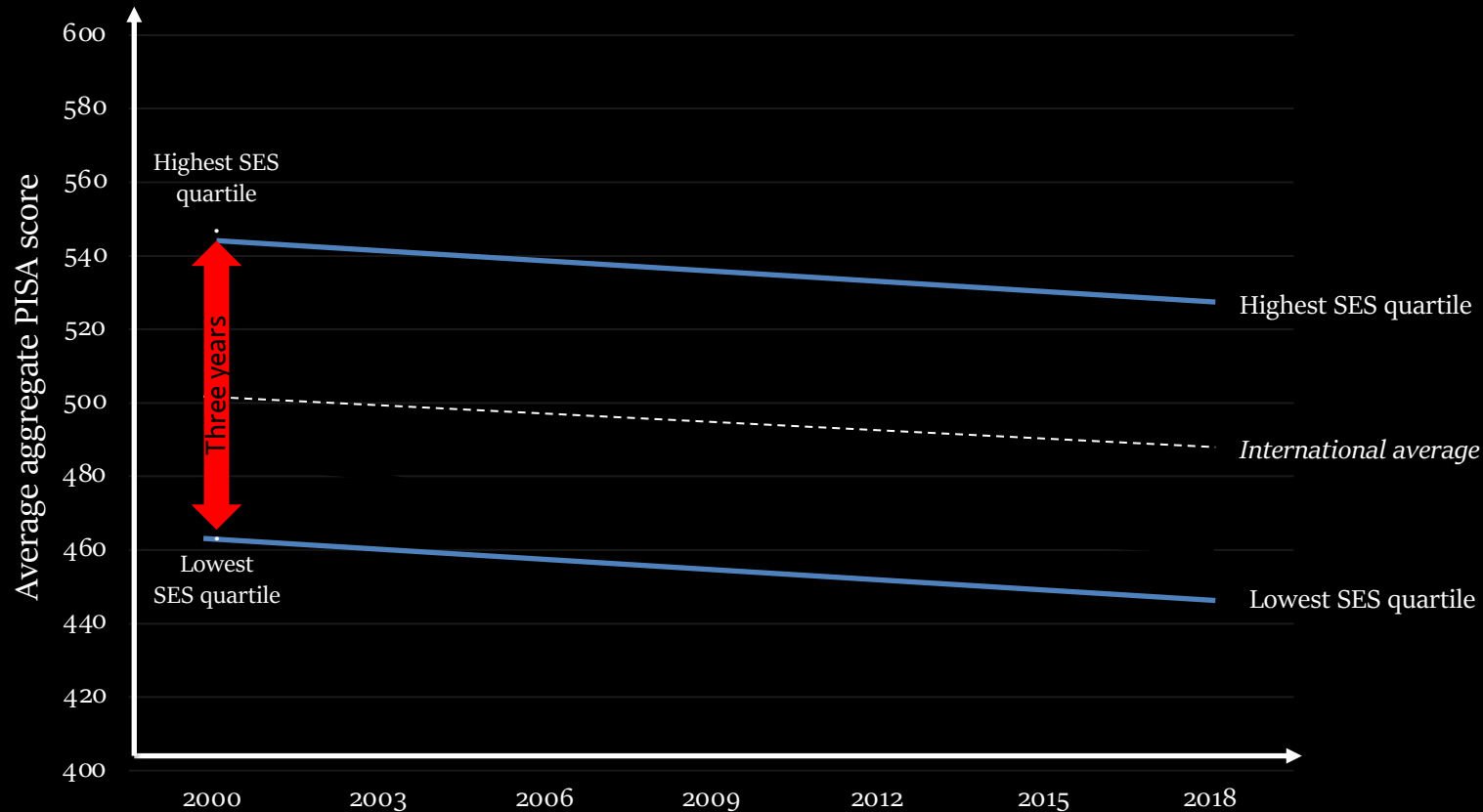
# Education outcomes vs. spending



*“Real spending on education has grown steadily over the last 10 years. But government education spending as a share of GDP has remained flat in the past 10 years.”*

