

# TAKING PLAY SERIOUSLY

Personal reflections in a time of disruption

Anne Cutler Research Conference

*“Implementing Playful Learning Landscapes”*

Pasi Sahlberg



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

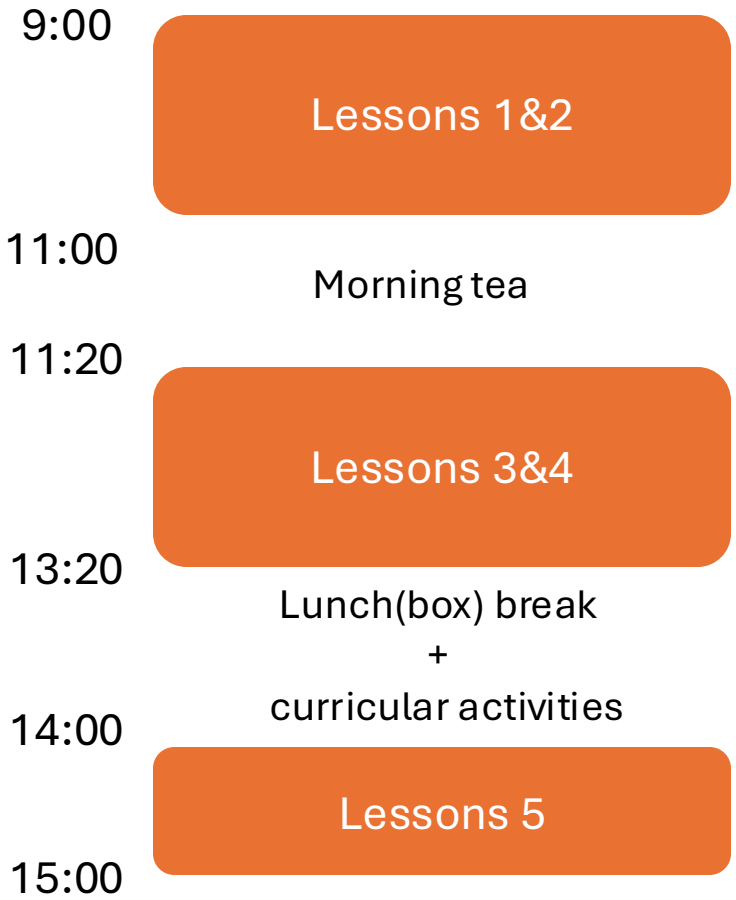
Western Sydney University

Westmead, NSW

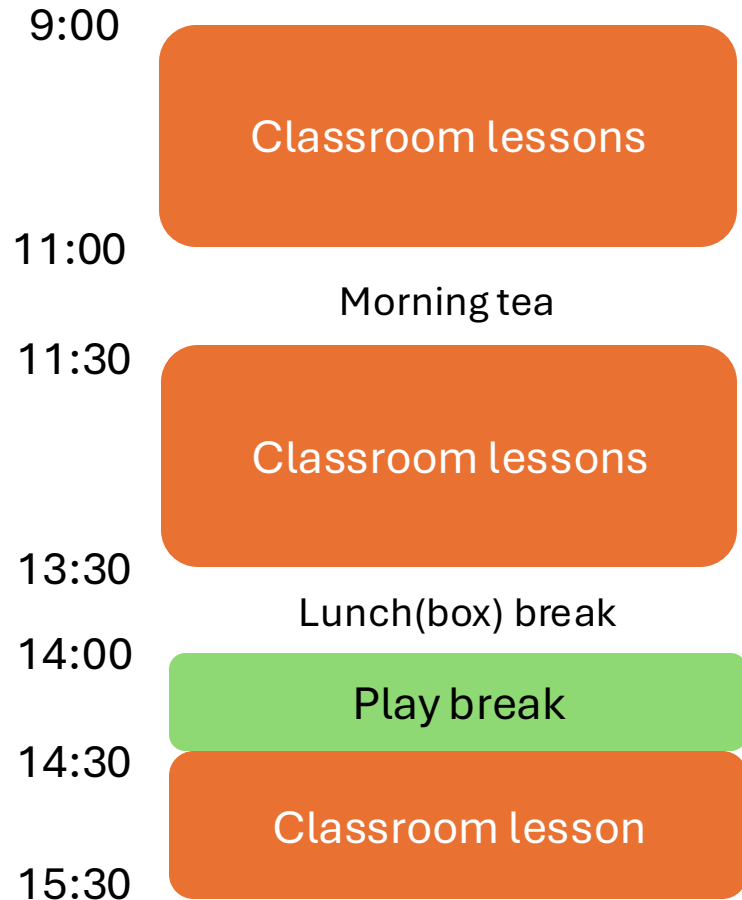
28 February 2025

# A typical primary school day

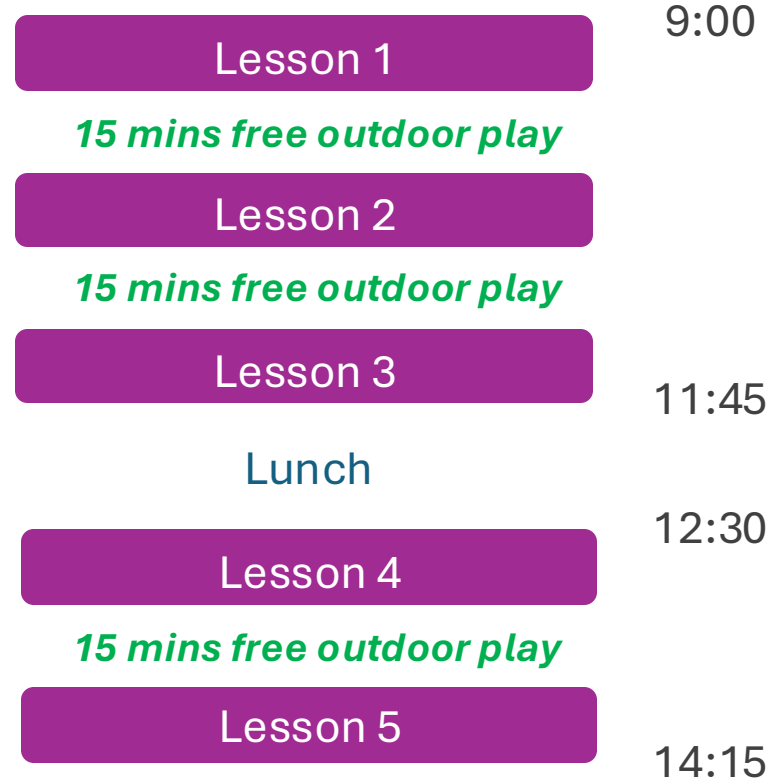
## NSW



## VIC



## FIN



# Length of primary and lower-secondary education

Hours of instruction

Total compulsory instruction time during primary and lower secondary education in OECD countries (in hours)

