

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE - QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2003-2004 ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES HEARING

Outcome: 1
Output Group: 1.1 – Funding for schools

DEST Question No. E842_04

Senator Carr provided in writing.

Refers to B.Preston, "The social make-up of schools: family income, religion. Indigenous status, and family type in government, Catholic and other non-government schools" (Australian Education Union December 2003)

Question:

Are you aware of a recent paper by education policy consultant Barbara Preston, which provides an analysis based on the 2001 Census data of the social composition of the student bodies of government, Catholic and other non-government schools?

This paper presents data that indicates that a significantly higher percentage of students in government schools come from low-income families than those in either Catholic or other non-government schools.

It also shows that students from high-income families are significantly more likely to attend "other non-government" (independent) schools, and the proportion of high-income background students in these schools is well over twice that of their representation in government schools.

Catholic schools sit somewhere in between, but nevertheless show evidence that they draw on a more well-to-do population than government schools.

What do you regard as the significance of this *direct* measure of SES status (family income) of the population of these three categories of schools – as shown by the Census data?

What are the implications for the adequacy of the *indirect* measure provided by the SES model – which measures the SES levels of the neighbours of families using different schools, rather than the families themselves directly?

Are you actively considering the outcome of this or similar studies in your evaluation of the SES model?

If not, why not?

Answer:

SES funding

While Census data, such as that used in Ms Preston's study, can be used to obtain an overall profile of students attending the three categories of schools in Australia, these data cannot be directly applied for funding purposes as individual schools are not separately identified by the Census.

Although it is possible to measure only one dimension, such as income, using three complementary dimensions (eg occupation, education and income), which measure social as well as economic factors, allows a more precise and stable profile to be constructed. The use of income alone would produce a volatile SES measure.

The SES funding model does not set out to measure the wealth of any individual household, but rather to obtain a relative measure of the SES of each school's community. The SES methodology, which is based on independent Census data, produces a measure that provides a good proxy for parental socioeconomic status without the intrusiveness and administrative complexity inherent in means testing parents more directly.

All relevant research is taken into consideration as part of the ongoing monitoring of the SES funding model but there is no work underway to evaluate/review the SES funding arrangements.