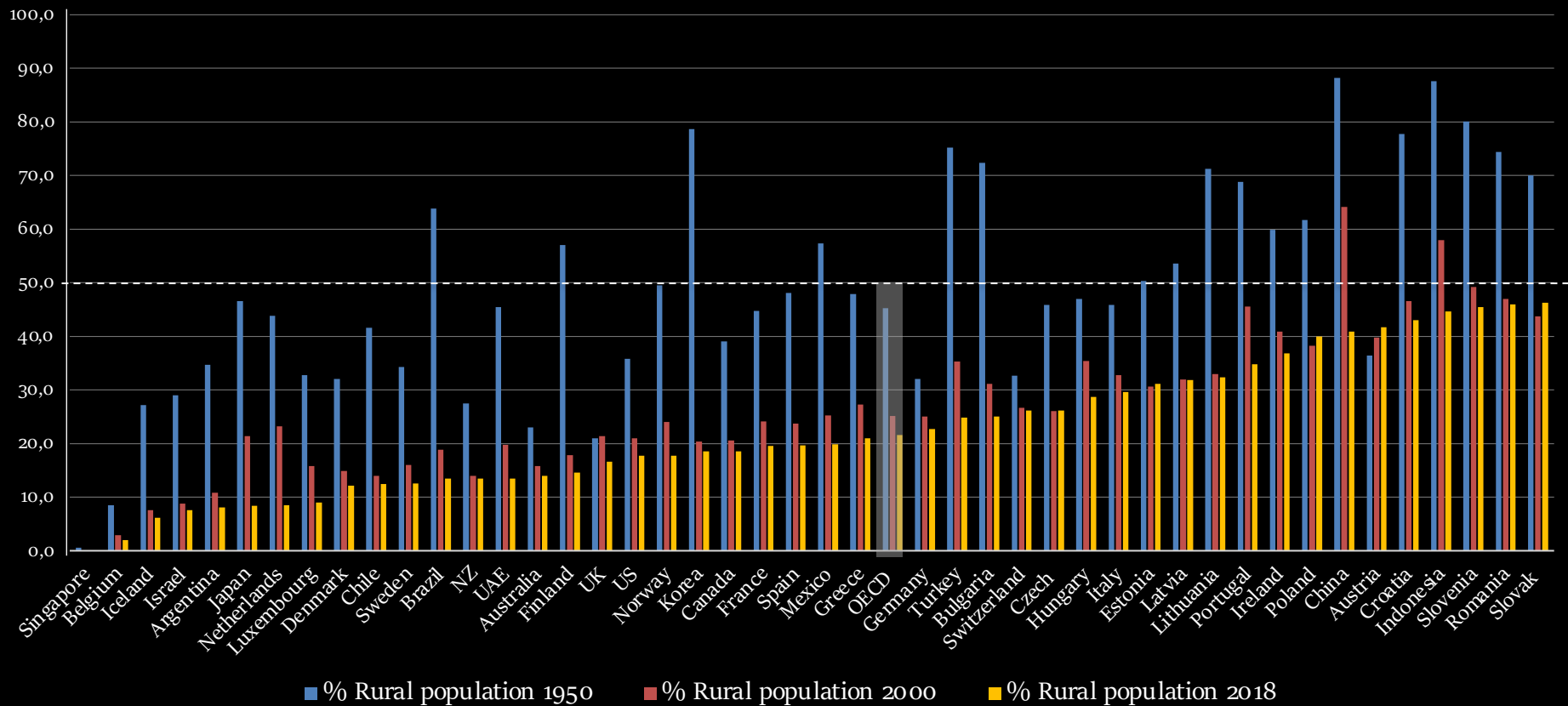
- UIS; OECD; IMF; World Bank databases

# Average student academic achievement in OECD countries by socioeconomic (SES) quartile since 2000



**What do we know about country education?**

# Share of rural population since 1950 in OECD countries





# What makes country education different?

Smaller, sparsely located population

Lower socio-economic status

Geographical distance

Ethnically homogeneous and socially  
cohesive communities

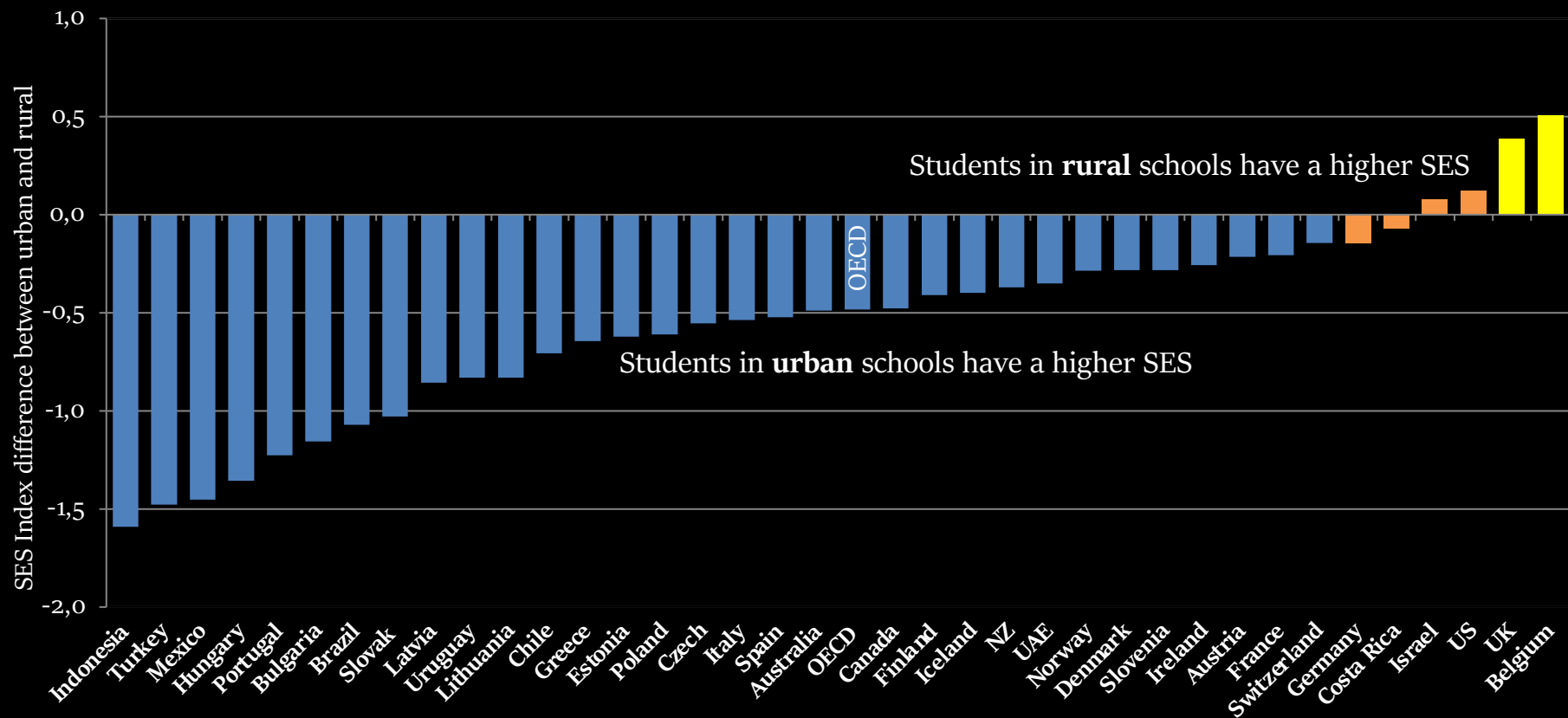
# What does global evidence tell?