12000

10000

8000

6000

4000

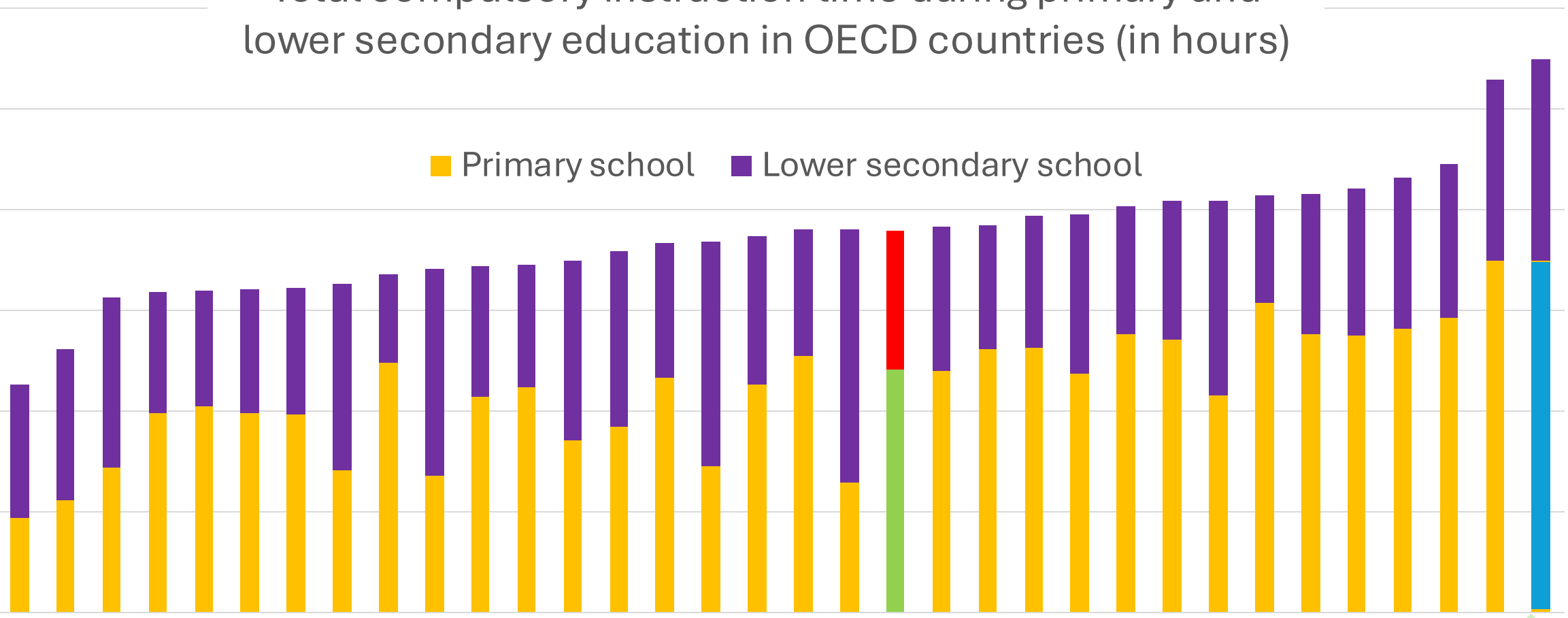
2000

0

Primary school Lower secondary school

Years of schooling

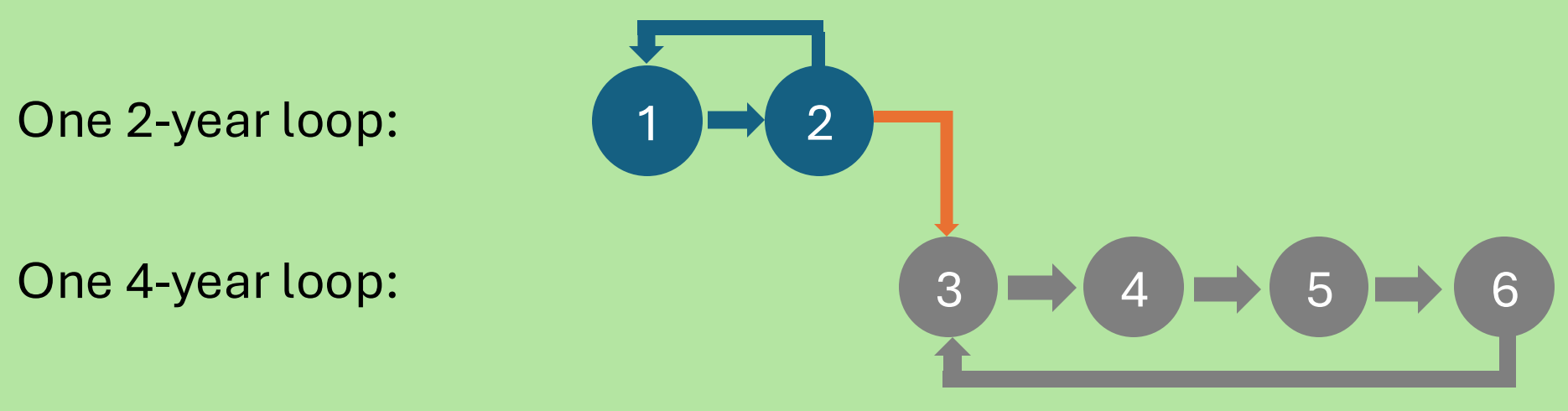
Croatia [8] Poland [8] Türkiye [8] Finland [9] Slovenia [9] Estonia [9] Korea [9] Austria [8] Belgium [8] Slovak [9] Sweden [9] Greece [9] Czechia [9] EU25 [9] Japan [9] Germany [9] Italy [8] Iceland [10] Lithuania [10] OECD [9] Switzerland [9] Portugal [9] Norway [10] Spain [9] Luxembourg [9] Ireland [9] France [9] Chile [8] Canada [9] Israel [9] Netherlands [9] United States [9] Denmark [10] Australia [11]



# Organisation of teaching in primary schools



The Finnish Model



Could playful learning improve student outcomes?

# The Sydney Morning Herald

Friday, November 29, 2024

INDEPENDENT. ALWAYS.

## Schools report card stripped of key goals

**EXCLUSIVE**  
Lacy Carroll  
Education editor

The NSW Department of Education has stripped key performance targets from its annual report, removing specific goals for lifting academic results, attendance and the number of public school students finishing year 12.

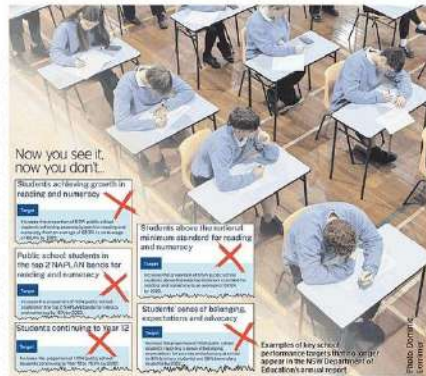
It is the first time in almost 20 years that education officials have failed to include achievement targets, some of which they had recently failed to meet, in the report. The department, which runs one of the world's largest public school systems, has previously published ambitious targets for boosting the proportion of students who feel a sense of belonging at school, as well as increasing attendance, HSC results and students finishing school.

Surveys released this year show that almost half of NSW public high school students feel like they do not belong at school, with girls more likely to struggle and feel disconnected. About a third of all public school students drop out of school before reaching year 12, last year's figures show.

