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Dear Ms Bresnan

I am advised the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs is conducting an inquiry into the educational achievement gap in the ACT.

I have attached the ACT Government's submission to this inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Barr MLA
Minister for Education and Training

14 SEP 2009

ACT LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

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**ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Education, Training and
Youth Affairs**

Inquiry into the educational achievement gap in the ACT

ACT Government Submission

14 September 2009

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Educational outcomes, the achievement gap and implications for students from differing backgrounds	6
3. Assessments of student performance	9
3.1 NAPLAN	10
3.2 National Assessment Programs (NAP)	19
3.3 PISA	21
3.4 TIMSS	24
3.5 PIPS	24
3.6 What the measures of academic performance tell us about the achievement gap	25
4. Measures of student engagement	27
4.1 Completion and Retention	27
4.2 Year 12 Attainment	28
4.3 Attendance	31
4.4 Satisfaction with public schools	31
5. Systemic initiatives designed to improve achievement in all students	35
5.1 A focus on school improvement	36
5.2 Quality teaching matters	36
5.3. Literacy and numeracy skills as the foundation	38
The Department's Literacy and Numeracy Strategy	39
The Department's literacy and numeracy support plan	40
5.4 The importance of early intervention	42
5.5 Lowering class sizes	43
5.6 Supporting student engagement and participation	44
Pastoral care package	44
Other programs and initiatives to engage students in schooling	45
Support for financially disadvantaged students	45
6. Specific initiatives and programs to address particular achievement gaps	47
6.1 Support for Indigenous students	47
6.2 Students with language backgrounds other than English	50
6.3 Gifted and talented students	51
7. Opportunities to complement and support ACT programs under the COAG agenda	52
7.1 Literacy and Numeracy NP	53
7.2 Improving Teacher Quality NP	53
7.3 Low Socio-economic Status School Communities NP	53
8. Conclusion	55
References	56
List of Attachments	58

List of figures

Figure 1: Measures available to demonstrate levels or rates of engagement and/or achievement of different groups of ACT students against benchmarks and/or averages	9
Figure 2: NAPLAN 2008: Percentage of ACT students at or above the national minimum standard	11
Figure 3: NAPLAN: Performance of ACT and Australian students in reading	12
Figure 4: NAPLAN: Performance of ACT and Australian students in writing	13
Figure 5: NAPLAN: Performance of ACT and Australian students in numeracy	14
Figure 6: NAPLAN 2008: Performance of ACT and Australian students in reading, writing and numeracy, by gender	15
Figure 7: NAPLAN 2008: Performance of ACT and Australian students in reading, writing and numeracy, by Indigenous status	16
Figure 8: Gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in reading	17
Figure 9: NAPLAN 2008: Performance of ACT and Australian students in reading, writing and numeracy, by LBOTE	18
Figure 10: NAPLAN 2008: Performance of ACT LBOTE students, all ACT students and all Australian students achieving above the national minimum standard by year level, in reading	18
Figure 11: NAP ICT Literacy: mean scores at year 6 and year 10 by gender	19
Figure 12: NAP Civics and Citizenship: ACT and Australian mean scores at year 6 and year 10 for males and females	20
Figure 13: NAP Science Literacy: ACT and Australian mean scores at year 6	21
Figure 14: Percentage of students at different proficiency levels in scientific literacy for PISA 2006	22
Figure 15: Percentage of students at different proficiency levels in reading literacy for PISA 2006	22
Figure 16: Percentage of students at different proficiency levels in mathematical literacy for PISA 2006	22
Figure 17: Australia and ACT rankings, TIMSS 2007	24
Figure 18: Apparent retention rates for ACT Indigenous students from 2003 to 2007 compared with Australia and all ACT students in percentage terms	27
Figure 19: Number of Candidates (Year 12 Certificate) – Comparison 2007 – 2008	28
Figure 20: Number of Candidates (Tertiary Entrance Statements) - Comparison 2007 – 2008	29
Figure 21: Overview of Results for year 12 Indigenous students	30
Figure 22: Overall satisfaction with ACT public schools 2008	32
Figure 23: Satisfaction levels of Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents and carers	33
Figure 24: Satisfaction levels of LBOTE parents compared with the levels for all parents	33

**ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Education, Training and
Youth Affairs**

Inquiry into the educational achievement gap in the ACT

ACT Government Submission

1. Introduction

The ACT Government is proud of its strong, ongoing commitment and record of investment in education and of the achievements of ACT students on the national and international stage.

The 2008 National Assessment Program in Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results show ACT students perform above the national average in the five areas tested and the proportion of ACT students performing at or above the national minimum standard in these areas is also above the national average.

The 2009 NAPLAN results are consistent with those of 2008, however year 3 reading and grammar and punctuation, and year 5 numeracy showed significant improvement. The 2009 NAPLAN results confirmed the ACT's position as a leading jurisdiction in literacy and numeracy performance.

The ACT has maintained the highest Australian year 12 retention rates; year 6 and 10 ACT students have achieved the highest mean score for information and communication technology in the National Assessment Program (NAP); and ACT 15 year olds perform better than all other Australian states and territories in reading and scientific and mathematical literacy in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

The Government acknowledges, however, that in the best interest of all our students we cannot rest on our laurels. We need to analyse and use our results to identify any marked differences in educational achievement across and within our ACT schools and to target areas for further improvement in ACT education. We also acknowledge that we must put our greatest efforts into supporting our very small, but widely dispersed cohort of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island (Indigenous) students if we are to improve their literacy and numeracy outcomes and increase their year 12 or equivalent attainment rates to levels similar to those of their non-Indigenous peers.

Our focus is to build on our many initiatives introduced since coming to Government in 2001 to give all ACT students the best possible education. Our major commitments for schooling during this term are: to put more, and better quality, teachers in front of children in classrooms; continue to invest in the construction of high quality new schools and upgraded school facilities; and work to improve the learning outcomes for every student in every classroom in every school.

To do this we must focus on what research is telling us has the greatest potential to improve the performance of all students – and that is the quality of the teacher and the teaching occurring in the classroom. We also need to focus attention on giving every student a strong foundation in reading, writing and numeracy skills. Lastly, we need to focus on those groups of students for whom there is a particular achievement gap and work hard to close that gap.

The first part of this submission provides information on the achievement and engagement of ACT students on available local, national and international measures, with the aim of identifying any differential outcomes or experiences for students from different backgrounds. The second part of the submission outlines the Government's investment in programs and initiatives directed at supporting all students to achieve, and to closing any achievement gaps identified from the analysis.

The focus of this submission as determined by the Terms of Reference is from an education perspective. However it is important to acknowledge that a range of interventions and services outside the educational setting contribute to the well being of students and their families. Achieving the best outcomes and improving the well being of students and their families is a shared responsibility, requiring extensive partnership between a range of government and non-government agencies.

It should also be noted that this submission does not focus on children and young people with learning difficulties, intellectual or physical disabilities. The needs of ACT students with a disability is subject to a separate Inquiry being conducted by the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs, and will be addressed in that sphere.

2. Educational outcomes, the achievement gap and implications for students from differing backgrounds

The term 'achievement gap' is used to describe any marked difference between the achievement or performance level of one group of students relative to another group. The 'achievement gap' between 'high' and 'low' achievers can generally be observed on measures such as standardised assessment scores, retention and completion rates, and attainment levels at school certification points.

An achievement gap can be observed between different groups of students, such as that defined by socioeconomic status, ethnicity or cultural background, and gender. An achievement gap can also be observed between schools across a jurisdiction, when one school performs more highly than a 'like' school. It can also be observed within a school, when one group or year of students performs significantly different to another.

Unlike other jurisdictions in Australia, there is no strong evidence or data from national or international measures to suggest there is a significant disparity between schools in the ACT similar to that observed in other jurisdictions. We do know, for example, that while a relationship between socioeconomic status and school performance is evident in other states, the character of the ACT population is different, and there is no evidence available to suggest that socioeconomic profile has a significant between-school influence on performance in the ACT.

We do know that in terms of our student population, there is a gap between the performance of our Indigenous students and their non-Indigenous peers across all our schools, and that while there is a marked gap in the performance of our students who start school with a language background other than English, the gap narrows, or even closes, over time.

Educators across all jurisdictions are very aware that when Indigenous students and students from a language background other than English begin school with a limited command of standard English compared with the majority of their classmates, they begin their educational journeys at a disadvantage. This is not to say however that this 'gap' cannot be narrowed, or for some, even closed. Studies (Hattie, 1993; Hargreaves, 2001) show that when students engage in high quality programs designed to meet their learning needs and have strong support and encouragement from their parents and teachers to achieve at school, they generally do much better in school.

A number of key findings pertinent to any discussion about an educational achievement gap were reported by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) research program (Marks et al, 2000).

A copy of the LSAY report is at Attachment A.

This research, conducted between 1975 and 1998, examined student achievement scores on tests of reading comprehension and mathematics, as well as trends for groups of students, from five studies that tested the literacy and numeracy levels of 14-year-olds in Australian schools.

The report found that there is a strong indication that, as a group, students from homes where English is not the main language spoken improved their achievement, both in reading comprehension and in mathematics. While the average achievement on tests of reading comprehension for students of a language background other than English was lower than the average for students from English language backgrounds, their achievement levels improved significantly over the period and the gap was narrowed substantially. The study also found that the widest gaps in average test scores remained between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students for both reading comprehension and mathematics.

The LSAY report also found that by Year 12, participation is more a product of student achievement than social background and that how well students perform in literacy and numeracy is a much better predictor of their subsequent educational participation than are their social characteristics. The report found that although socioeconomic background remains an influence on educational participation, its effect is declining and that students who complete Year 12 and participate in higher education are more likely to be female, students with language backgrounds other than English, or students from metropolitan areas.

Like all jurisdictions, the ACT demonstrates a differential in outcomes, or an achievement gap, within schools, and the consensus among education researchers is that it is the quality of teaching practices that plays a significant part in that discrepancy (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Hargreaves, 2001; Hattie, 2003; Rowe, 2002).

Ryan, in his 2008 report to the Western Australian Education Minister on that state's school system, calls on the significant amount of research on the subject, to demonstrate that teachers account for about 30 per cent of the variance in student performance, and that it is what teachers know, do, and care about, which is very powerful in driving student achievement. He states that the policy implications are clear:

*What students 'bring to the table' is the most important determinant of their success. However, there is little that policy can do – even in the long run – to change students' innate abilities or the social life of their family and community. There are few obvious, acceptable policies for raising the quality of parenting and raising parents' expectations for their children. Policy can improve school infrastructure and reduce average class sizes. The quality of school leadership can be raised. But the combined effects of these policies are minor relative to the influence of the teacher. Policy could raise the quality of peer interactions for selected students - but at the cost of lowering the quality of peer interactions for others. The **standout factor** which is both important and policy can positively influence is the quality of **teaching**. (p. 17)*

A copy of Ryan's report, *Top of the Class: Making the Most of Western Australia's School System* is at Attachment B.

It is this strong evidence base, which clearly demonstrates the links between student achievement and the effectiveness of individual teachers, that has informed the ACT Government's programs and initiatives designed to improve the educational achievement of all students.

3. Assessments of student performance

ACT students compare very favourably with their national and international counterparts, according to results from a range of assessment processes. Consistently, the results for ACT students are above national and international means, a higher proportion of ACT students score in the top levels and a smaller proportion of ACT students score in the lowest bands than is the case nationally and internationally.

This section summarises the results of these assessment processes, showing performance for ACT across the spectrum of achievement. Breakdowns for groups of students for which an achievement gap has traditionally been considered to be an issue (that is, Indigenous, gender, language background other than English (LBOTE) and low socioeconomic status (SES)) are shown where possible. The analysis shows that there is an achievement gap within the ACT, despite the better overall performance of ACT students, and this gap is particularly evident for Indigenous students.

As identified in Figure 1, a range of assessment measures can be used to demonstrate levels of achievement of students and subgroups against a range of comparative benchmarks and/or averages.

Figure 1: Measures available to demonstrate levels or rates of engagement and/or achievement of different groups of ACT students against benchmarks and/or averages

	PIPS	PISA	TIMSS	NAPLAN	National Assessment Program (Sample)		
					ICT	Science	Civics and Citizenship
LBOTE		✓		✓			
SES		?		?			
ATSI	✓			✓			
Gender	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

✓ indicates that disaggregated data is available relative to the particular cohort

? indicates that only limited information is available

Source: ACT Department of Education, 2009

Across Australia, the National Assessment Program in Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) provides the most comprehensive information on the performance of all students and subgroups by gender, language background and indigineity. Also conducted at the national level are the National Assessment Programs (NAP) - being sample assessments of science, civics and citizenship, and information and communication technology (ICT). The NAP sample assessments are conducted triennially and include subgroup analysis, but are somewhat limited in their jurisdictional analysis.

At the international level, the most authoritative assessment of the performance and achievement of ACT students is the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). PISA provides an analysis of the effect of cultural and language background, and to a very limited extent socio-economic status.

The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) provides reliable data on the mathematics and science achievement of year 4 and year 8 students compared with students in other countries. TIMSS data has been collected in 1995, 1999, 2003, and 2007. Due to the small size of the ACT sample, the TIMSS sample testing does not allow for valid jurisdictional comparison, or analysis of the performance of ACT sub groups, except for males and females. The latest TIMSS was conducted in 2007 in 60 countries, with a total of 425 000 students worldwide being assessed at year 4 and 8.

Specific to the ACT, is the Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) assessment instrument which provides information on the performance of students in ACT public schools in their first year of formal schooling.