Internationally comparable data show that, on average across OECD countries, students in urban schools score about 30 points higher than students in rural schools, which is roughly equivalent to one year of schooling.

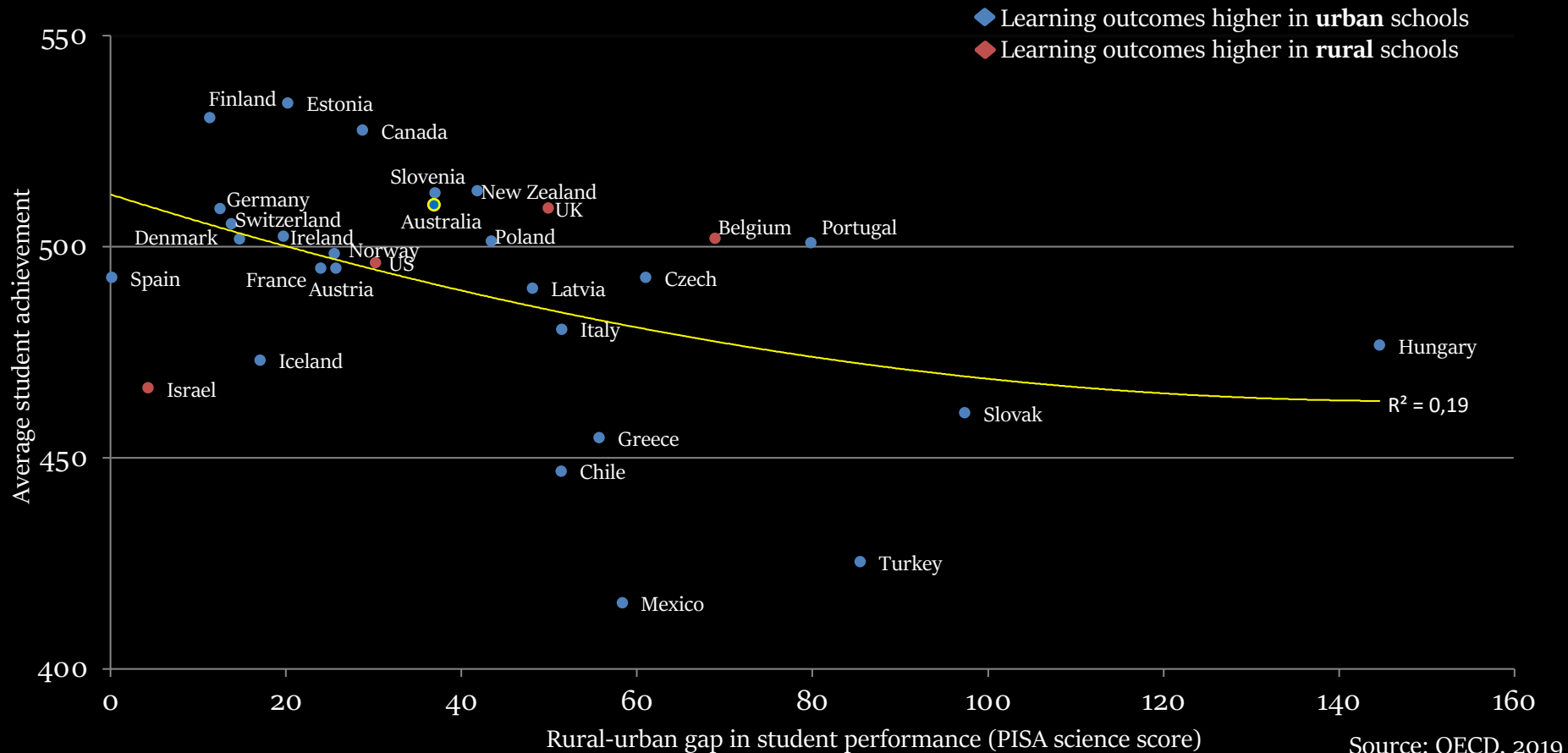
# What does global evidence tell?

Some studies show that small rural schools can be particularly beneficial to socio-economically disadvantaged students.