While targets have been published in annual reports since 2005, specific goals to lift the number of NAPLAN and HSC results in the top two achievement bands were introduced by the state government at about a decade ago.

Principals have long criticised the academic achievement targets as a narrow measure of success that fails to account for student complexity or improvements across multiple areas.

The department's 2023-24



Now you see it, now you don't...

- Students achieving growth in reading and numeracy** - **Removed**
- Students above the national minimum standard for reading and numeracy** - **Removed**
- Public school students in the top 2 NAPLAN bands for reading and numeracy** - **Removed**
- Students' sense of belonging, expectations and advocacy** - **Removed**
- Students completing year 12** - **Removed**

report, released last week, does not specifically reference NAPLAN, HSC performance data, or targets to lift academic performance or close achievement gaps.

Grattan Institute, education program director Larissa Hunter said system-level targets should be publicly available and reported on yearly to ensure governments

"stay focused and committed to tough reforms" needed to lift outcomes. "In the long term, the vast majority of students should hit the lower benchmarks in NAPLAN, and Australia should aim for a 15 percentage point improvement over the next 10 years on reading results," she said.

Golden Century is back in business  
NEWS PAGE 5



MEDIA SPAT  
WAR OF WORDS ERUPTS  
NEWS PAGE 22



IS THE SOUTHERLY RUNNING OUT OF PUFF?  
PLUS  
Fire and flood forecast for summer  
NEWS PAGE 15

## Cummings calls in liquidator amid probe

**EXCLUSIVE**  
Chris Barrett  
Investigation reporter

One of finance's greatest family dynasties is to be unravelled after the trading business of Anthony Cummings was placed into liquidation with debts of more than \$2 million.

Cummings (pictured) is a member of a media royalty, being the son of legendary horseman Bert Cummings and father of James Cummings, the Cox Plate-winning head trainer of global thoroughbred powerhouse Godolphin in Australia.

However, the 68-year-old could be forced to vacate the famous Loftus Lodge stables, where Bert trained some of his 12 Melbourne Cup winners, as Racing NSW investigates the collapse of his training company and assesses his suitability to hold a license.

According to a liquidator's report filed with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, Cummings' business Rose Carbery Holdings is being wound up, with \$4.2 million claimed by unsecured creditors.

Almost half of that is being made to the company by Cummings himself, as well as by his wife, Bernadette, and another related party, Anthony Cummings Thoroughbred.



The report by Sydney insolvency firm DW Advisory said the

Australian Tax Office had pursued a for debts of \$1.3 million and that a further \$772,200 was outstanding to other trade creditors.

Employees were also due \$253,120 in superannuation when the company went into administration.

Liquidator Cameron Gray said it was likely the company engaged in insolvent trading but further investigation may be required.

He listed "failure to maintain adequate books and records" and "acting recklessly and not in good faith in the best interest of the corporation or not for the proper purposes" as other possible breaches of the Corporations Act but said they may also need further investigation.

The liquidator drew attention to the retention of a loan from Anthony Cummings. Theoughtrivets by \$200,483 in the past year and payments made to the creditors of another company of his that was placed into liquidation two years ago.

"I don't believe any of that applies. I acted in good faith at all times," Cummings said yesterday. "The reality is the biggest debts were to me, my wife and my thoroughbred company. That's a