3.1 NAPLAN

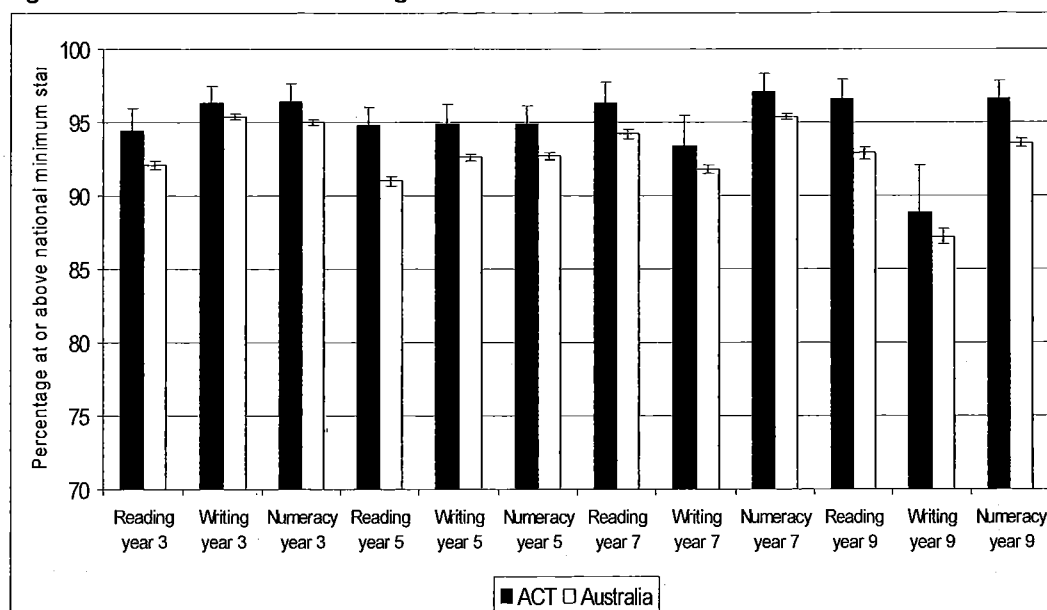
NAPLAN consists of tests in the domains of reading, writing, language conventions (incorporating spelling, grammar and punctuation) and numeracy. In May 2008, and again in May this year students across Australia at years 3, 5, 7 and 9 participated in NAPLAN.

The summary results for 2009 were released on 11 September 2009, while the final national report on the 2008 assessments was released in December 2008. This 2008 final report provided information about the performance of subgroups by gender, Indigenous status, and LBOTE. Subgroup performance information on 2009 NAPLAN results will not be available until December 2009.

In 2008, the ACT had consistently very high proportions of students achieving the national minimum standard in each of the years and domains tested and the highest or the equal highest mean scores across most domains.

As shown in Figure 2, the ACT had the highest or the equal highest percentage of students at or above the national minimum standard in Australia across reading, numeracy, writing and grammar and punctuation for years 3, 5, 7 and 9 and in spelling for years 7 and 9. The ACT also had the highest or the equal highest mean scores across reading and numeracy for years 3, 5, 7 and 9; across grammar and punctuation for years 5, 7 and 9; spelling for years 7 and 9; and writing for year 3. In spelling, while the mean score performance of students in years 3 and 5 was similar to the national results, they were below those achieved by NSW and Victoria.

Figure 2: NAPLAN 2008: Percentage of ACT students at or above the national minimum standard



Source: Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, NAPLAN Report 2008

Results from the 2009 NAPLAN Summary Report show that in overall terms, ACT students have again achieved results that are at or near the top of the results from all jurisdictions.

For 2009, the ACT results at years 3, 5, 7 and 9 in reading were the highest in Australia and above the national mean, a similar level of attainment to last year's NAPLAN. Between 93 and 96 percent of all students performed at or above the national minimum standard.

Results in writing across all year levels were less strong than the results for reading. Generally, the ACT was equal first with other jurisdictions when confidence levels were applied (second overall on raw scores). In year 5, the ACT was ranked second, statistically. In addition, in most cases the ACT result was statistically equivalent to the national mean, and in year 3 the result was significantly higher than the national mean. Between 89 and 96 percent of students performed at or above the national minimum standard.

Again, in numeracy the ACT had the highest results with confidence levels applied, along with NSW and VIC in all years except year 7 where QLD and WA also recorded equivalent results. ACT results were above the national mean in all years, and 95 percent of students performed at or above the national minimum standard.

To provide a context for analysing the degree of change in achievement gaps it is important to monitor the overall pattern of attainment of all students in the ACT and Australia. In the following Figures 3 to 5, the performance of all ACT and all Australian students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 in 2008 and 2009 NAPLAN is compared.

Reading: (2008 and 2009)

Across the two years of the national tests ACT students have maintained their high performance. Across all years tested the ACT mean score was the highest in Australia. At year 3 there was an increase from the national mean compared with 2008.

In 2009, at years 3 and 5 there were 40 to 50% of students achieving in the top performance bands for their year level. Across all years the ACT had a greater percentage of students performing in the top performance bands when compared with other states.

The percentage of students achieving below the national minimum standard (including exempt students) increased slightly across all year levels with the exception of year 3. However, across all years except year 9, of those who sat the tests, there was a decrease in students performing below the national minimum standard.

Figure 3: NAPLAN: Performance of ACT and Australian students in reading

Students	Mean relative position				Percentage of students achieving at or above national minimum standard				
	ACT	CI	Aust	CI	ACT	CI	Aust	CI	Difference
Year 3									
2008	421.0	5.9	400.5	1.2	94.4	1.5	92.1	0.3	2.3
2009	433.8	9.9	410.9	7.7	94.7	1.7	93.8	1.1	0.9
Year 5									
2008	503.3	5.6	484.4	1.1	94.8	1.2	91.0	0.3	3.8
2009	513.1	9.8	494.0	7.5	94.2	1.5	91.7	1.2	2.5
Year 7									
2008	558.2	10.1	536.5	1.4	96.3	1.4	94.2	0.3	2.1
2009	558.8	11.7	541.2	6.9	95.5	1.8	93.9	1.1	1.6
Year 9									
2008	601.9	10.0	578.0	1.5	96.6	1.3	92.9	0.4	3.7
2009	598.4	11.2	580.4	7.4	94.0	2.5	92.2	1.5	1.8

Source: Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, NAPLAN Report 2008 and 2009

Writing: (2008 and 2009)

While writing is an area in need of attention there has been some improvement between the two years of assessment. After the application of confidence intervals, the ACT's results are not significantly different to the states with the highest mean scores. The ACT's difference from the mean has increased for all years except year 3 where it has remained relatively stable.

In 2009, at years 5, 7 and 9 approximately 20 to 25% of students are achieving in the top performance bands for their year level, with nearly 50% in the top performance bands at year 3. The ACT would be ranked third overall for students performing in the top performance bands when compared with other jurisdictions.

The percentage of students achieving below the national minimum standard (including exempt students) increased slightly across year 3, 5 and 7. However, when viewing performance of students who sat the tests there was a slight decrease in the percentage of students performing below the national minimum standard in all years except year 5.

Figure 4: NAPLAN: Performance of ACT and Australian students in writing

Students	Mean relative position				Percentage of ACT students achieving at or above national minimum standard				
	ACT	CI	Aust	CI	ACT	CI	Aust	CI	Difference
2008	432.2	4.6	414.2	1.0	96.3	1.2	95.4	0.2	0.9
2009	422.0	4.6	414.0	0.9	95.9	1.5	95.6	0.2	0.3
2008	490.7	4.7	486.5	1.0	94.9	1.3	92.6	0.2	2.3
2009	489.3	5.1	484.5	0.9	93.7	1.4	92.8	0.2	0.9
2008	534.3	9.4	533.7	1.5	93.4	2.1	91.8	0.3	1.6
2009	539.0	9.1	532.5	1.3	93.2	2.1	92.5	0.3	0.7
2008	571.0	11.7	569.4	1.8	88.9	3.2	87.2	0.5	1.7
2009	578.4	9.0	569.0	1.7	89.6	2.6	87.7	0.5	1.9

Source: Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, NAPLAN Report 2008 and 2009

Numeracy: (2008 and 2009)

The performance of ACT students in numeracy varied across year levels. ACT years 7 and 9 students achieved the highest mean scores across the country. In all years, 95 per cent of ACT students performed at or above the national minimum standard.

The performance of ACT students in the top performance bands for their year level remained stable over the two years. More than one quarter of students at each year level achieved in the top performance bands. The ranking of ACT students remained similar to 2008 with more ACT year 9 students performing at the highest level than other jurisdictions.

The percentage of students achieving below the national minimum standard (including exempt students) increased slightly across year 3, 7 and 9. When considering performance of students who sat the tests only at year 3 and 7 there was a slight increase in the percentage of students performing below the national minimum standard.

Figure 5: NAPLAN: Performance of ACT and Australian students in numeracy

Students	Mean relative position				Percentage of ACT students achieving at or above national minimum standard				
	ACT	CI	Aust	CI	ACT	CI	Aust	CI	Difference
Year 5									
2008	411.5	5.1	396.9	1.0	96.4	1.2	95.0	0.2	1.4
2009	408.2	10.9	394.1	9.5	94.7	1.7	94.0	1.1	0.7
Year 7									
2008	483.8	5.8	475.9	1.1	94.9	1.2	92.7	0.2	2.2
2009	496.2	10.3	486.8	8.7	95.4	1.5	94.2	1.2	1.2
Year 9									
2008	556.2	10.1	545.0	1.6	97.1	1.2	95.4	0.2	1.7
2009	549.4	12.4	543.5	7.1	95.4	1.9	94.8	1.0	0.6
Year 5									
2008	594.9	10.3	582.2	1.8	96.6	1.2	93.6	0.3	3.0
2009	600.3	11.6	588.5	6.7	95.3	2.2	94.9	1.1	0.4

Source: Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, NAPLAN Report 2008 and 2009

In terms of the different subgroups of students in NAPLAN, the only available data is from the 2008 results.

Gender: (2008 only)

In 2008, in all domains with the exception of spelling, ACT male and female students outperformed males and females nationally. ACT female students performed the highest in the country at years 5, 7 and 9 in reading and equal highest in all other assessments with Victoria and NSW.

Gender differentiation in the ACT was evident in all literacy domains where female students achieved higher mean scores than male students (Figure 6). This trend was similar across Australia. While these differences were significant in the ACT in years 3 and 5, by years 7 and 9 the gap in reading performance between males and females had narrowed. Conversely, ACT male students achieved higher mean scores in numeracy than female students, and significantly higher in year 5, however, the gap had again narrowed by year 9.

In the ACT, the greatest variation in performance of males and females achieving above the national minimum standard occurred in writing at years 7 and 9 (12 percentage points at year 9). Overall, more females achieved above the national minimum standard in all tests at all year levels with the exception of year 9 numeracy, where the proportion above the national minimum standard was the same as males (97%).

Figure 6: NAPLAN 2008: Performance of ACT and Australian students in reading, writing and numeracy, by gender

		Students	Mean Score				Percentage of students achieving at or above national minimum standard				
			ACT	Confidence Interval	Aust	Confidence Interval	ACT	Confidence Interval	Aust	Confidence Interval	Difference
			Points	Points	Points	Points	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percentage Points
Year 3	Reading	Overall	421.0	5.9	400.5	1.2	94.4	1.5	92.1	0.3	2.3
		Males	414.1	7.0	393.1	1.3	92.2	2.1	90.3	0.3	1.9
		Females	428.0	6.4	408.2	1.1	96.6	1.1	94.1	0.2	2.5
	Writing	Overall	432.2	4.6	414.2	1.0	96.3	1.2	95.4	0.2	0.9
		Males	409.9	5.9	400.6	1.1	94.4	1.8	93.7	0.3	0.7
		Females	436.6	4.6	428.4	1.0	98.3	0.7	97.1	0.2	1.2
	Numeracy	Overall	411.5	5.1	396.9	1.0	96.4	1.2	95.0	0.2	1.4
		Males	416.0	6.3	400.6	1.1	95.4	1.7	94.6	0.2	0.8
		Females	407.0	5.5	393.1	1.0	97.3	1.0	95.5	0.2	1.8
Year 5	Reading	Overall	503.3	5.6	484.4	1.1	94.8	1.2	91.0	0.3	3.8
		Males	495.5	7.0	478.4	1.2	93.5	1.7	89.3	0.3	4.2
		Females	511.2	6.7	490.7	1.1	96.0	1.2	92.8	0.3	3.2
	Writing	Overall	490.7	4.7	486.5	1.0	94.9	1.3	92.6	0.2	2.3
		Males	477.4	6.1	472.2	1.1	92.7	2.0	89.8	0.3	2.9
		Females	504.1	5.0	501.4	1.0	97.1	1.1	95.5	0.2	1.6
	Numeracy	Overall	483.8	5.8	475.9	1.1	94.9	1.2	92.7	0.2	2.2
		Males	490.5	7.0	481.6	1.2	94.6	1.4	92.8	0.3	1.8
		Females	477.0	6.5	469.9	1.1	95.2	1.4	92.5	0.3	2.7
Year 7	Reading	Overall	558.2	10.1	536.5	1.4	96.3	1.4	94.2	0.3	2.1
		Males	554.6	11.9	531.9	1.7	95.0	2.0	92.8	0.3	2.2
		Females	561.9	11.2	541.4	1.5	97.6	1.1	95.6	0.2	2.0
	Writing	Overall	534.3	9.4	533.7	1.5	93.4	2.1	91.8	0.3	1.6
		Males	518.0	10.1	517.8	1.7	90.2	3.1	88.6	0.4	1.6
		Females	551.4	9.0	550.3	1.6	96.8	1.4	95.3	0.2	1.5
	Numeracy	Overall	556.2	10.1	545.0	1.6	97.1	1.2	95.4	0.2	1.7
		Males	565.9	11.8	552.3	2.0	96.9	1.4	95.4	0.2	1.5
		Females	546.1	10.7	537.3	1.7	97.4	1.3	95.3	0.2	2.1
Year 9	Reading	Overall	601.9	10.0	578.0	1.5	96.6	1.3	92.9	0.4	3.7
		Males	597.0	12.4	575.0	1.9	95.4	1.8	91.5	0.4	3.9
		Females	606.6	10.3	581.0	1.6	97.9	1.1	94.4	0.3	3.5
	Writing	Overall	571.0	11.7	569.4	1.8	88.9	3.2	87.2	0.5	1.7
		Males	550.4	14.0	551.2	2.2	83.0	4.9	82.2	0.7	0.8
		Females	591.1	11.0	588.4	1.9	94.7	2.0	92.5	0.4	2.2
	Numeracy	Overall	594.9	10.3	582.2	1.8	96.6	1.2	93.6	0.3	3.0
		Males	598.5	12.9	586.5	2.2	96.6	1.7	93.7	0.4	2.9
		Females	591.4	10.5	577.6	2.0	96.6	1.3	93.6	0.4	3.0

Source: Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, NAPLAN Report 2008

Indigenous: (2008 only)

Across Australia in 2008, Indigenous students' performance in NAPLAN was consistently below the performance of non-Indigenous students (Figure 7).