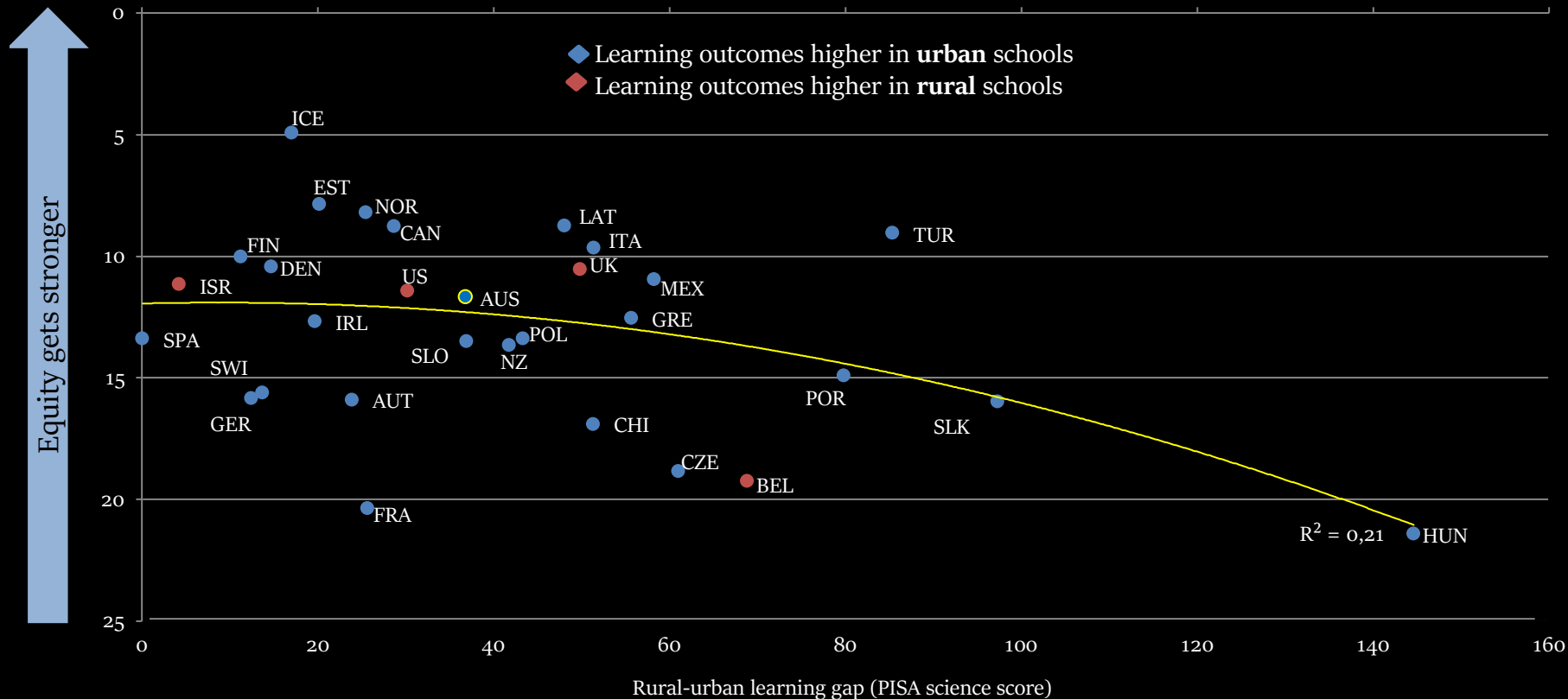
# The rural-urban gap in students' socio-economic status