Continued Page 14

# THE AUSTRALIAN

## Return to old-school teaching methods sends students' results through roof



THE AUSTRALIAN

ALBANESE: THE INCREMENTALIST

NEWS PAGE 1

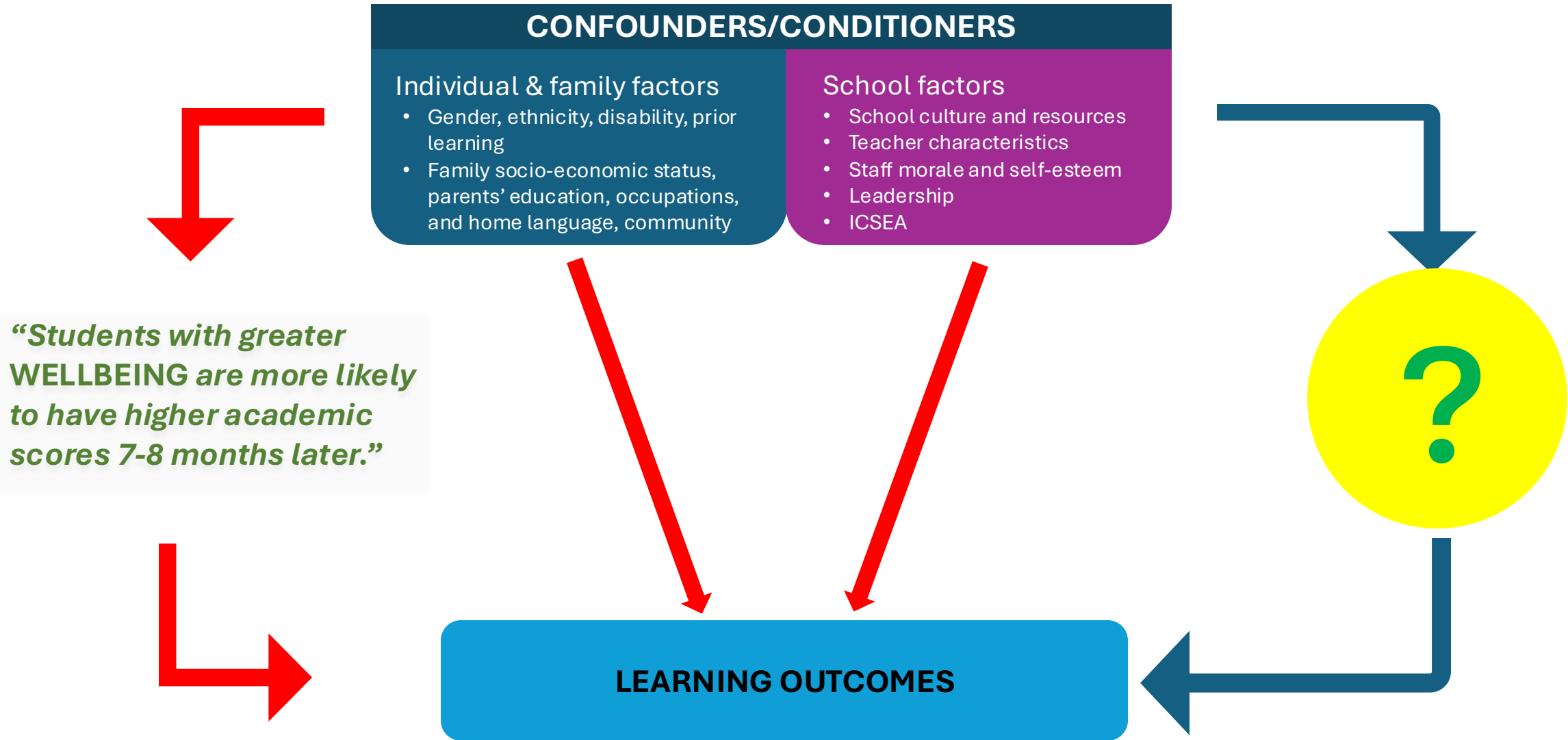
Fire and flood forecast for summer

NEWS PAGE 15

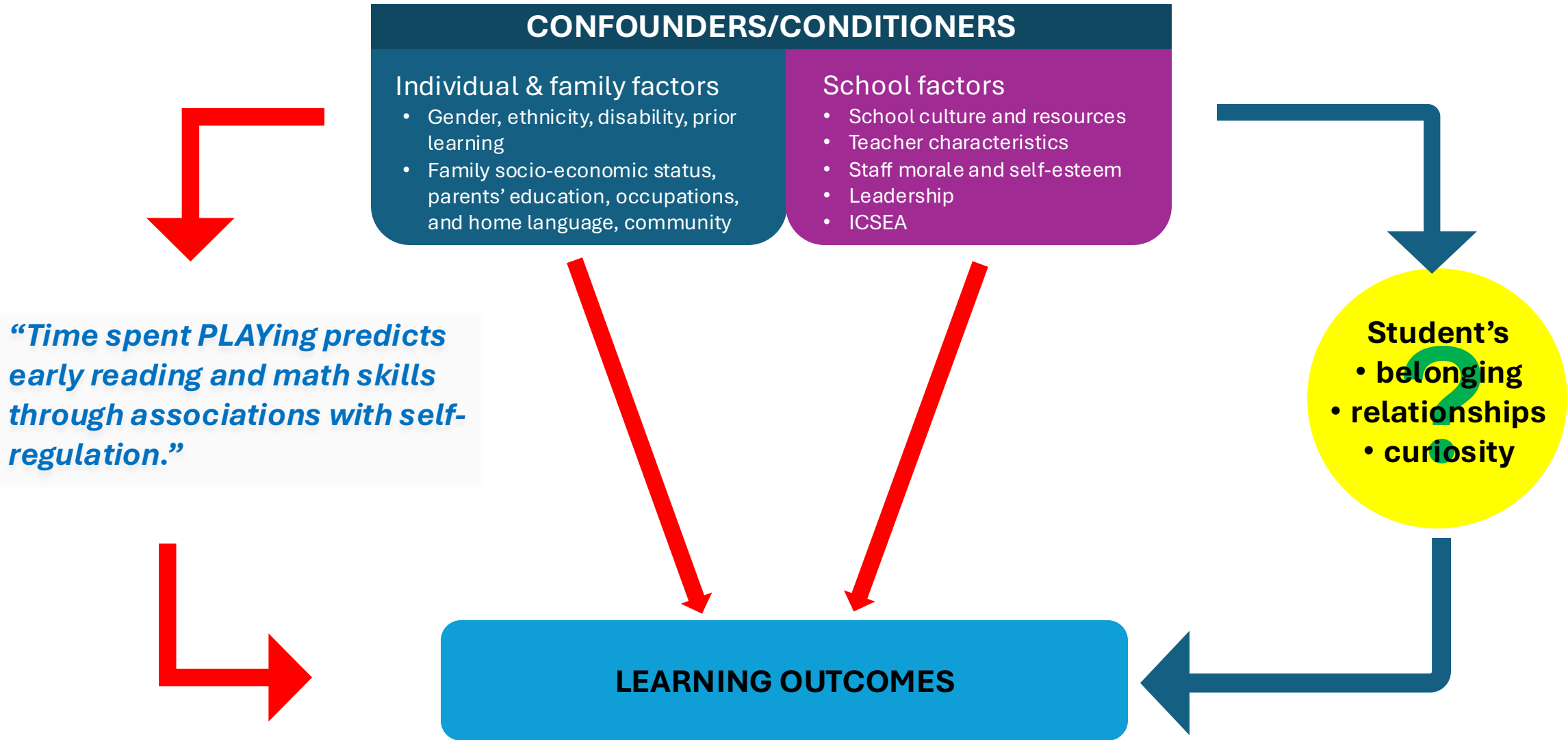
New Sydney homes sit empty due to no sewers