Figure 7: NAPLAN 2008: Performance of ACT and Australian students in reading, writing and numeracy, by Indigenous status

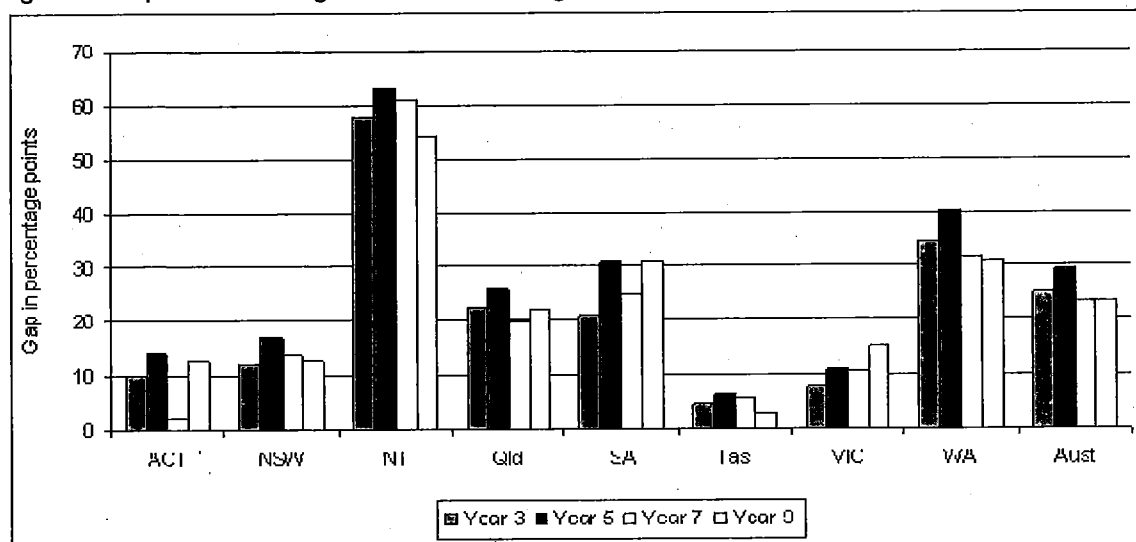
		Students	Mean Score				Percentage of students achieving at or above national minimum standard				
			ACT	Confidence Interval	Aust	Confidence Interval	ACT	Confidence Interval	Aust	Confidence Interval	Difference
			Points	Points	Points	Points	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percentage Point
Year 3	Reading	Overall	421.0	5.9	400.5	1.2	94.4	1.5	92.1	0.3	2.3
		Indigenous	359.5	17.6	313.7	4.9	84.9	8.1	68.3	2.0	16.6
	Writing	Overall	432.2	4.6	414.2	1.0	96.3	1.2	95.4	0.2	0.9
		Indigenous	374.0	17.1	339.3	4.5	89.5	6.6	78.8	1.8	10.7
	Numeracy	Overall	411.5	5.1	396.9	1.0	96.4	1.2	95.0	0.2	1.4
		Indigenous	355.1	16.2	327.6	3.3	88.4	9.3	78.6	1.7	9.8
Year 5	Reading	Overall	503.3	5.6	484.4	1.1	94.8	1.2	91.0	0.3	3.8
		Indigenous	441.9	16.7	403.4	4.1	81.1	8.0	63.4	1.8	17.7
	Writing	Overall	490.7	4.7	486.5	1.0	94.9	1.3	92.6	0.2	2.3
		Indigenous	442.9	14.9	411.2	4.1	82.1	8.7	69.7	1.7	12.4
	Numeracy	Overall	483.8	5.8	475.9	1.1	94.9	1.2	92.7	0.2	2.2
		Indigenous	428.5	14.0	408.0	2.8	82.3	8.5	69.2	1.7	13.1
Year 7	Reading	Overall	558.2	10.1	536.5	1.4	96.3	1.4	94.2	0.3	2.1
		Indigenous	519.4	16.5	466.5	4.2	94.3	4.8	71.9	2.0	22.4
	Writing	Overall	534.3	9.4	533.7	1.5	93.4	2.1	91.8	0.3	1.6
		Indigenous	485.8	17.2	455.9	5.0	84.1	9.5	67.9	2.0	16.2
	Numeracy	Overall	556.2	10.1	545.0	1.6	97.1	1.2	95.4	0.2	1.7
		Indigenous	504.7	14.3	476.2	3.4	90.3	7.6	78.6	1.7	11.7
Year 9	Reading	Overall	601.9	10.0	578.0	1.5	96.6	1.3	92.9	0.4	3.7
		Indigenous	552.8	17.7	513.8	4.6	84.2	9.0	70.7	2.1	13.5
	Writing	Overall	571.0	11.7	569.4	1.8	88.9	3.2	87.2	0.5	1.7
		Indigenous	515.7	29.2	491.3	5.4	73.4	11.2	59.7	2.0	13.7
	Numeracy	Overall	594.9	10.3	582.2	1.8	96.6	1.2	93.6	0.3	3.0
		Indigenous	546.5	14.6	515.1	4.0	83.8	11.1	72.5	2.0	11.3

Source: Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, NAPLAN Report 2008

Figure 8 shows the gap in the reading performances of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students across states and territories for each year level. The gap is calculated by subtracting the proportion of Indigenous students achieving at or above the national minimum standard from the proportion of non-Indigenous students achieving at or above the national minimum standard. Nationally, the gap for year 5 reading was 29 percentage points, and variation across

jurisdictions ranged from a low of 6 percentage points for Tasmania to a high of 63 percentage points for the Northern Territory.

Figure 8: Gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in reading



Source: ACT Department of Education and Training, 2009

The ACT had a relatively small gap, with the most marked difference (largest gap) occurring in the literacy areas (grammar, punctuation, spelling and writing) at year 3, and the smallest difference (narrowest gap) across each of the domains was at year 7. While some ACT Indigenous students achieved in the top two proficiency bands of performance at each year level, a disproportionate number were represented in the lower bands of performance compared with non-Indigenous students.

Whilst the gap in performance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in the ACT, as stated previously, was significant and remains of concern, Indigenous students in the ACT outperformed their peers in all other states and territories. A greater proportion of ACT Indigenous students achieved above the national minimum standard in all tests at all year levels when compared with the national results.

The participation rates, however, for ACT Indigenous students in years 7 and 9 were below the national averages and the exemption (absent or withdrawn) figures for the same years were higher in comparison with the national figures. The ACT Government is taking steps to address these issues which are outlined in section 6 below.

LBOTE: (2008 only)

NAPLAN results for 2008, for students with language backgrounds other than English (Figure 9) show a remarkable story. Across all domains, these students closed the gap in mean score results from year 3 to year 9. In some cases, such as numeracy, LBOTE students had a higher mean score than English language background students by year 9. This provides evidence that ACT Government programs are successfully assisting this group in their educational achievements.

Figure 9: NAPLAN 2008: Performance of ACT and Australian students in reading, writing and numeracy, by LBOTE

		Students	Mean Score				Percentage of students achieving at or above national minimum standard				
			ACT	Confidence Interval	Aust	Confidence Interval	ACT	Confidence Interval	Aust	Confidence Interval	
			Points	Points	Points	Points	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Difference
Year 3	Reading	Overall	421.0	5.9	400.5	1.2	94.4	1.5	92.1	0.3	2.3
		LBOTE	399.1	10.9	399.3	2.4	87.8	6.4	90.4	0.7	-2.6
	Writing	Overall	432.2	4.6	414.2	1.0	96.3	1.2	95.4	0.2	0.9
		LBOTE	421.8	8.4	420.4	2.1	91.6	6.1	93.6	0.6	-2.0
	Numeracy	Overall	411.5	5.1	396.9	1.0	96.4	1.2	95.0	0.2	1.4
		LBOTE	397.7	9.3	401.0	2.1	90.4	6.4	93.0	0.6	-2.6
Year 5	Reading	Overall	503.3	5.6	484.4	1.1	94.8	1.2	91.0	0.3	3.8
		LBOTE	486.0	9.4	478.7	2.4	88.8	5.6	87.5	0.7	1.3
	Writing	Overall	490.7	4.7	486.5	1.0	94.9	1.3	92.6	0.2	2.3
		LBOTE	488.1	7.7	494.2	2.1	91.7	5.3	91.1	0.6	0.6
	Numeracy	Overall	483.8	5.8	475.9	1.1	94.9	1.2	92.7	0.2	2.2
		LBOTE	484.5	8.9	484.9	2.5	90.3	5.7	90.7	0.7	-0.4
Year 7	Reading	Overall	558.2	10.1	536.5	1.4	96.3	1.4	94.2	0.3	2.1
		LBOTE	551.6	17.8	528.6	3.0	95.2	3.3	90.8	0.8	4.4
	Writing	Overall	534.3	9.4	533.7	1.5	93.4	2.1	91.8	0.3	1.6
		LBOTE	540.6	13.8	538.4	3.1	93.9	3.0	90.3	0.8	3.6
	Numeracy	Overall	556.2	10.1	545.0	1.6	97.1	1.2	95.4	0.2	1.7
		LBOTE	570.0	17.5	553.0	3.7	97.3	1.9	93.6	0.6	3.7
Year 9	Reading	Overall	601.9	10.0	578.0	1.5	96.6	1.3	92.9	0.4	3.7
		LBOTE	595.0	13.5	570.7	3.4	96.6	2.6	90.0	0.8	6.6
	Writing	Overall	571.0	11.7	569.4	1.8	88.9	3.2	87.2	0.5	1.7
		LBOTE	568.2	15.4	574.3	3.8	88.2	5.5	86.7	0.9	1.5
	Numeracy	Overall	594.9	10.3	582.2	1.8	96.6	1.2	93.6	0.3	3.0
		LBOTE	613.0	14.6	594.8	4.2	97.6	2.5	93.0	0.7	4.6

Source: Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, NAPLAN Report 2008

Interestingly, the data shows a slightly different story for all Australian LBOTE students. Nationally, for this group, their starting points in year 3 are much closer to, and in fact in some cases ahead of, the mean scores for Australian English language students. The improvement of all Australian LBOTE students over time, compared with overall student results, is less marked than in the ACT. Some caution needs to be exercised in using this data given that it represents just one time point.

Figure 10: NAPLAN 2008: Performance of ACT LBOTE students, all ACT students and all Australian students achieving above the national minimum standard by year level, in reading

Source: Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, NAPLAN Report 2008

3.2 National Assessment Programs (NAP)

The national sample assessments test students' skills and understanding in science literacy, civics and citizenship and information and communication technology (ICT) literacy. Only selected groups of students in years 6 and 10 participate in these sample assessments, which are held on a rolling three-yearly basis. Sample assessments began in 2003 with science literacy, followed by civics and citizenship in 2004 and ICT literacy in 2005.

NAP ICT Literacy

ACT year 6 and year 10 students participated in the 2007 National Assessment Program in ICT and achieved the highest mean scores across states and territories, showing that ICT has been successfully embedded into teaching programs.

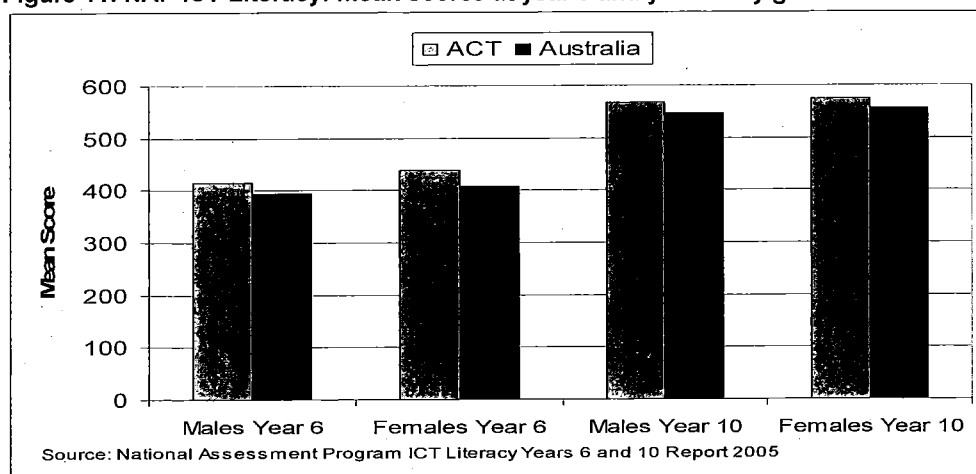
Minimum standards like those in literacy and numeracy have not been set for ICT performance. The standard for ICT performance is set at the boundary of proficiency levels 2 and 3 for year 6 students and at the boundary of proficiency levels 3 and 4 for year 10 students. This is a challenging level of performance, with students needing to demonstrate more than minimal or elementary skills expected at that year level to be regarded as reaching it. Data represent the proportion of students at or above each proficiency level and the proficient standard.