# The rural-urban learning gaps in OECD countries



# The rural-urban learning gap and equity in education



## **2: Our Education Nation**

# What makes Australian school education unique?

Long school days

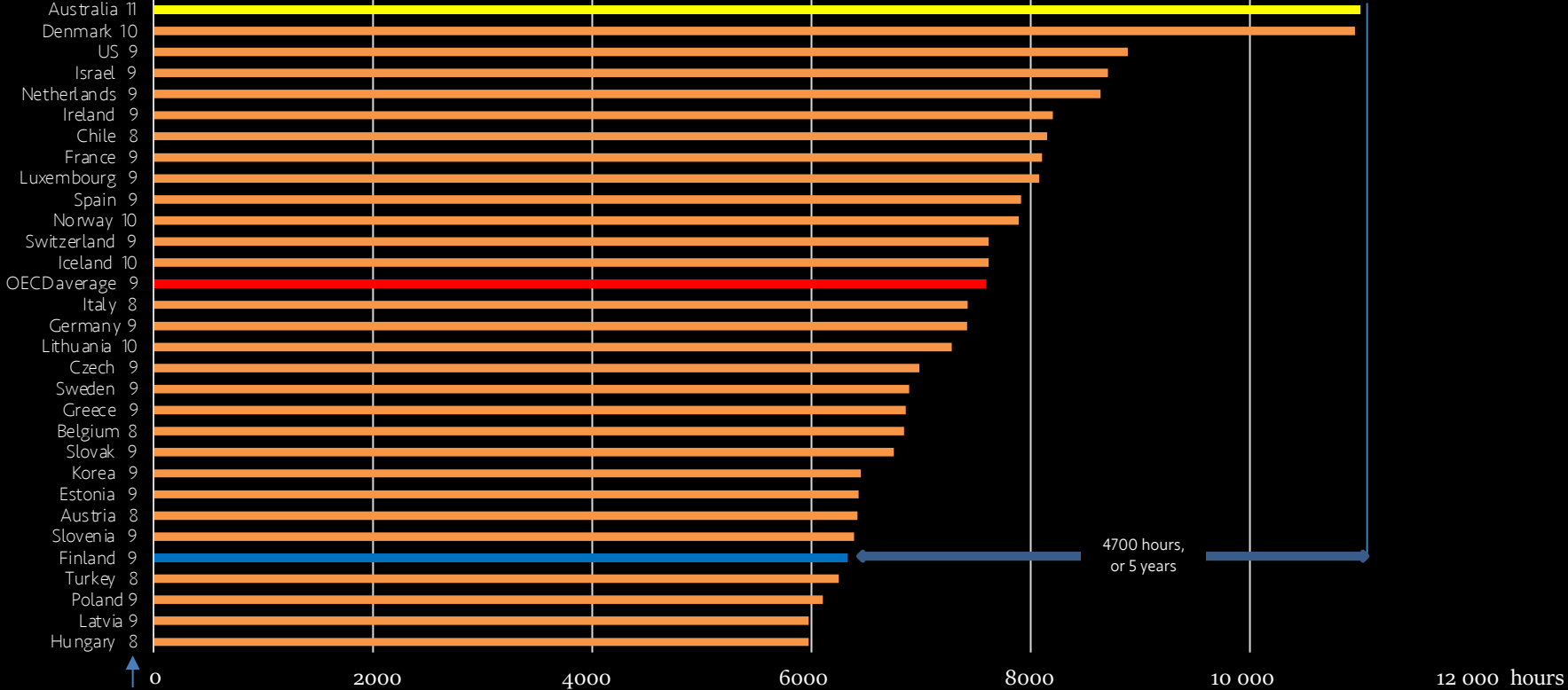
Less time to play

Unfair school funding

Test-based accountability



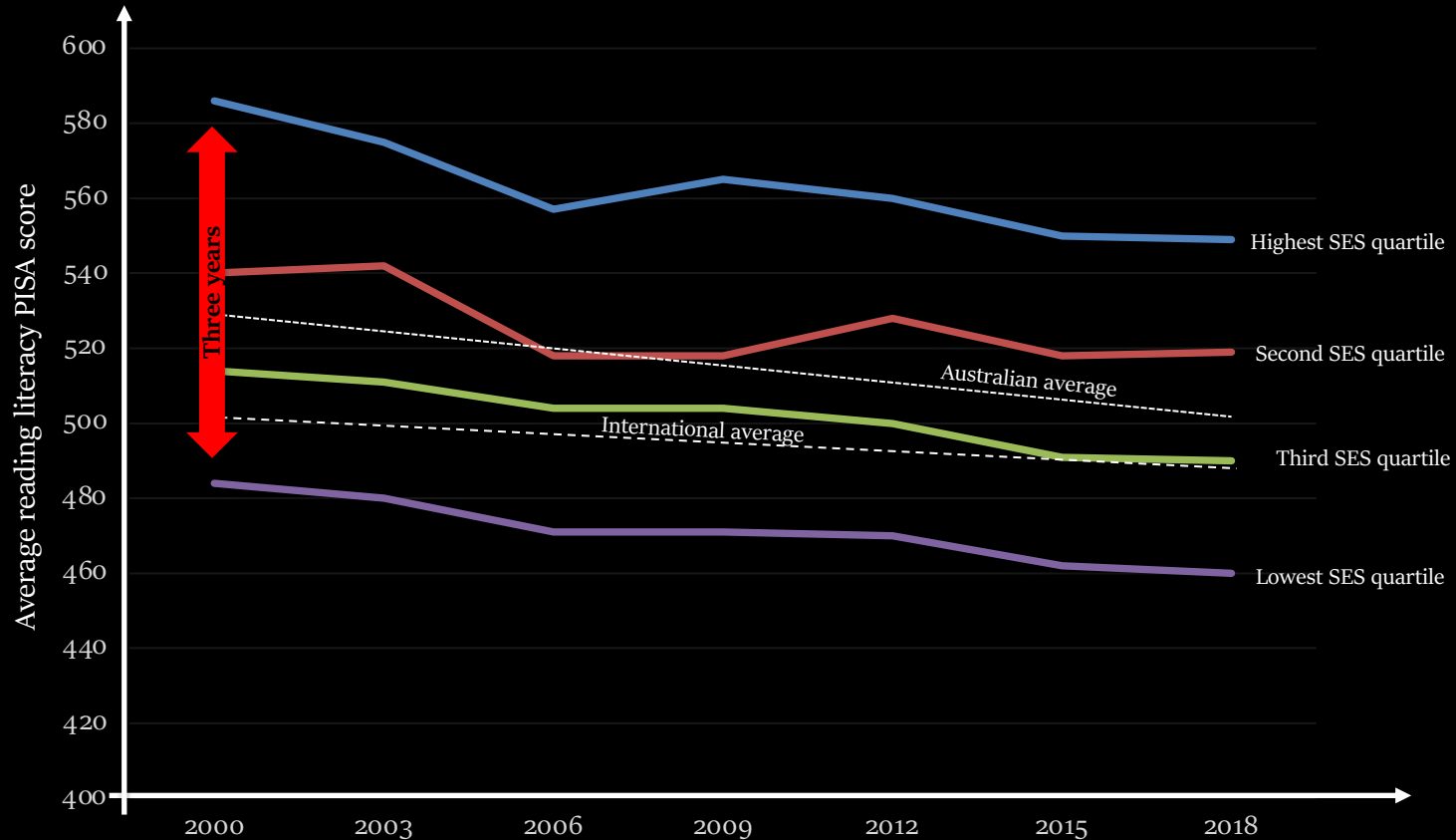
# Compulsory instruction hours in primary and lower secondary education