NEWS PAGE 18

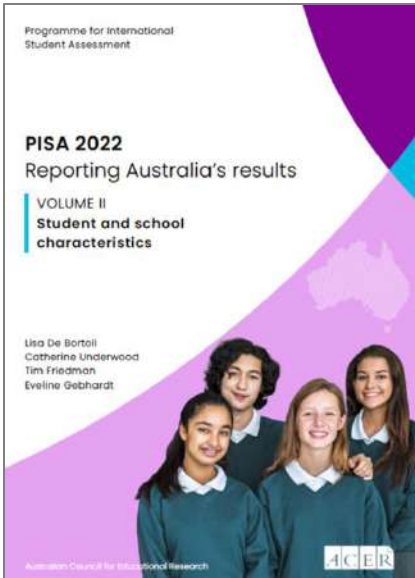
# Factors explaining student achievement



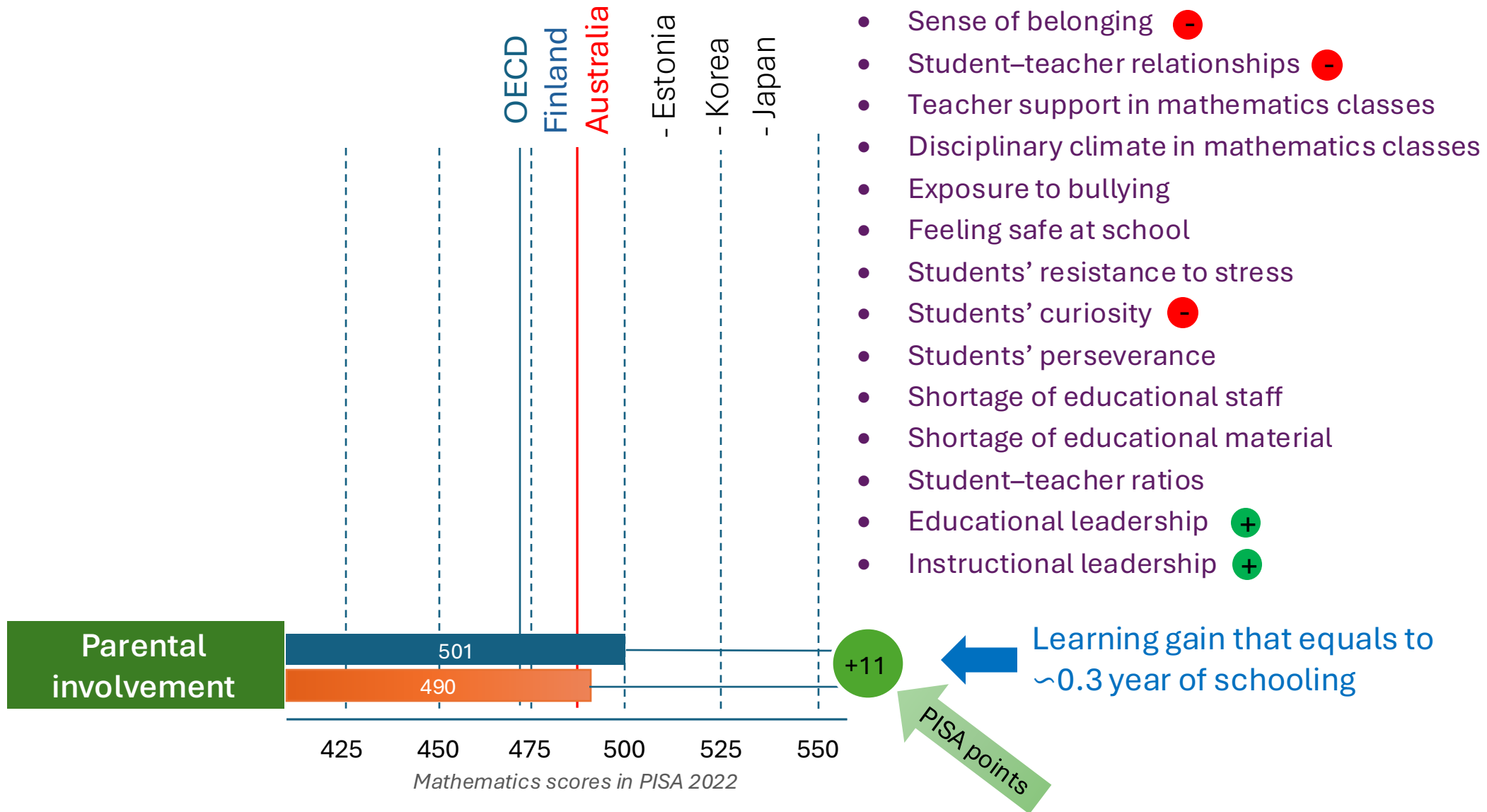
# Factors explaining student achievement