In year 6, 58% of ACT students, (compared with 49% nationally), attained the proficient standard, the highest percentage of all jurisdictions; and for year 10, 66% of ACT students, (compared with 61% for Australia), attained the proficient standard, at the top of the table with Victoria.

Gender

Based on mean scores, females were performing better than males at year 6, however, by year 10 the gap had closed and was not considered statistically significant.

Figure 11: NAP ICT Literacy: mean scores at year 6 and year 10 by gender



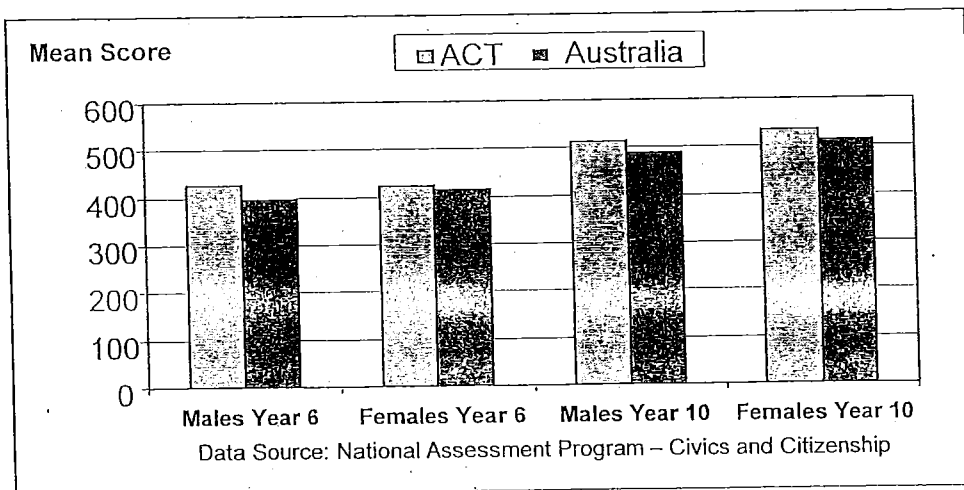
NAP Civics and Citizenship

In 2007, ACT year 6 and year 10 students participated in the National Assessment Program in Civics and Citizenship. ACT performance was strong and showed improvement on the 2004 assessment. Along with NSW, the ACT achieved the highest mean scores across states and territories, (taking account of the confidence intervals), significantly above the Australian mean. In terms of the percentage of students at or above the proficient standard, NSW students (52% in year 10) performed slightly better than ACT students (50%), and both jurisdictions were well above the Australian performance of 42%.

Gender

As can be seen from Figure 12, males and females in year 6 performed at a similar level and females performed marginally better than males in year 10 when confidence intervals are considered.

Figure 12: NAP Civics and Citizenship: ACT and Australian mean scores at year 6 and year 10 for males and females



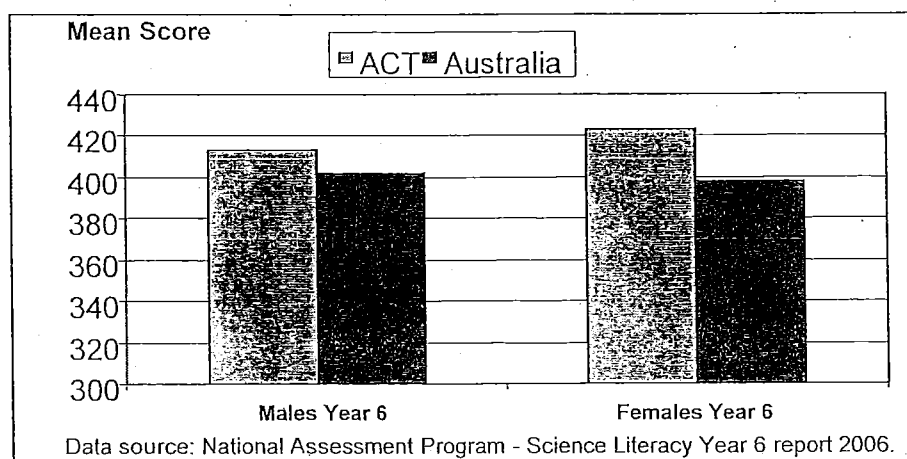
NAP Science Literacy

The ACT performance in science literacy in 2006 at the primary level (year 4 and year 6) was very strong. In year 6 for example, the ACT had the highest percentage of students achieving at the proficient standard (62%), compared to the Australian average of 54%, and the highest mean score nationally (418), well above the Australian mean of 400. At the secondary level (year 8), the ACT was also ranked first nationally in science literacy.

Gender

Figure 13 shows that ACT males and females achieved at levels well above males and females nationally, particularly ACT females, who outperformed ACT males at year 6 level.

Figure 13: NAP Science Literacy: ACT and Australian mean scores at year 6



3.3 PISA

PISA is conducted every three years by the OECD and provides a basis for international comparison of Australian and ACT student performance in reading, mathematical and scientific literacies. PISA also analyses student performance against socioeconomic factors.

Over 57 countries and almost 400 000 fifteen-year-olds participated in the PISA tests undertaken in 2006. Across Australia, 14 170 students in 356 schools were assessed and in the ACT, a random sample of 26 schools and almost 1000 students across public, Catholic and independent schools participated. PISA testing has occurred again this year, however, results will not be available until late 2010.

In 2006, in general the ACT performed extremely well, and along with WA and NSW were the best performing jurisdictions in the country. However, there was a gap between the highest and lowest scores both in the ACT and across Australia generally. In terms of the subgroups, females generally performed more strongly than males, with the exception of numeracy. It is difficult to make statistically reliable judgements about the impact of socio-economic background on ACT results in PISA.

The ACT's spread of scores across the different achievement levels was wider than the OECD average for scientific literacy, and narrower than the OECD average for reading and mathematical literacy. In reading literacy, the ACT gap is also narrower than the Australian average.

In 2008 the ACT Department of Education and Training (the Department) commissioned ACER to examine the performance of ACT students against Australian and OECD standards over the previous three assessment cycles of PISA. The report noted that the average achievement scores of students in each literacy domain in the ACT were the highest in Australia across the 2000, 2003 and 2006 assessments. In 2006, around 70% of ACT students achieved above the OECD average in each of the three literacy domains, compared with the national average of around 62%.

A copy of the ACER report is at [Attachment C](#).

In PISA 2006 in scientific literacy, 21% of ACT students, compared with 15% of Australian students and an OECD average of 9%, achieved at the highest two proficiency levels (Figure 14). Eleven per cent of ACT students did not achieve at the OECD defined baseline proficiency, level 2. This compared favourably with the Australian average of 13% and the OECD average of 19%.

Figure 14: Percentage of students at different proficiency levels in scientific literacy for PISA 2006

State	Below Level 1	SE	Level 1	SE	Level 2	SE	Level 3	SE	Level 4	SE	Level 5	SE	Level 6	SE
ACT	3	0.8	8	1.3	15	1.5	25	1.7	28	1.9	17	1	4	1.1
Australia	3	0.3	10	0.5	20	0.6	28	0.5	25	0.5	12	1	3	0.3
OECD average	5	0.1	14	0.1	24	0.2	27	0.2	20	0.2	8	0	1	0
Highest nation	1	0.1	4	0.4	14	0.7	29	1.1	32	0.9	17	1	4	0.3

Source: Thomson, S. and de Bortoli, S. 2008, The Performance of Students in the Australian Capital Territory on PISA; report to the ACT Department of Education and Training, Australian Council for Educational Research

The ACT also compared well with Australian and OECD results in reading literacy (Figure 15). In PISA 2006, 46% of ACT students achieved at the higher levels of proficiency, compared with 36% of Australian students and 29% of the OECD students. Ten per cent of ACT students, compared with 14% of Australian students and 20% of OECD students, did not achieve proficiency level 2.

Figure 15: Percentage of students at different proficiency levels in reading literacy for PISA 2006

State	Below Level 1	SE	Level 1	SE	Level 2	SE	Level 3	SE	Level 4	SE	Level 5	SE
ACT	3	0.9	7	1.1	16	1.2	29	2.1	30	1.8	16	2
Australia	4	0.3	10	0.5	21	0.7	30	0.6	25	0.7	11	1
OECD average	7	0.1	13	0.1	23	0.2	28	0.2	21	0.2	9	0
Highest nation	1	0.3	4	0.7	13	0.8	27	1.1	33	1.3	22	1

Source: Thomson, S. and de Bortoli, S. 2008, The Performance of Students in the Australian Capital Territory on PISA; report to the ACT Department of Education and Training, Australian Council for Educational Research

In mathematical literacy in PISA 2006, 23% of ACT students, 16% of Australian students and 13% of students in the OECD, performed at the highest two proficiency levels (Figure 16). Ten per cent of ACT students, compared with 13% nationally and an OECD average of 22%, did not reach proficiency level 2. There were no significant differences found between the percentage of ACT students above or below the OECD average for mathematical literacy.

Figure 16: Percentage of students at different proficiency levels in mathematical literacy for PISA 2006

State	Below Level 1	SE	Level 1	SE	Level 2	SE	Level 3	SE	Level 4	SE	Level 5	SE	Level 6	SE
ACT	3	1	7	1.4	16	1.6	24	2.2	26	1.8	17	2	6	1.3
Australia	3	0.3	10	0.4	21	0.6	27	0.6	23	0.5	12	1	4	0.5
OECD average	8	0.1	14	0.2	22	0.2	24	0.2	19	0.2	10	0	3	0.1
Highest nation	4	0.6	8	0.7	14	0.9	19	0.7	22	0.8	20	1	12	0.8

Source: Thomson, S. and de Bortoli, S. 2008, The Performance of Students in the Australian Capital Territory on PISA; report to the ACT Department of Education and Training, Australian Council for Educational Research

However, at 10%, the ACT had the smallest cohort of students below proficiency level 2 in mathematical literacy, equal to the best in the world.

SES

The ACER report noted that the distribution of socioeconomic levels in the ACT was narrower than that of other states, with the lower and higher socioeconomic levels higher for the ACT than for all other states. Being both narrower and higher, it is difficult to make statistically reliable judgements about the impact of socio-economic background on ACT results in PISA. ACER reported however, that in all literacies assessed, ACT students were performing consistently better than Australian and OECD students and that the ACT had higher levels of achievement than any of the other states over all levels of socioeconomic background.

ACER found that there was no significant difference between the percentage of students in the lowest socioeconomic quartile performing at or above the OECD average in any of the three literacies in the ACT and Australia. In contrast, a slightly higher percentage of ACT students than Australian students in the highest socioeconomic quartile achieved at or above the OECD average in each of the literacies.

At the lowest level of achievement, the ACT score was similar to that of a few of the other states, however as socioeconomic levels increased, the gap between the performance of students in the ACT and Australia increased. While the performance of ACT students with a high socio-economic index was the highest of all jurisdictions, ACT students with a lower socio-economic index also performed well compared to with their equivalent Australian peers.

Gender

In PISA reading literacy the mean score difference varied in each assessment period of 2000, 2003 and 2006. In 2000 mean scores were statistically no different for females and males. In 2003 they were 8% higher and in 2006 they were 5% higher.

In PISA mathematical literacy in both 2003 and 2006 there was no difference between the mean score of males and females. In 2006 the mean score for females was 3% lower than males. For Australia in 2003 there was no difference in the mean scores for males and females, however in 2006 the mean score for males was 3% higher than for females and compared to the difference for the ACT. There were no assessment details for PISA 2000 in mathematical literacy.

Over each of the assessment periods the PISA mean scores for ACT males and females were higher than for Australia.

Indigenous

Given the very small size of the cohort of 15-year-old Indigenous students in the ACT, it is not possible to use PISA as a measure to compare the performance of Indigenous students with non-Indigenous students.

3.4 TIMSS

Results from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) show the ACT achieved scores above the international average at years 4 and 8; scoring significantly higher than the national result in both science and mathematics. ACT year 8 students were placed sixth out of 49 nations in terms of international achievement in mathematics and eighth of 49 nations in science, as shown in Figure 17. More than 10 percent of year 8 ACT students reached the advanced benchmark.

Figure 17: Australia and ACT rankings, TIMSS 2007

Year 4	Ranking	
	<i>maths</i>	<i>science</i>
Australia/International	14/36	13/36
ACT/International	9/36	13/36
ACT/National	3/8	4/8
Year 8	Ranking	
	<i>maths</i>	<i>science</i>
Australia/International	14/49	13/49
ACT/International	6/49	8/49
ACT/National	1/8	1/8

Source: TIMSS, 2007

Gender

There were no statistically significant differences by gender in performance of ACT students in TIMSS 2007.

3.5 Primary Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS)

Each year, on entry to kindergarten in an ACT government school, students are individually assessed in aspects of English literacy and numeracy using the PIPS instrument, and again at the end of the year to ascertain progress. Students assessed as meeting the minimum standard in February PIPS are considered to have commenced schooling with adequate preparation for more formal learning in mathematics and reading.

Indigenous

The proportion of Indigenous kindergarten students whose first PIPS assessment was at or above the minimum standard was 48% in mathematics, 50% in reading, and 60% in phonics, compared with 81%, 78% and 72% respectively for non-Indigenous students.

This data indicates that around 50% of Indigenous students are already at a disadvantage when they start formal schooling and that without intensive intervention as early as possible, these gaps of between 12 and 33 percentage points between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students will be difficult to close as these students progress through schooling.

Gender

In 2009, 78% of males were above the minimum standard in mathematics at the start of their kindergarten year; this compares well to the proportion of females above the minimum standard, of 81%. In reading, 74% cent of males were above the minimum standard; for both genders, these proportions have remained stable and not changed over the last seven years.