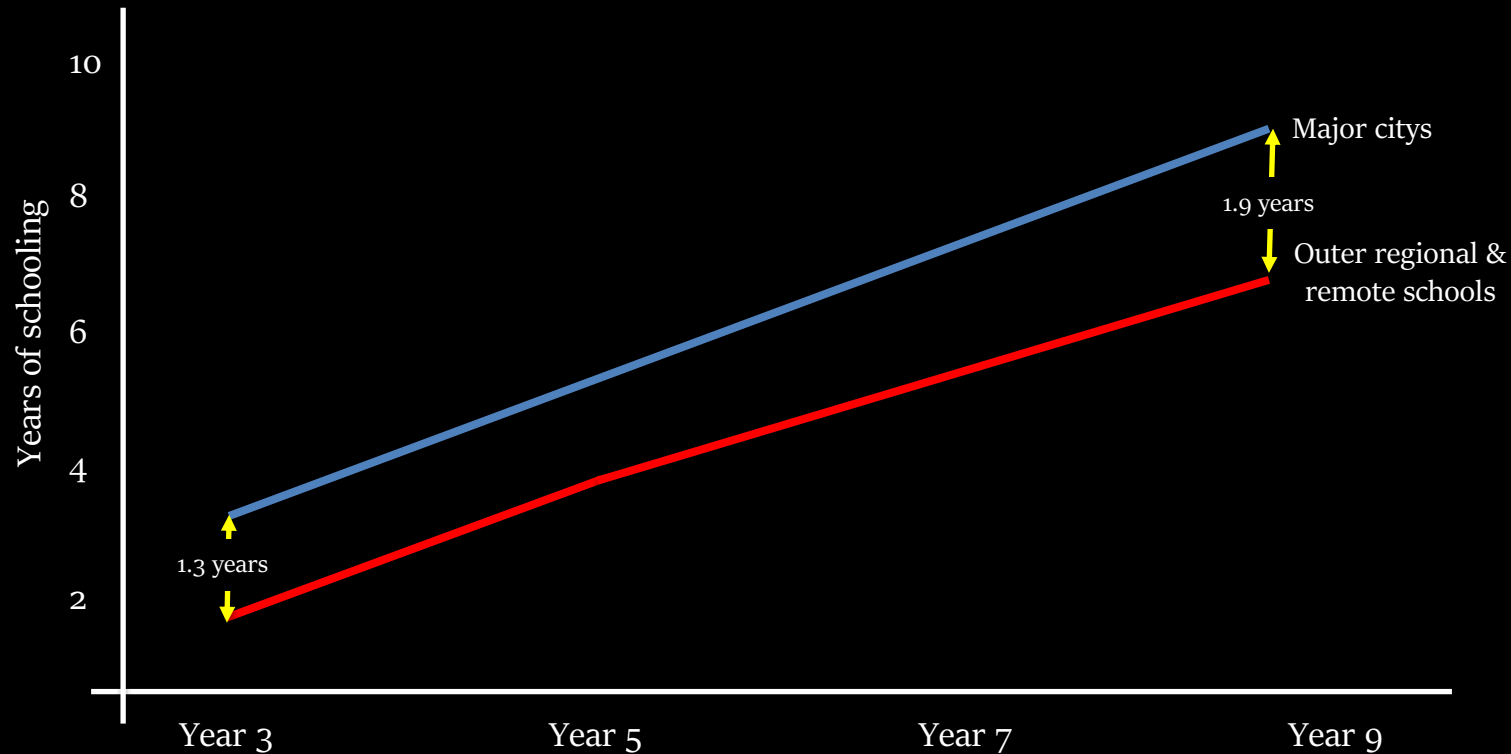
Duration of primary and lower secondary education