# The role of student & school characteristics



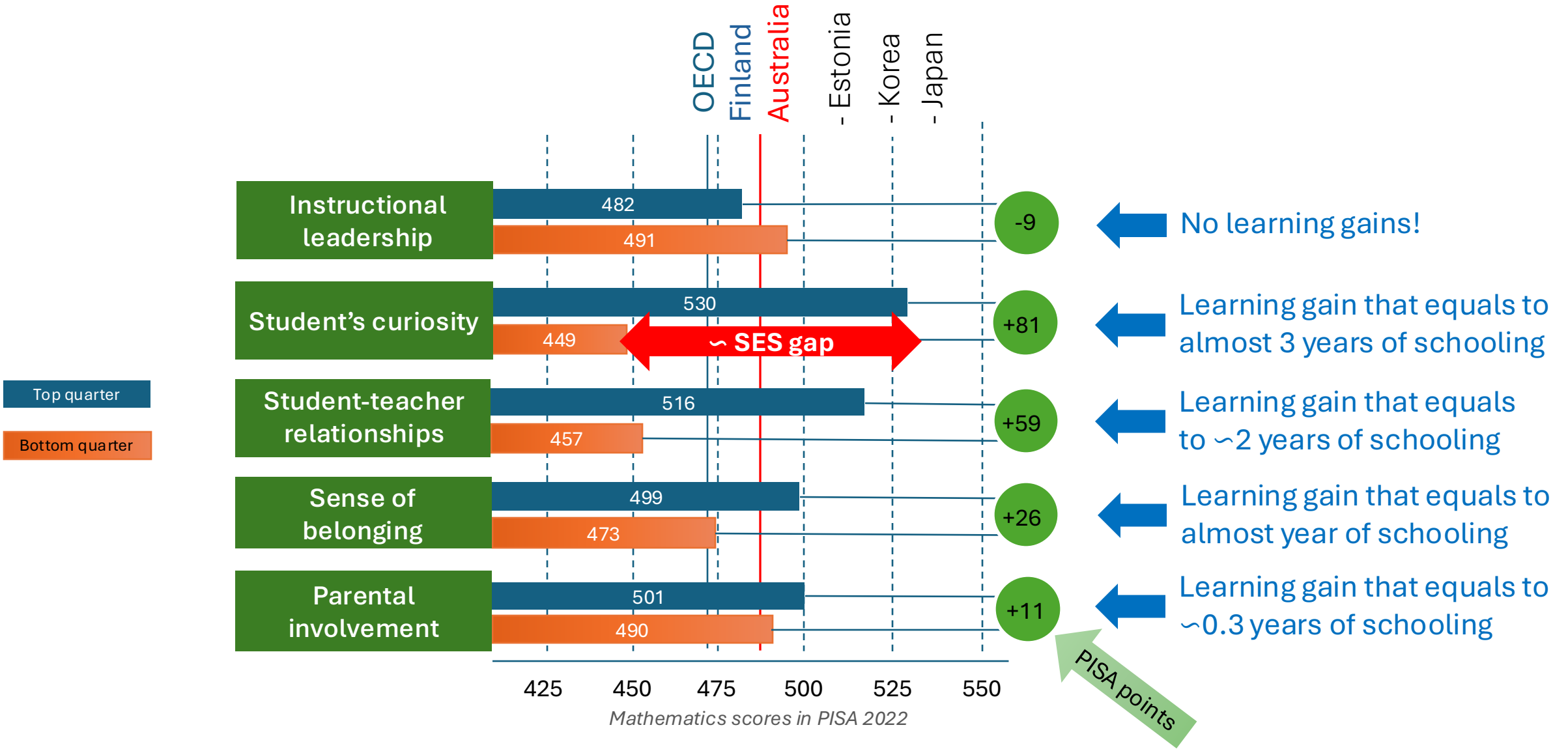
Top quarter  
Bottom quarter



- Sense of belonging -
- Student-teacher relationships -
- Teacher support in mathematics classes
- Disciplinary climate in mathematics classes
- Exposure to bullying
- Feeling safe at school
- Students' resistance to stress
- Students' curiosity -
- Students' perseverance
- Shortage of educational staff
- Shortage of educational material
- Student-teacher ratios
- Educational leadership +