From this data we can see there is little difference in 'readiness' in mathematics between the cohorts of boys and girls when they start school. This is not the case in reading however, where there is a difference between the groups of seven percentage points, meaning girls as a group, are more advanced in their early literacy skills on entry to school.

3.6 What the measures of academic performance tell us about the achievement gap

ACT students perform well in assessments of academic achievement, compared with students elsewhere in Australia and overseas. By many measures, ACT students have among the highest mean scores, a higher proportion of ACT students perform at the top achievement levels, while a smaller proportion have results below minimum standards or benchmarks.

While ACT students perform well across the board, there is still a gap between the group of highest performing students and those in the lowest achievement band(s), on all measures. However, in general this gap is no more or less than in other comparable jurisdictions.

One possible reason for the gap in performance may be a lower achievement level by some groups of students. However, in the ACT the only significant achievement gap was between the performance of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students which varies between year groups, and needs to be treated with caution given the relative size of the cohort. In, general, the gap was rarely less than 10% as observed on a number of measures.

ACT students with a language background other than English started school at a disadvantage but over time the gap narrowed and closed. It could be said that LBOTE had a significant positive influence on later achievement.

While a number of studies and more recent national assessments point to a relationship between socio-economic status and performance, there is little hard evidence available at this time to suggest that socio-economic profile is a

key determinate of performance in the ACT, or a key contributor to a performance gap between ACT schools.

ACT's NAPLAN results also suggest that time spent at school does not enlarge achievement gaps. In fact, for most students regardless of their background, there is a general trend towards a reduction in any achievement gap.

In terms of gender, the gap favouring females remains fairly constant across the domains in all year levels' except in writing where the gap somewhat diminishes. For our Indigenous students, across the years, their relative mean score performance improves in the NAPLAN reading and writing domains, and with the exception of numeracy also increases as a percentage above the national minimum standard. For students with language backgrounds other than English there are schooling benefits evident in the reduction of performance gaps for reading from year 3 to year 9; these students also improve in relation to the national means score in reading and numeracy.

4. Measures of student engagement

Participation and attendance rates, satisfaction levels and attainment levels provide some indication of the engagement and satisfaction levels of some groups of students.

4.1 Completion and Retention

According to the ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing, the proportion of the 17 to 19 year old population in the ACT in 2006 having completed Year 10 or above was 98%.

Indigenous

With regard to year 10 completion rates, nationally 96.9% of non-Indigenous people have completed Year 10, compared with 81.2 per cent of Indigenous people aged 17 to 19.

While there was little variation in Year 10 completion rates for non-Indigenous people across jurisdictions, there were large variations for Indigenous people, ranging from the very low rate of 49.7 per cent in the Northern Territory, to the high rate of 92% in the ACT and Tasmania. For the ACT this means there is a 6 percentage point gap between Year 10 completion rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people in the ACT.

Of the 51 Indigenous students in the ACT enrolled in year 10 in public high schools in 2008, 44 (86%) received a year 10 certificate compared with 94% for non-Indigenous students.

Figure 18: Apparent retention rates for ACT Indigenous students from 2003 to 2007 compared with Australia and all ACT students in percentage terms.

	ACT Indigenous	Australian Indigenous	All ACT	ACT Indigenous	Australian Indigenous	All ACT
Year	Years 7 to 10	Years 7 to 10	Years 7 to 10	Years 10 to 12	Years 10 to 12	Years 10 to 12
2003	96	87	100	88	44	101
2004	108	85	102	87	44	101
2005	100	85	100	71	42	100
2006	88	88	99	66	44	101
2007	84	88	99	65	46	97
Average	95	87	100	75	44	100

Source: Productivity Commission
Report on Government Services 2009

4.2 Year 12 Attainment

On 2 July 2009 COAG agreed to a new Youth Attainment and Transitions National Partnership (YATNP). Under this agreement, COAG has brought forward the 90% year 12 or equivalent attainment rate national target from 2020 to 2015. The NP includes differential jurisdictional targets in order to achieve this national standard. The ACT's target is the highest at 95%, which reflects our current high performance.

Currently, 83.5% of young people in Australia have completed year 12 or equivalent. This proportion varies across states and territories from a high of 93.1% in the ACT, to a low of 65.1% in the Northern Territory.

In 2008, 4111 students from 21 ACT colleges and the CIT Vocational College met the requirements for an ACT Year 12 Certificate. An overview of data for 2007-08 is displayed in Figures 19 and 20.

Figure 19 shows that the percentage of ACT students receiving an ACT Year 12 Certificate remained stable from 2007 to 2008. However, there was an increase in the percentage of ACT public students receiving a Year 12 Certificate and a corresponding decrease in attainment by non-government students.

Figure 19: Number of Candidates (Year 12 Certificate) - Comparison 2007 - 2008

	Year 12 Certificate			
	2008	Percentage of cohort ¹	2007	Percentage of cohort ¹
Year 12 students				
ACT Public	2463	87.4%	2437	86.2%
ACT Non Gov	1580	97.9%	1490	98.7%
CIT	68	-	61	
International	149	-	124	
TOTAL Certificated	4260			
ACT Public & Non Gov	4043	91.2%	3927	90.6%
Male - ACT Public & Non Gov	1957	91.4%	1882	90.1%
Female - ACT Public & Non Gov	2086	91.1%	2045	91.0%

¹ Note: February census figures used (including year 12, O and M students) Figures for CIT not included

2008: ACT Public 2817

ACT Non Government (excluding Canberra Grammar School) 1614

2007: ACT Public 2826

ACT Non Government (excluding Canberra Grammar School) 1509

Source: 2008 Technical Adviser's Report to the Board of Senior Secondary Studies

Figure 20 shows that in 2008, 2558 ACT students achieved a Tertiary Entrance Statement (TES). Based on the 2008 February Census figures, the percentage of ACT year 12 students receiving a TES increased by 3 percentage points compared with 2007. There were increases from 2007 to 2008 in both the public college sector and the non-government sector, with the percentage of both males and females increasing.

Figure 20: Number of Candidates (Tertiary Entrance Statements) - Comparison 2007 – 2008

	Tertiary Entrance Statements			
	2008	Percentage of cohort ¹	2007	Percentage of cohort ¹
Year 12 students				
ACT Public	1390	49.3%	1341	47.5%
ACT Non Gov	1125	69.7%	1011	67.0%
CIT	43		30	-
International	118		90	-
TOTAL TES receivers	2676			
ACT Public & Non Gov	2515	56.8%	2352	54.3%
Male - ACT Public & Non Gov	1120	52.3%	1034	49.5%
Female ACT Public & Non Gov	1395	60.9%	1318	58.7%

¹Note: February census figures used (including year 12, O and M students) Figures for CIT not included

2008: ACT Public 2817

ACT Non Government (excluding Canberra Grammar School) 1614

2007: ACT Public 2826

ACT Non Government (excluding Canberra Grammar School) 1509

Source: 2008 Technical Adviser's Report to the Board of Senior Secondary Studies

In 2008, 62% of ACT students receiving a Year 12 Certificate also received a TES. This was an increase of 2% compared with 2007. This reversed a declining trend over the past two years. Of the 21 ACT colleges, 17 different colleges had students in the top two percent. Of the 2 558 students in the ACT who achieved a UAI, 77% were above the University of Canberra main round general UAI cutoff of 65.

Indigenous

Nationally, Indigenous young people had significantly lower Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates (47%) compared with the non-Indigenous rate of 83%. There was also considerable variation across the states and territories. The ACT was the most successful on this measure, with 66% of Indigenous young people with year 12 or equivalent, although as stated above, even this high rate was well below the rate for non-Indigenous young people in the ACT of 91%.

In 2008, the percentage of ACT Indigenous students achieving a Year 12 Certificate was 82% which was lower than in 2007 and was below the ACT percentage for non-Indigenous students of 91%. However, the percentage of Indigenous students receiving a TES was 40%, which was an increase of 6 percentage points for the same period, although this was still below the general ACT percentage of 57%.

In 2008, there was also an increase (3 percentage points) in the percentage of Indigenous students achieving above the University of Canberra main round general cutoff. Due to the small numbers involved, caution needs to be exercised in reviewing percentage changes in the figures for Indigenous students.

Figure 21: Overview of results for year 12 Indigenous students

	2008		2007	
Indigenous students	45		47	
Awarded Year 12 Certificate:	37	82.2%	45	95.7%
Awarded UAI:	18	40.0%	16	34.0%
UAI >= 65	10	22.2%	9	19.1%
Vet Certificate plus Yr 12 Certificate:	6	13.3%	12	25.5%
Partially completed Vet Certificate & awarded Yr 12 Certificate:	11	24.4%	10	21.3%

Note: the percentages are in terms of year 12 Indigenous students from February census 2007 and 2008.

Source: Extracted from the 2008 Technical Adviser's Report to the Board of Senior Secondary Studies

SES

At a national level, at the lowest socio-economic level of quintile 1, year 12 attainment ranged from a low of 72%, to a high of 92% for quintile 5. Again, there was significant variation in attainment rates across states and territories. As the ACT did not have students in quintile 1, and only approximately 5% of students fell in quintiles 2 and 3, it is not valid to make an assessment of the impact of socio-economic status on attainment levels in the ACT.

Gender

By the time ACT students completed their year 12 program of study, the BSSS reported that gender differences in literacy courses were relatively consistent with previous findings. However, in 2008, while there was still a difference in the average scaled course scores for English, (higher for females than males), it was continuing to narrow and was exactly half of what it was in 2003. The difference between the average scaled course score for mathematics, (lower for females than males), remained relatively constant for the past three years but was still three times larger than the difference in 2004 and 2005.

In 2008, the percentage of females receiving a TES increased by two percentage points and the percentage of males receiving a TES increased by three percentage points. In 2008, the difference in the average UAI for females and males was the third smallest difference in the past ten years, and was about the same as in 2007.

LBOTE

The BSSS reported that around 70% of culturally and linguistically diverse students, (a similar classification to LBOTE students), who received a Year 12 Certificate in 2008, also received a TES. This was a higher proportion than the general cohort of year 12 students (around 62%). The average UAI for LBOTE students was 72, well above the University of Canberra cutoff of 65, and again demonstrating how the gap narrowed, and for many LBOTE students, closed as they reach the final years of formal schooling.

4.3 Attendance

Across Australia, 99% of children aged between 6 to 15 years were enrolled in school in 2008 (ABS). The proportion of children enrolled in school varied very little between states and territories, which is indicative of the compulsory nature of schooling in Australia for this age group.

While student attendance rates across Australia were relatively constant through the primary school years, they began to decline once students were in year 7. In the ACT, the attendance rate for primary schools was very high; for example at year 1 and again at year 5, it was 94% in 2008. By year 10, it had fallen to 88%.

Indigenous

Indigenous attendance rates tend to follow the general trend, with attendance rates declining by year 10, but at a greater rate than for non-Indigenous students.

In the ACT in 2008, the attendance of Indigenous students at primary school was 88%, a 6 percentage point increase on the 2007 figure. This compared with a rate of 94% for non-Indigenous students in 2008, which was a gap of 6 percentage points. By year 10 the attendance rate had fallen to 88%, similar to NSW for non-Indigenous students, compared with 81% for Indigenous students; a gap of 7 percentage points.

For Indigenous students in ACT public secondary colleges, there was little difference in the attendance rates of around 84% for Indigenous students between 2007 and 2008, compared with a rate of 88% for non-Indigenous students.

Gender

In 2007, male and female attendance rates matched each other remaining on or above 90 percent from year 1 through to year 8. There was a decline to 87 percent in female attendance in years 9 and 10. Male attendance in year 9 was 88 percent and 89 percent in year 10.

4.4 Satisfaction with public schools

Surveys from parents, carers, students and staff, conducted in one third of ACT public schools as part of the school review process, reflect high levels of satisfaction. In 2008, the same group of schools was surveyed as in 2005, and there was an improvement in satisfaction across all sectors, with over 7 in 10 parents being satisfied with the school their child attended across primary, high and colleges; and 9 in 10 students in primary schools being satisfied with the education the school provided.

Separate surveys indicated that 98% of parents and carers were satisfied with their child's preschool experience, an 8 percentage point increase from the previous year, and 98% of parents and carers were satisfied with their child's early intervention program.

While the overall satisfaction levels in high schools and colleges are lower than in the other sectors, there has been a trend of improvement since 2006 when overall satisfaction was reported as being 83%. In 2007, the result was reported as 87%, and when last reported in 2008 overall satisfaction was at 88%. Figure 22 provides a more complete picture of 2008 satisfaction results across three stakeholder groups: parents and carers, students, and staff.