Source: OECD 2021

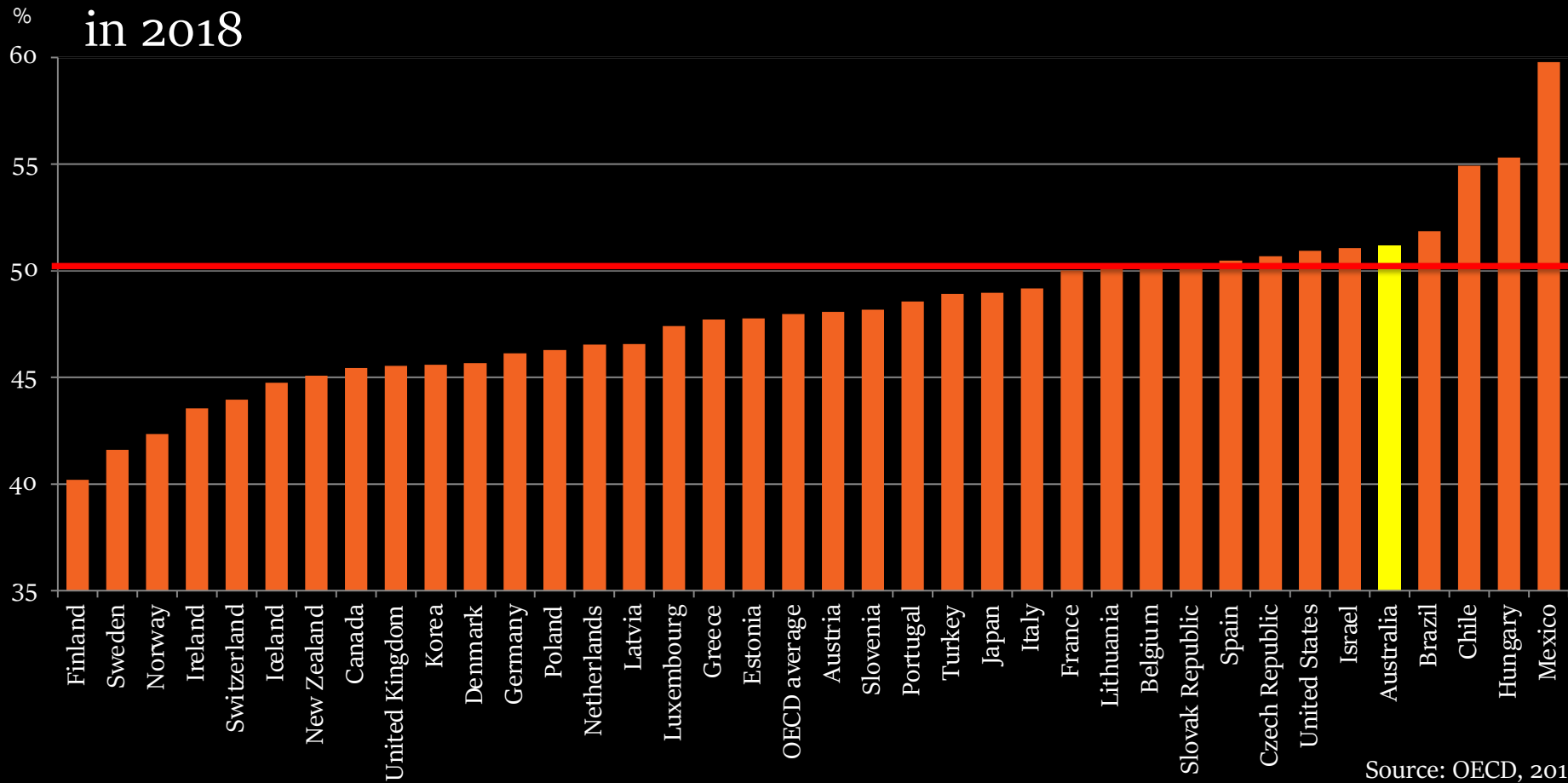
# Average reading literacy in Australia by SES quartile



# Single cohort through school urban-rural learning gap (NAPLAN)

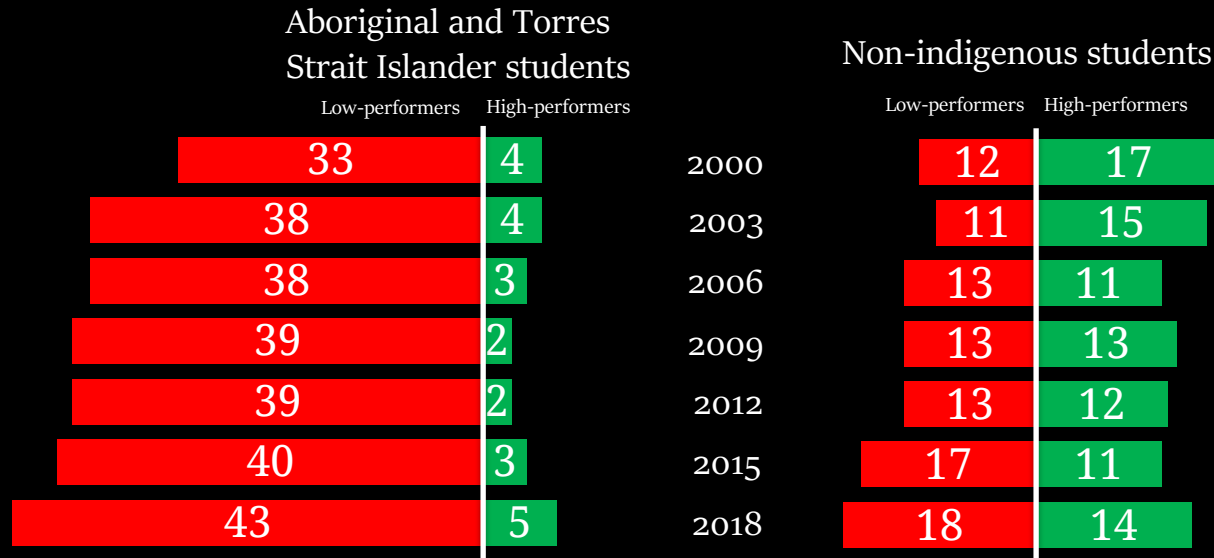


# Proportion of disadvantaged students in disadvantaged schools in 2018



Source: OECD, 2019

# Proportions of low and high performers in Australia on the OECD PISA reading literacy proficiency scale by Indigenous background