- Instructional leadership +



# The role of student & school characteristics



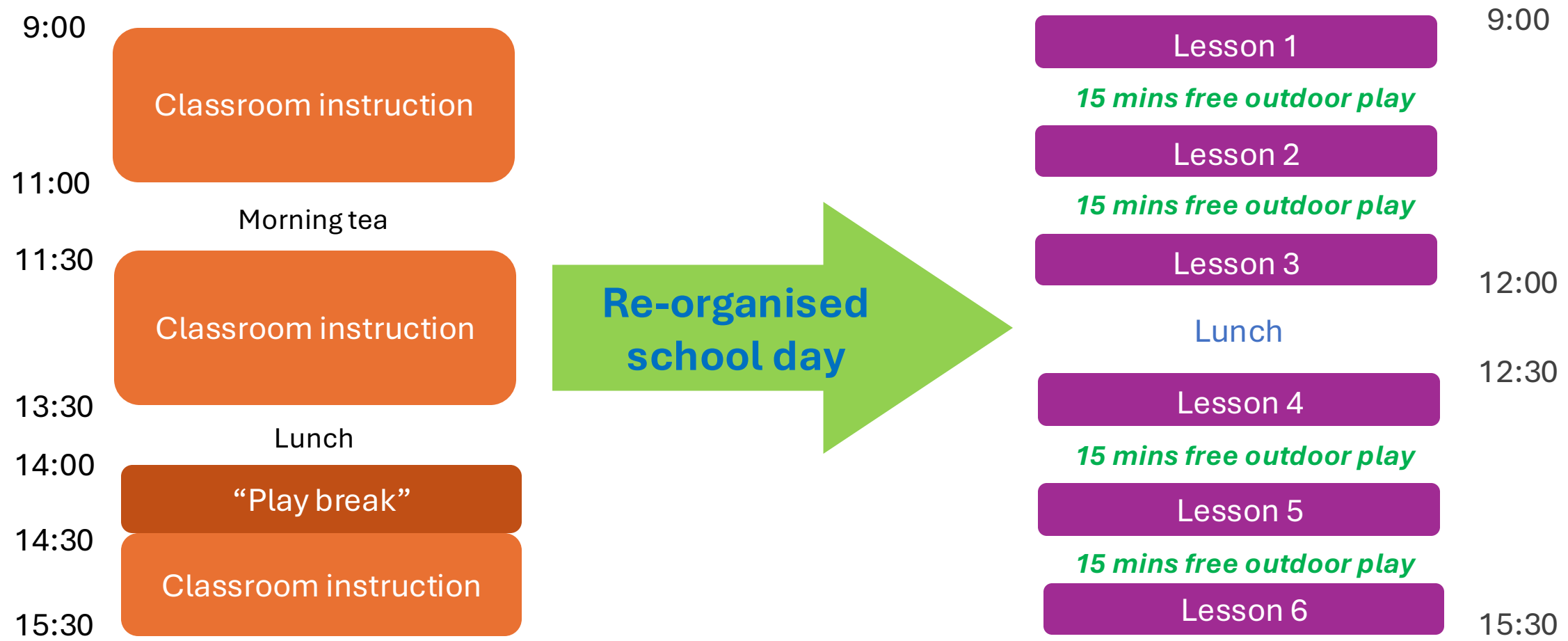
# Global trend:

Responses to “global learning crisis” are prioritising explicit teaching methods and making active and play-based learning less common in primary schools around the world.

# **But, play(ful learning) can effectively**

- 1. boost students' curiosity**
- 2. strengthen student-teacher relationships**
- 3. improve students' sense of belonging**

# Make time to play



**Thank you!**