Figure 22: Overall satisfaction with ACT public schools 2008

Aspect of satisfaction	With the school	With the education the school provides	That the school has high expectations in all that it does
Parents and Carers			
Primary	86%	86%	81%
High	76%	72%	67%
Colleges	84%	83%	77%
Students			
Primary	85%	91%	87%
High	61%	68%	62%
Colleges	86%	86%	81%
Staff			
Primary	82%	87%	86%
High	72%	74%	70%
Colleges	85%	81%	86%

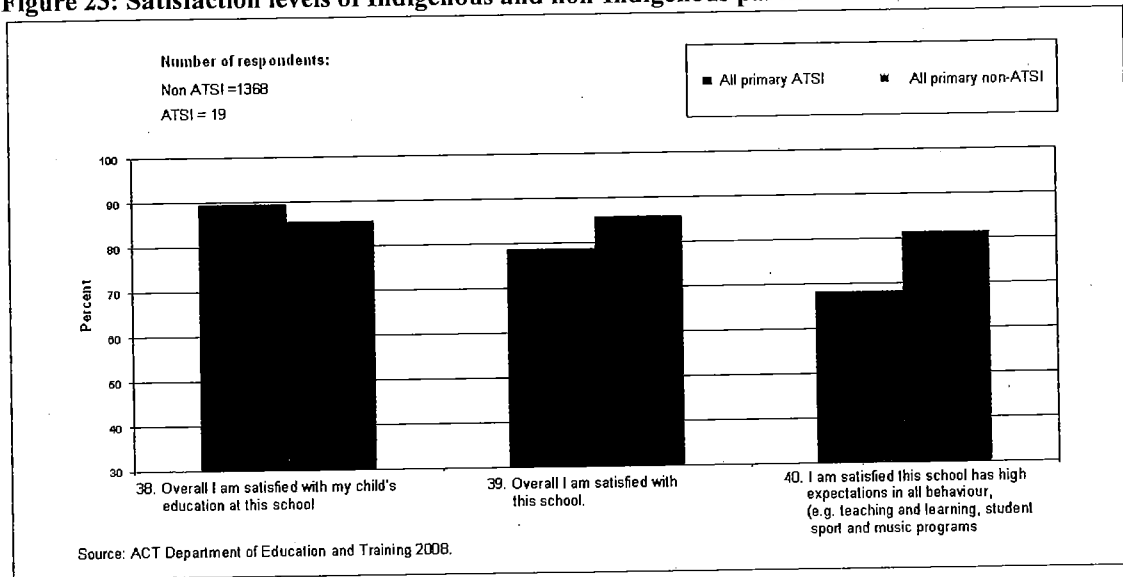
Note: Includes satisfied and very satisfied responses.

Source: ACT Department of Education and Training, 2009

Indigenous

Figure 23 illustrates that Indigenous parents with children in ACT public primary schools have a high level of satisfaction overall with their child's education at the school, (higher than the response from parents with non-Indigenous children); however they were not of the same view when asked if their school held high expectations across a range of areas (lower than the response from parents with non-Indigenous children). Caution should be taken in interpreting these results however, as only one third of schools were surveyed and the sample of respondents was only 19 Indigenous parents.

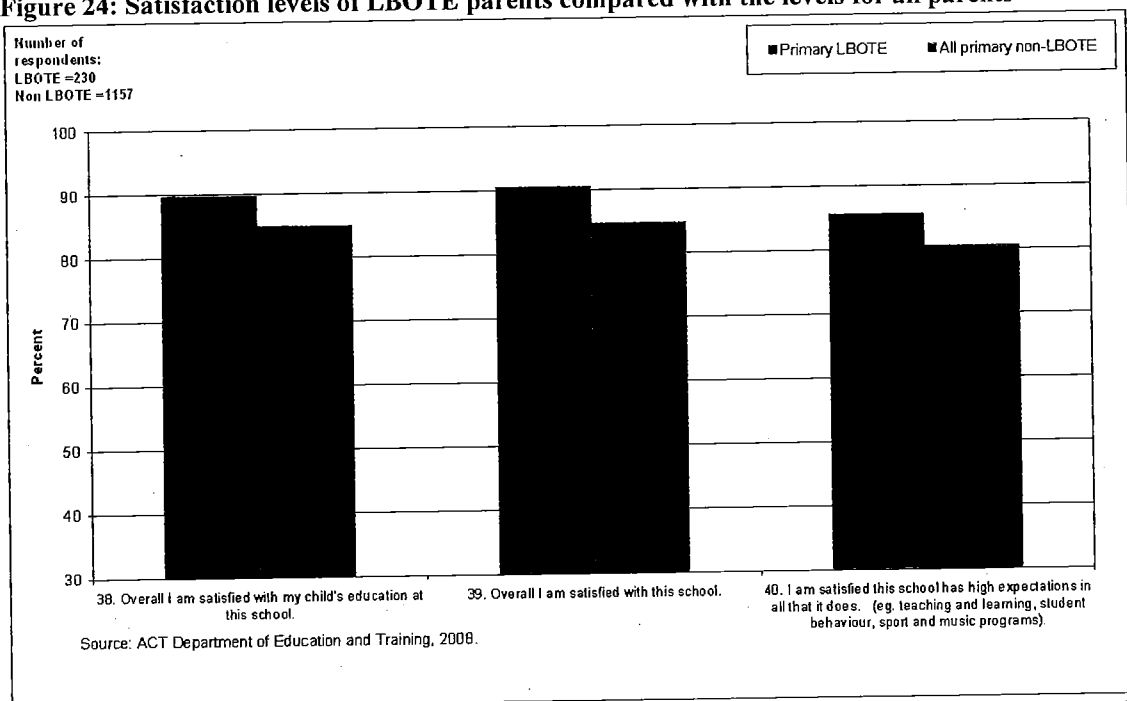
Figure 23: Satisfaction levels of Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents and carers



LBOTE

Overall parents of students whose first language is not English were very positive in their responses. They were well satisfied with the education their child's school was delivering and the high expectations it held, and with their child's education generally (at satisfaction levels above the rate for parents of students from English language speaking backgrounds). There was also a high return rate to the survey from LBOTE parents (230 responses).

Figure 24: Satisfaction levels of LBOTE parents compared with the levels for all parents



Gender

In terms of responses from boys and girls on the student surveys, while female primary school students were marginally more satisfied with their school than male students, males and females were equally satisfied with their high school. Of the three questions to students regarding satisfaction in ACT colleges, males and females again displayed equal levels of satisfaction.

5. Systemic initiatives designed to improve achievement in all students

It is clear from the data from national or international measures that the greatest differential in student outcomes in the ACT is within our schools rather than between our schools. It is also clear from education research studies that, of all the factors school systems and schools have some control over, it is the the quality of teaching that can have the biggest influence on within school achievement.

Masters (2009) in his recent report, *Improving literacy, numeracy and science learning in Queensland primary schools*, states:

Although there are many influences on how well students perform in school – some of them largely outside the control of schools – it is clear from research that the most effective way for education systems to improve achievement levels in primary schools is to improve the quality of classroom teaching (p. 3).

A copy of the Masters Report (2009) is at [Attachment D](#).

The Government's commitment is not only to narrow the gap between our highest and lowest achievers, but to raise the achievement levels of our lower performing students and extend and challenge our brightest students. ACT Government investment in programs and initiatives designed to improve the educational achievement of all students, is based on a clear recognition that the most influential factor in student achievement in schools is the quality of the teaching in the classroom. To this end, the ACT Government also recognises the importance of the development of strong literacy and numeracy skills in laying the foundation for all students to achieve in school and in life.

The key actions in supporting all students to achieve are:

- to support schools to reflect on the quality and effectiveness of their practices and identify teaching strategies and programs that are highly effective in increasing the learning outcomes of all students
- to build and extend the capacity of our teachers to bring out the best in their students by focusing on higher quality teaching for improved student outcomes
- to strengthen the quality of literacy and numeracy teaching and learning and raise the literacy and numeracy performance of every student
- to continue our major investment in the early years to set a strong foundation for future learning
- to lower average class sizes to 21 in primary and high schools and 19 in colleges to achieve better student-teacher ratios and better educational outcomes for students.

5.1 A focus on school improvement

In ACT public schools, the *School Improvement Framework* provides a context for all schools to aspire to excellence and high levels of academic achievement for all students through a four-year cycle of reflection, goal setting, planning, review and external validation. The Framework requires schools to critically examine the effectiveness of their programs and practices in meeting student needs and improving levels of student achievement in order to inform their decision-making.

In 2008, the first three-year cycle of school improvement was completed, with 27 public schools participating in external validation.

In December 2008, a major review of the framework was completed, and in June 2009 an updated version issued. This incorporated a wide body of feedback and the latest national and international research. The review highlighted widespread support for the ACT's innovative approach to school review and development, as well as some areas for strengthened school support and streamlined procedures.

The new *School Improvement Framework* replaces and brings together into the one structure, the previous *School Excellence Initiative* and recent concepts of school improvement. The Department also created a new position of school improvement partner, and in 2009, three school improvement partners commenced working alongside principals and schools directors to support school planning and review.

Schools will use the new *School Improvement Framework* to:

- make best use of evidence-informed processes and tools to evaluate their performance
- self-assess to identify school priorities
- develop a four-year plan and an annual operating plan with a focus on improvement over time
- establish accountability measures and targets that indicate their improvements and inform their planning
- report on their progress regularly.

A copy of the School Improvement Framework (2009) is at [Attachment E](#).

5.2 Quality teaching matters

As stated previously in this submission, a large body of contemporary research agrees that the quality of the classroom teacher is the largest in-school influence on student achievement. Major influences on the quality of classroom teaching students receive are teachers' professional learning and school leadership.

Because of this research, the ACT Government has invested in an initiative to strengthen the quality of teaching occurring in all ACT classrooms.

In 2008, the Department introduced the Quality Teaching model into all schools to support implementation of the ACT Curriculum Framework P-10 and the Colleges' Business Plan. The Quality Teaching model describes an approach to improving teaching practice that applies from preschool to year 12, and across all learning areas.

The model was developed by the NSW Department of Education and Training in partnership with researchers at the University of Newcastle. The model has its origins in the research into Authentic Pedagogy by Professor Fred Newmann and associates (1996), and more recently from the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (1998-2000) and from the NSW Systemic Implications of Pedagogy and Achievement (SIPA) longitudinal study (2004-2007).

The Department has worked in partnership with Professor Jenny Gore, Associate Professor James Ladwig and other staff from the University of Newcastle to adapt and build on the work started in NSW. The Department has a licence agreement with NSW to adapt and reproduce its teacher support materials for use in all ACT schools. All ACT teachers in both public and non-government schools have access to the ACT set of Quality Teaching resources.

The 2008-09 ACT Budget also provided \$2.378 million over three years to support the introduction of the Quality Teaching model in ACT public schools. This Budget initiative provided funding for three School Leader (SLC) positions for three years, up to 20 half-time (0.5) Quality Teaching contact teachers (one per school cluster) for 2009, and the provision of resources and professional development.

Since 2008, much progress has occurred on introducing the model into ACT schools and classrooms. In 2008, this included:

- Every teacher received book resources associated with implementing the model and schools received DVD resources. Over 30 introductory workshops introducing the Quality Teaching model were provided to schools and clusters.
- 48 principals participated in a series of workshops designed to assist them in introducing the Quality Teaching model in their schools.
- 31 scholarships were funded for teachers to do the Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies (Pedagogy) through Newcastle University, which included a particular focus on the Quality Teaching model.
- Three Quality Teaching consultants (one for each district) were employed from Term 4 2008 to assist schools in understanding and using the model.
- Two days of intensive professional learning were provided for the consultants, curriculum officers and some SLCs from clusters in November 2008.

In 2009, support has included:

- one School Leader C (SLC) teacher per cluster (14 in total) has been employed to work intensively with teachers in the cluster, and with the Quality Teaching consultant in the district, on implementing the model. In some cases, two clusters combined in order to have a full-time position. Other clusters resourced an additional 0.5 position to make the position full-time.
- 22 scholarships were funded for teachers to do the Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies (Pedagogy) through Newcastle University, with its particular focus on the Quality Teaching model. Thirty-three people (curriculum officers and school-based teachers) attended the University of Newcastle *Pedagogy in Practice* conference held on 21-22 July 2009.
- Professional development programs at the school and cluster level, as well as centralised workshops, continue to be delivered to build teacher understanding and practice in using the model.

A Quality Teaching Implementation Committee meets every term to oversee the implementation of the model and address issues that arise from this process. A forward plan to sustain implementation of the Quality Teaching model in future years will be put in place around four elements: resources, professional learning, building professional learning communities and research.

Copies of the ACT Quality Teaching resources are at [Attachment F](#).

5.3. Literacy and numeracy skills as the foundation

Dinham, in his 2008 article about the influence of education in overcoming disadvantage, has written that the quality of teaching each child receives in literacy is critical, given that literacy underpins every aspect of schooling.

Once students commence high school, previous achievement powerfully predicts future accomplishment. Some students are well equipped academically and socially for secondary schooling. Others quickly lose momentum. Their inadequate skills, especially in literacy and numeracy, see them falter while their peers move ahead. Parental support and guidance often falls away. Lack of progress can result in disengagement and behavioural problems, further undermining achievement (Web-based article).

The ACT Government is committed to ensuring schools prioritise the teaching of the important foundation skills of literacy and numeracy and has invested in a number of major initiatives over recent years to support that commitment. In the 2009-10 Budget, the ACT Government committed \$6.396m over four years to provide expert literacy and numeracy field officer positions. These positions will work intensively in one school at a time, coaching other teachers and assisting in the development of learning plans to support students who need help with literacy and numeracy. The Budget initiative also provided for

an additional position at the National Capital Centre for Literacy Research.

This was in addition to Government funding from previous Budgets for literacy and numeracy support. For example, the 2008-09 ACT Budget provided almost \$1m over four years to building the skills of teachers in teaching literacy and numeracy.

The Department's Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

The Department has recently developed a new strategy to support literacy and numeracy teaching and learning in ACT public schools over the next five years. Based on strong evidence, the *ACT Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2009-13* aims to:

- strengthen the leadership capacity of school leaders
- improve teachers' professional knowledge and skills in teaching literacy and numeracy
- improve the literacy and numeracy learning of every student
- enhance the use of data and systems to plan for, monitor and report on performance.

The Strategy has four priority areas for action.

1. Literacy and Numeracy Leadership involves the principal and executive collaborating with staff to promote and develop a productive school culture that aligns highly effective teaching practices and resource allocation across the school. Support will be provided to assist school leaders to develop an increased understanding of effective literacy and numeracy teaching
2. Literacy and Numeracy Teaching will increase teachers' professional knowledge, skills and capacity to use consistent, research-based practices to enhance their teaching. Instruction will be explicit and systematic and reflect a range of evidence based approaches. Targeted professional learning to meet the specific needs of learning communities will be provided to build teacher capacity
3. Literacy and Numeracy Learning focuses on assessing, monitoring and improving the literacy and numeracy outcomes for all students through active engagement in the learning process and addressing the diverse needs and abilities of all students.
4. Evidence informed practice focuses on building school capacity to use data to plan effective programs which meet individual student needs, and enabling teachers to track and evaluate student performance.