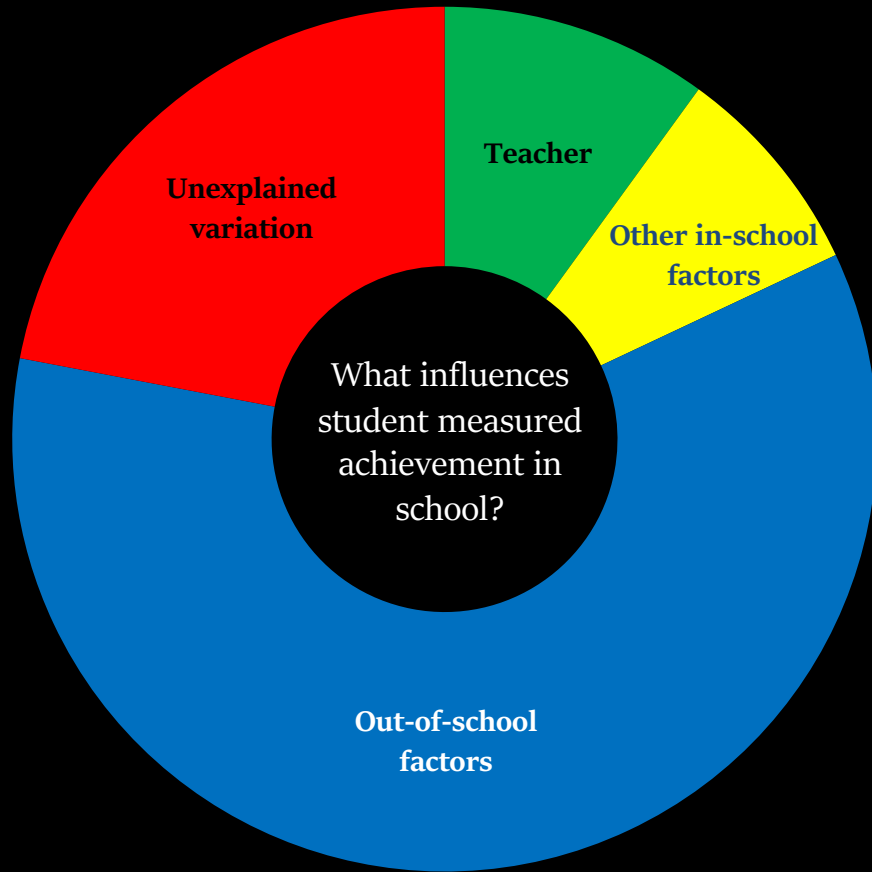
## **3: Your schools**



# An inconvenient truth

“It ain’t what you don’t know that gets you into trouble.  
It’s what you know for sure that just ain’t so.”

- Mark Twain



*Teachers account for about 10% to 14% of the variability in measured student achievement, therefore the majority of opportunities for quality improvement are found in the system-level conditions.*

- American Statistical Association (2014)



The conclusion that family background is far more important factor explaining student learning than people think has remained a solid empirical research finding for the past half a century.



SO WHAT?

**WHAT CAN WE DO?**

# Country schools could consider:

Better networking with other schools

Effective use of digital solutions for school improvement

Customising curriculum and assessment

Alternative arrangements to secondary and post-secondary education

# REMEMBER:

“A child's learning is a function more of the characteristics of her/his classmates than of those of the teacher.”

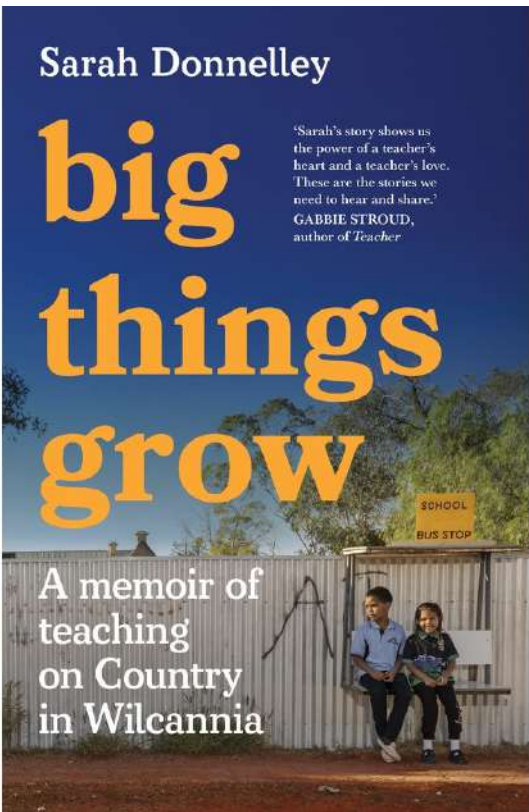
- Coleman et al. (1966)

Sarah Donnelley

# big things grow

'Sarah's story shows us the power of a teacher's heart and a teacher's love. These are the stories we need to hear and share.'  
GABBIE STROUD,  
author of *Teacher*

A memoir of  
teaching  
on Country  
in Wilcannia



FULL EPISODE

## A Heart in Two Places

Broadcast Yesterday at 11:00am



A Heart in Two Places

Share   



One morning, Sarah Donnelley packed her car with everything that would fit and left her home in Sydney to drive far out west to Outback New South Wales.

When she reached Dubbo it was as far inland as she'd ever been, but it was only halfway there. As the dirt turned red Sarah kept driving all the way to Barkandji Country.

**THANK YOU!**

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