As part of the Strategy, the Department has set the following targets to be achieved by 2013:

- to increase the mean score in NAPLAN in years 3,5,7 and 9 by eight points in reading, writing and numeracy

- to reduce the achievement gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy by 25%.

All ACT public schools will be required to contribute to these system targets. Each school will set their own targets for their students, and will be required to monitor and report on their improvements over the five-year period.

A copy of the *ACT Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2009-2013* is at Attachment G.

The Department's literacy and numeracy support plan

Key elements of the support being provided to school leaders and teachers under the *ACT Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* are outlined below.

Literacy and Numeracy Field Officers

The 2009-10 Budget provided over \$6m to fund specialist literacy and numeracy executive teachers (field officers) to work in schools assisting classroom teachers to improve their teaching strategies and to develop individual learning plans for those students in most need.

There will be a total of 21 field officers in 2010-14; 14 funded by this ACT Budget initiative, three from redirection of current positions from within the Literacy and Numeracy section in the Department, and four funded through the COAG Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership. The process for recruitment of the literacy and numeracy field officers has commenced.

The field officers allocated to primary schools will be trained facilitators of *First Steps Reading and Writing* and *Count Me In Too* programs and based in a single school for 12 months at a time to provide onsite school support.

School Literacy and Numeracy Coordinators

All schools will appoint Literacy and Numeracy Coordinators with their allocation of Literacy and Numeracy staffing points from 2010. Coordinators will be expected to spend 50% of their time coaching and mentoring teachers and the other 50% providing support to students. Extensive and ongoing professional learning will be provided for these Coordinators.

Teaching resources

On the basis of evidence, the Department and Catholic sectors have identified *Count Me in Too* and *First Steps* as the system-based teaching programs for use across all schools to improve literacy and numeracy achievement. The Department will provide these resources to all schools, as well as professional development in their use.

Professional development

An extensive program of professional development will continue to be provided to support both school leaders and teachers to improve student literacy and numeracy skills. For example, a series of nine professional development workshops has been developed for 2009, targeted at teachers in the early years of schooling (K-3). These workshops are designed to model current initiatives and developments in the acquisition of early literacy and will provide a platform for teachers to collaboratively problem-solve and share their practice. Six workshops have taken place to date.

The Early Literacy Intervention Strategies (ELIS) program is another new initiative in 2009, developed to support the building of teacher capacity to improve the literacy outcomes of all students. ELIS provides networking and support for teachers who deliver targeted literacy teaching to identified students in the early years. It utilises the work of Dame Marie Clay and other leading literacy educators, incorporating effective strategies regarded as best practice to support children in the acquisition of effective early literacy skills.

National Capital Centre for Literacy Research

This Centre, a joint initiative between UCAN and DET has been established to support literacy learning by working with parents and schools. Funding from the 2009-10 Budget initiative will be used to expand the U-CAN Read program at the University of Canberra (UCAN) to develop a strong research focus, deliver professional learning to teachers and build stronger partnerships with schools.

Support in understanding and using data

From 2009, three School Improvement Partners will work with ACT public schools to help them understand their School Measurement, Assessment and Reporting Toolkit (SMART) data and its use for planning at the classroom and whole school level. The SMART Data Software for the NAPLAN assists schools to analyse NAPLAN results in-depth, quickly and with relative ease. All ACT schools, both public and non-government, have been provided with the SMART Data Software since 2008.

SMART helps schools analyse the data according to the:

- school's performance relative to the state
- performance of individual students
- comparative performance of students from Year 3 to Year 5, Year 5 to Year 7 and Year 7 to Year 9
- custom student groups
- comparative school groups.

It also allows schools to analyse changes from year to year and trends over time from 2006 to 2009. Schools will be supported in their use of SMART by workshops and individual school visits by officers of the Department.

5.4 The importance of early intervention

International and national research highlights the importance of investment in early childhood education. The early years are critical in setting the foundation for future learning, behaviour and health throughout the school years and on into adult life.

Research also demonstrates the importance of investment in early childhood and early intervention with families as improving overall achievements for children, young people and families. The ACT has in place a range of holistic early intervention strategies. For example, significant work is undertaken by the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services concerning early intervention through child care, Child and Family Centres, Schools as Communities program and services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

Studies have demonstrated repeatedly the positive effects of quality early childhood education. This includes higher school completion rates, further education participation, better employment outcomes, better earnings and better general social wellbeing. One U.S. study (Galinsky, 2006) showed that each dollar invested in early childhood education can save up to \$7 in later public expenditure. Research on the value of early childhood programs, particularly for children who are disadvantaged, is undisputed and well substantiated.

The ACT Government has responded to this research evidence and recognised that investment in early intervention and high quality education in the early years will have lasting effects on a child's social, emotional and intellectual development. The range of programs and policies in place to strengthen our provision of early childhood education is outlined below.

In 2009, there are 75 preschool programs operating in the ACT, including Jervis Bay. At the February 2009 census, there were 3 792 children, including 111 Indigenous children, attending preschools and enrolled in public preschool programs, up 0.5% since February 2008. From 2008, all preschool programs became fully integrated within ACT public primary schools.

In recent years, the ACT Government has made a significant investment to reduce class sizes in the early years of schooling (K-3) to 21, and \$8m (over four years) was provided in the 2005-06 budget to increase hours of preschool education from 10.5 to 12 hours.

In addition, the Government established four new early childhood schools to complement the long-established O'Connor Cooperative School. The four new Early Childhood Schools at Southern Cross, Narrabundah, Lyons and Isabella Plains opened in 2009 with strong enrolments and community interest.

These new early childhood schools will provide a full range of services for families and the community from birth to age 8. As the childcare programs commence operation in each of the four new early childhood schools this year,

and the schools are linked with before and after school care programs, they will further assist families to manage the demands of life in the 21st century by providing a stable environment for young children.

In 2009, there are also 39 programs (including playgroups) which cater for around 450 children annually from two to six years of age who have, or are at risk of a developmental delay or disability.

The ACT Government has also recently signed a National Partnership Agreement to implement 15 hours of free preschool in the early childhood schools from 2009, and to extend the 15 hours to all Government preschool units, to be phased in from 2010. Initial funding from the Australian Government to support this initiative is \$1.3m in 2008-09, with funding to increase in the following years up to \$7m in 2012-13.

The staged extension to 15 hours in all public preschools facilities will continue with the following primary schools to be included in 2010: Charnwood Dunlop, Richardson, Florey, North Ainslie, Gilmore, and Ngunnawal, and with Kingsford Smith School and Caroline Chisholm School. The Catholic Education Office (CEO) will also offer 15 hours at the newly established Holy Family Preschool at Holy Family Primary School, Gowrie, as part of the funding provided to the ACT by the Australian Government under the Universal Access National Partnership.

Programs for three-year-old children continue to be offered in lower socio-economic areas at Charnwood Dunlop School and Narrabundah Early Childhood School. There is also an interim program at the Lyons Early Childhood School in 2009.

5.5 Lowering class sizes

The 2009-10 Budget provided \$28.7 million over four years to lower average class sizes to 21 in primary and high schools and 19 in colleges. Capital works of \$6 million over two years will be undertaken to ensure there is sufficient capacity to accommodate the additional classes. This commitment builds on previous successful initiatives in which class sizes in years K to 3 were lowered to a maximum of 21.

The initiative will fund the employment of 70 extra teachers to reduce class sizes to ensure better educational outcomes for students. Approximately 10 additional teachers will be allocated to the primary school sector, 50 to the high school sector, and 10 to the college sector.

Additional teachers will be recruited through the teacher recruitment process in 2009 and the initiative will be implemented from the beginning of the 2010 year.

5.6 Supporting student engagement and participation

A key part of closing the achievement gap for some students is retaining them in school and, when there, keeping them engaged in their education. The ACT Government is committed to providing the best possible learning environment for all students in the ACT. This includes the need for students to feel safe, well supported and engaged in their education. The Department has developed a model of counseling and welfare services based on having a range of professionals working together to support all students.

Pastoral care package

Under the 2007-2008 Budget (2nd Appropriation Bill), the Government provided \$17.4 m over four years for a Student Welfare 'Pastoral Care Package' to strengthen student counselling, welfare services and alternative education support programs for students disengaged or at risk of disengagement from their schooling and education. This initiative has funded a range of specific initiatives.

- Pastoral Care Coordinators – A dedicated pastoral care coordinator in every high school is coordinating whole school student pastoral care programs that take a personalised approach to supporting student well-being. They also have a role in supporting staff to promote and increase student attendance and engagement with learning, and ultimately their connection to school.
- Achievement Centres - Three Achievement Centres for students in years 7 and 8 were opened in semester 2, 2008 at Canberra High School, Campbell High School and Wanniasa School. The centres support students who have not experienced a successful transition to high school or are not successfully engaged in learning.
- Connect 10 - The Connect 10 Program is designed for students in years 9 and 10 to help them re-engage with schooling, engage with training or work, or complete a year 10 certificate and enrol in a college program. Since the beginning of 2009, there has been a Connect10 program in each school district. Each program has the staffing capacity for two teachers and one youth support worker, with other college staff engaged to provide a relevant and diverse curriculum.
- Families and Schools Together (FAST) - Three social workers under the Families and Schools Together (FAST) team are now employed to support families of ACT Government high school students who may be showing signs of disengaging from their learning.
- Disability Support Officers – Two Disability Support Officers work with school staff to develop and implement individual support and community access programs for students in special settings. They assist students in making successful connections to develop greater independence within the community, and work with key stakeholders to identify and develop student plans and provide programs based on student needs.

- School Youth Health Nurse Program (SYHN) - The SYHN program is a collaborative initiative between the Department and ACT Health. The program aims to improve the health and wellbeing of students by providing information, support and advice on health matters relating to students, parents/families/carers and staff in the school setting. Eight schools will pilot the program over three years with four registered nurses servicing two high schools each.

Other programs and initiatives to engage students in schooling

The ACT Government also funds a range of other programs to extend students' engagement in schooling. Two such programs are CCCares and the SPICE program.

CCCares is conducted by Canberra College in partnership with ACT Health, Connecting Young Carers to Life Opportunities and Personalised Support (CYCLOPS) and other community agencies. It provides education and support to young carers, parents and pregnant students in the ACT and surrounding districts.

The 2008-09 Budget provided \$0.802 million to enable the Department to contract Volunteering ACT to continue to deliver the Students Participating in Community Enterprises (SPICE) program. Operating since 2000, SPICE is a volunteer work placement program for students from diverse backgrounds who are at risk of dropping out of school before completing their year 10 certificates. The students referred to the program are between the ages of 12 and 15 years.

Support for financially disadvantaged students

The ACT Government also funds specific schemes for financially disadvantaged students to assist their participation and continued engagement in schooling, and moderate any impact of socio-economic disadvantage on their education outcomes. These schemes include:

- Secondary Bursary Scheme - Eligible students from low income families in years 7-10 can access \$500 per year to assist with education costs. Families with a health care card or a Centrelink concession card are eligible to apply.
- Schools Equity Fund (SEF) - This fund provides targeted assistance to schools serving communities defined as socio-economically disadvantaged. Fifteen schools are receiving funding in 2009 under SEF. Approximately \$280 000 is given to schools in direct grants, \$10 000 is allocated to professional development for staff in identified SEF schools, and \$10 000 is allocated to a research project aimed at an evaluation of the efficacy of school programs. The 2008-2009 ACT Budget also funded a teacher position to support schools in identifying and developing effective teaching strategies for children from socio-economically disadvantaged families, especially in the areas of literacy and numeracy.

- Student Support Fund - Approximately \$500 000 is allocated annually to public schools to support individual students from disadvantaged families. Principals determine how best these funds can be used to support disadvantaged students in their school, and is often used to provide clothing, food and cultural experiences.

6. Specific initiatives and programs to address particular achievement gaps

From our analysis of the performance of ACT students on the available quantitative and qualitative measures and where possible, compared with the performance of national and international students, we know that in the main, ACT students are the top performers, or among the very best performers, on all assessments.

We also know that, in terms of our student population:

- a significant achievement gap, consistent on all measures, is the performance of our very small cohort of Indigenous students. Our greatest efforts must be made to raise the achievement levels of these students and significantly narrow this gap
- our ESL students commence formal schooling at a disadvantage, but with right interventions at the right time, we can narrow this gap and for many, close it by the end of formal schooling
- we must also not lose our focus on our top level performers and our gifted and talented students. It is important that these students have every opportunity to continue to achieve as high as possible – but at the same time raising the performance level of all students, so as not to extend the distance or gap between our highest and lowest achievers.

In addition to the systemic initiatives in school improvement, literacy and numeracy and teacher quality, the Government has supported specific programs to improve the educational achievements of Indigenous students, ESL students and gifted and talented students.

6.1 Support for Indigenous students

The 2009 February School Census identified 1 082 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (out of a total of 38 2080 students) enrolled in ACT public schools, and 248 Indigenous students enrolled in non-government schools (out of a total of 26 100).

Since 2008, the total number of Indigenous students in ACT schools has increased by 84 students, primarily due to an increase of 109 students (11.2%) at public schools. Offsetting this increase in public sector Indigenous student enrolments were declines in both the independent and Catholic sectors, down five and 20 students respectively. The public school sector continues to have the majority of Indigenous students (81.4%).

The Government committed almost \$3.9 m in the 2008-09 Budget (2nd Appropriation) over four years to a set of strategies designed to improve the educational outcomes for Indigenous students. This funding supports the Indigenous Literacy and Numeracy program, School Leadership in Indigenous Education program and the Indigenous Students Aspirations program.

The early years

The Government is providing opportunities for young Indigenous students to benefit from early intervention programs so that they are not disadvantaged on entry to school. As the February PIPS results show, quality early intervention is critical if these students are to get a good start.

The Koori Preschool program caters for 100 children at any one time and provides an early childhood education program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from birth to five years of age. Children under three years can attend the program when a parent or adult carer accompanies them. The program operates at Ngunnawal, Wanniasa and Calwell Primary Schools, Narrabundah Early Childhood School and Kingsford Smith School. These locations contribute to ease of access by Indigenous families.

Four-year-old Indigenous children can access both the Koori Preschool program, for up to nine hours per week, and access their local preschool for 12 hours per week, (a total of 21 hours per week). Three-year-old Indigenous children may enrol in the early entry (Indigenous) program which provides access to 12 hours of local preschool in second semester. Children enrolled in this program are also eligible to attend the Koori Preschool program for nine hours per week. February 2009 enrolment figures show that 59 children were enrolled in the Koori Preschool program.

Other Government and non-Government partners also support the children and families in the early years, and the involvement of Child and Family Centres in providing additional supports through speech pathology assessments, holiday programs and programs for mothers, is an example of the holistic perspective of early intervention service delivery in the ACT.

Literacy and numeracy support

Under the ACT Government funded Indigenous Literacy and Numeracy program, Indigenous students from Kindergarten to year 4 are provided with explicit and systematic support to improve their literacy and numeracy development.

In 2008, five Indigenous Literacy and Numeracy Officers worked closely with teachers and with students in small groups to raise literacy and numeracy levels. Building on the Indigenous Literacy and Numeracy initiative in 2009, another officer has been appointed to support the transition of year 6 students to year 7. Indigenous Literacy and Numeracy Officers provide support for up to one school term in selected schools.

The ACT Government has also committed to implementing the COAG targets to halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade and to at least halve the gap in attainment rates by 2020 for Indigenous students in year 12 or equivalent. Preliminary Implementation Plans have been developed for a National Partnership (NP) Agreement between the Australian Government and the ACT to improve literacy and numeracy

outcomes. A priority focus of the NP is on primary aged students most in need of support, including Indigenous students. More detail about this NP is at section 6 below.

In addition, the ACT Department has set its own targets for public schools to be achieved by 2013; to reduce the achievement gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy by 25%.

Improving attendance and engagement

In July 2009, six Indigenous Education Officers (IEO) were based in high schools to support high schools and contributing primary schools. The focus is to improve attendance, establish a connection and build relationships between schools and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.

Two Indigenous Education Workers (IEW) work across three primary schools each (Charles Conder, Bonython and Gordon and Gold Creek, Ngunnawal and Amaroo). They are based at Charles Conder and Gold Creek primary schools. The IEW provides support to Indigenous students in the school environment and works with the school community to raise awareness of Indigenous issues and perspectives.

The Department is also working collaboratively with the Department of Housing and Community Services (DHCS) and ACT Health to improve the attendance and participation rates of indigenous students. The Integrated Services Delivery project for vulnerable Indigenous children, young people and families, seeks to improve outcomes across health, care, safety as well as education of children, young people and their families. Funding provided in the 2008-09 ACT Budget included approximately \$1.6 million to DHCS, and an additional \$416 000 to both ACT Health and Education (over four years).

Encouraging aspirations

The 2008-09 Budget initiative also funded the Indigenous Students Aspirations program. The aim of this program is to support and mentor higher achieving Indigenous students in years 6 and 10 to successfully transition to high school and college respectively and enroll and participate in courses that will assist them to reach their goals.

The ACT Government committed \$691 000 over four years in the 2009-10 Budget to increase the number of Indigenous teachers and teachers' assistants in ACT public schools. Ten scholarships of \$5000 per annum will be offered to Indigenous students in years 11 and 12 who aspire to further education. This will be implemented in semester 2, 2009. The scholarship recipients will provide a mentoring role to younger Indigenous students, thus developing their leadership and teaching skills and providing a positive role model for young Indigenous students.

Three university scholarships of \$20 000 per annum will also be offered to Indigenous year 12 graduates to undertake a teaching degree in the 2010

academic year. Recipients would also be able to earn a further \$10 000 to work part-time as assistants in ACT public schools during their study.

Building the capacity of school leaders

Professional learning in school leadership for principals and deputy principals will continue to focus on Indigenous education in 2009. Closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students is included in each principal's performance appraisal. Seventy-eight ACT public schools have joined the national *Dare to Lead* program, which supports schools to focus on culturally appropriate strategies for improving the educational outcomes of Indigenous students.

Research

The Department is gathering data to track Indigenous children who participated in a Koori preschool program or mainstream preschool to determine their learning outcomes when compared to those Indigenous children who did not participate. This research will be important in our attempt to narrow the 'readiness' gap at school entry.

The Department is also participating in a national research activity with the Australian Government related to personalised learning plans for Indigenous students. The project aims to produce a teacher resource package on good practice in the use of personalised learning plans.

In addition, the Department has contracted the University of New England for research into the language acquisition of Indigenous preschool children. This is a joint initiative with the Indigenous Education Consultative Body to determine the impact on speakers of Aboriginal English, or Torres Strait Creole, of teachers' preferencing Standard Australian English in the classroom.

6.2 Students with language backgrounds other than English

The improvement of learning outcomes for students with English as a Second Language (ESL), through the provision of additional staff support to schools over a four year period, was a 2008 ACT Labor Government election commitment. The 2009-10 Budget will provide \$3.144m over four years to employ an additional eight (8.4 FTE) ESL teachers, increasing the number of ESL students who can receive targeted additional support.

This program will improve the literacy and numeracy development of ESL students through the explicit teaching of English language skills. In the ACT, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are over-represented in NAPLAN in the lowest 20% of students.

The provision of assistance to ESL students to bring them quickly into mainstream education is important in closing the achievement gap evident for these students on entry to school.

6.3 Gifted and talented students

The Government's commitment is not only to narrow the gap between our highest and lowest achievers, but to extend and challenge our brightest students. The ACT Government is providing \$0.984m over four years to assist our brightest students - our gifted and talented students - their families and teachers, to ensure these students are provided with the opportunities to achieve to their full potential.

The major elements of the 2009-10 Budget initiative are:

- assisting schools to identify gifted and talented students and provide for their education through extension classes, enrichment or acceleration
- supporting parents to cover the costs of educational and psychological testing, where required, to identify gifted and talented students for early entry to preschool or kindergarten
- strengthening the provision of gifted and talented programs in schools through centrally coordinated professional learning program for classroom teachers and increased support for teachers
- establishing a gifted and talented consultant at School Leader level to provide increased support and the development of resources for schools and school clusters. The SLC will also assist schools in identifying gifted and talented students.
- providing a one-off grant to the gifted and talented parent network to assist them in their work to develop strategies for promoting and delivering parent information and support about gifted and talented students.

7. Opportunities to complement and support ACT programs under the COAG agenda

In 2008, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) committed to a comprehensive education reform agenda for Australia. To facilitate this agenda, National Partnership (NP) agreements were developed to fund specific projects and deliver on nationally significant reforms. The COAG agenda supports and complements ACT priorities and programs already in train, and provides us with opportunities to use Commonwealth funds to build on our initiatives and deliver better outcomes for our students.

Five of the NPs are particularly relevant to this submission and complement the programs and initiatives being implemented by the ACT Government:

- **Literacy and Numeracy:** this Partnership will provide more funds to complement the Department's new five-year strategy. It will focus on the key areas of teaching, leadership and the effective use of student performance information to deliver sustained improvement in literacy and numeracy outcomes, especially for those students who are falling behind.
- **Low Socio-economic Status School Communities:** this Partnership supports a range of in and out of school reforms that are aimed at transforming the way schooling takes place in our most disadvantaged school communities. It provides an opportunity for four of our schools that have been selected to participate to improve student engagement and attainment.
- **Teacher Quality:** this Partnership will provide more funding to implement our strategic Quality Teaching initiative already being implemented. It will assist us to drive reform and innovation to improve the quality of teaching and leadership in ACT schools and to sustain a quality teaching workforce.
- **Early Childhood Reform (Universal Access):** this Partnership aims to achieve universal access to early childhood education for all children in the year before schooling by 2013. These preschool programs are to be delivered by a four-year university qualified early childhood teacher, in accordance with the national early years learning framework, for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks per year.
- **Youth Transitions and Attainment:** this Partnership aims to achieve a national year 12 or equivalent attainment rate of 90 percent by 2015 by introducing a mandatory requirement for all young people to participate in school until they complete year 10 and, once they complete year 10, to continue in education, training or employment until they turn 17. The agreement also provides for an education or training entitlements for young people in a way that suits their needs, abilities and their plans for the future.

During 2009, the ACT has progressed involvement in the COAG reform agenda, with the completion in June of the preliminary implementation plans for the teacher quality, literacy and numeracy, and low socioeconomic status NPs.

7.1 Literacy and Numeracy NP

The Literacy and Numeracy NP supports the implementation of the Department's *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2009-2013*, as it focuses on similar themes of effective and evidence-based teaching of literacy and numeracy, strong school leadership and whole school engagement with literacy and numeracy, and monitoring student and school literacy and numeracy performance to identify where support is needed.

A number of ACT public, Catholic and independent primary schools will be NP schools under this Agreement. A Preliminary Implementation Plan, developed following collaboration by the three sectors, was provided to the Australian Government in June 2009. Final plans are expected to be completed in October.

The ACT has been allocated \$6m of Australian Government funding over four years under this NP, with \$2m available from 2009 to 2010, and reward payments of \$4m available in 2011-12 for meeting targets.

7.2 Improving Teacher Quality NP

The NP Agreement on Improving Teacher Quality seeks to achieve national reforms relating to the development of new professional teacher standards, improved pathways into teaching, mobility of teachers and improved performance management and teacher workforce planning.

The ACT will be able to access approximately \$8m by achieving its reform targets set out in the implementation plan. The ACT Preliminary Implementation Plan for the NP has been developed in collaboration with all school sectors and was submitted to the Australian Government In June 2009. Final plans are expected to be completed in October.

The Improving Teacher Quality NP supports commitments the ACT Government has already made with regards to implementing the Quality Teaching model, as well as ensuring our best teachers are paid top salaries, of up to \$100,000.

7.3 Low Socio-economic Status School Communities NP

The Low Socio-economic status (SES) School Communities NP aims to improve student engagement and educational attainment and to start to overcome some of the barriers to high educational achievement in these communities. It will fund a range of within school and out-of-school reforms to support the educational needs and wellbeing of students in schools in low SES communities. These reforms include: incentives to attract high performing teachers and principals; provide more flexible school operational arrangements; strengthen external partnerships with parents, other schools

and the community; and strengthen personalised learning and school accountability.

The ACT has particular issues around the participation of students from low-SES communities in schooling. The design of Canberra has spread low-SES families around the city, so that many low-SES families are hidden amongst the relatively affluent population in Canberra. In deciding the schools to participate in this NP, student profiles which exhibit an elevated low socio-economic status (SES) population combined with Indigenous and non-English speaking background populations were taken into account.

Four ACT public schools will be supported by this NP. The ACT has been allocated \$3m of Australian Government funding over seven years, from 2009 to 2015. A Preliminary Implementation Plan has been developed , with a final plan due to the Commonwealth by the end of October.

Copies of the ACT's Preliminary Implementation Plans are available at Attachment H.

8 Conclusion

Catering for the educational needs of all students in ACT schools is a complex issue. Each child and young person in a school setting is unique, with their own strengths, interests, experiences, abilities, intelligences, insights, needs and capacity to learn. They come from a range of cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, home environments, social and economic situations and family circumstances within the ACT community.

The mix of students in each school and across the ACT school system as a whole is representative of our diversity and will always be reflected to some extent in the distance between the level of performance of the highest and lowest groups of students on any standardised measure.

Treating students therefore, as an homogeneous group, is clearly not the answer if we are to narrow the achievement gap. We must set explicit and high expectations for each individual student, in particular each of our Indigenous students, and use all available data to closely monitor their learning, and provide them with every opportunity to improve their performance.

The ACT Government is committed to building a fairer and more harmonious society through education. While we acknowledge the high levels of performance of our ACT students, we also recognise that we have students who are not achieving to their potential. We will continue to make a concerted effort to address this situation. Our strong focus will continue to be on the fundamentals – school improvement, quality teaching, literacy and numeracy - and we will continue to invest in the provision of high quality programs, resources and targeted support, to ensure that every student is able to benefit from high quality schooling in the ACT.

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List of Attachments

- A. *The Patterns of Participation in Year 12 and Higher Education in Australia: Trends and Issues*, LSAY Research Report No. 17, Marks, G., Fleming, N., Long, M. & McMillan, J. (2000). (June 2006) (Melbourne: ACER.)**
- B. *Top of the Class: Making the Most of Western Australia's School System*, Ryan, M. (2008). Institute of Public Affairs and Mannkal Economic Education Foundation Project Western Australia Discussion Paper**
- C. *The Performance of Students in the Australian Capital Territory in PISA* Thompson, S. & de Bortoli, L. (2008). ACER**
- D. *A Shared Challenge: Improving Literacy, Numeracy and Science Learning in Queensland Primary Schools*, Masters, G. (2009), ACER**
- E. *School Improvement Framework* (2009) ACT Department of Education and Training**
- F. *ACT Quality Teaching resources* ACT Department of Education and Training**
- G. *ACT Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2009-2013* (2009) ACT Department of Education and Training**
- H. *ACT's Preliminary Implementation Plans for Smarter Schools NPs* (2009) ACT Department of Education and Training**

