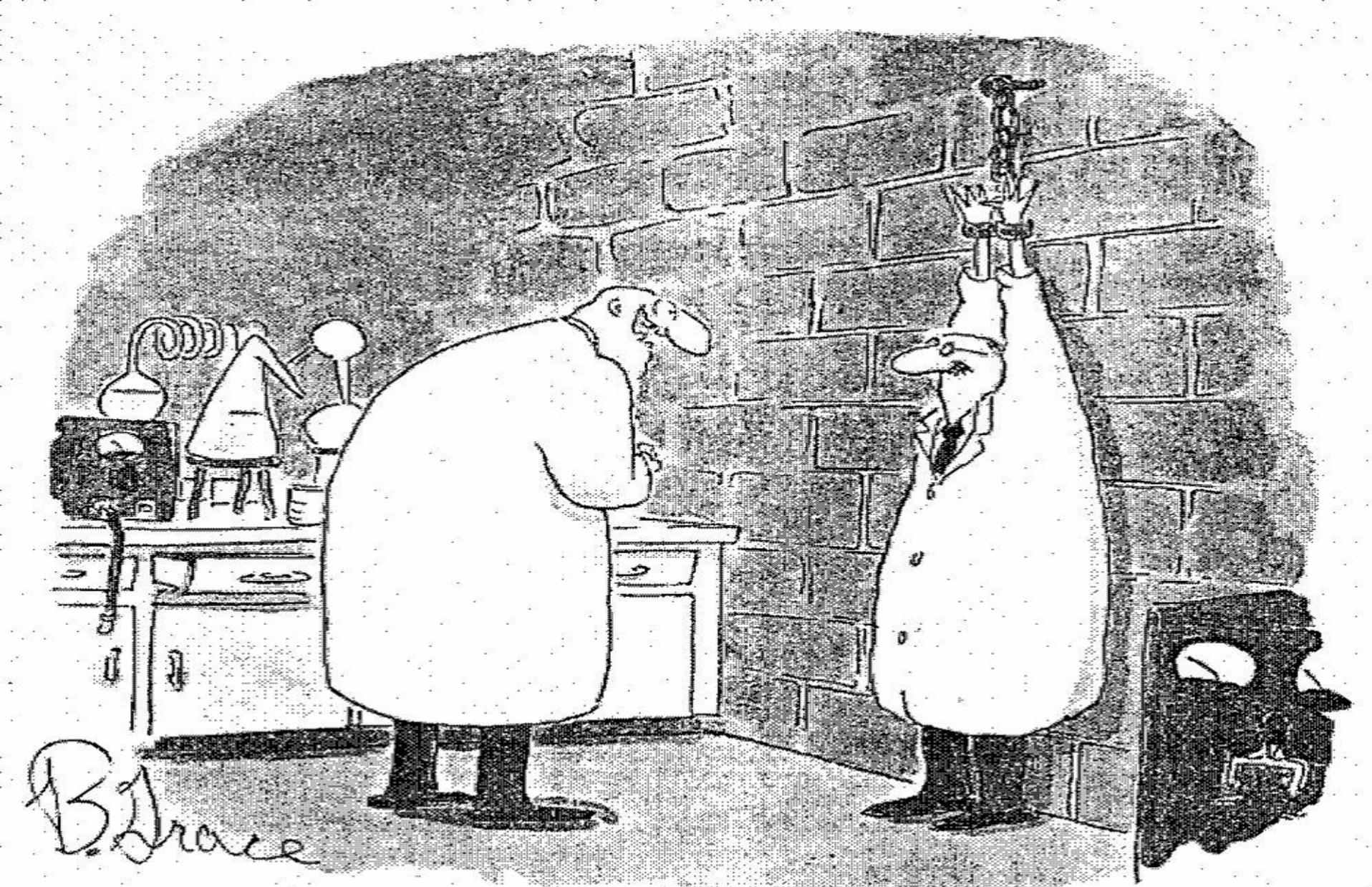


Improving Our Schools: What We Know and What We Need to Do

March 2012
Ben Levin
OISE/University of Toronto



"Me? Mad? Yes! Yes! I'm mad! But I have tenure."

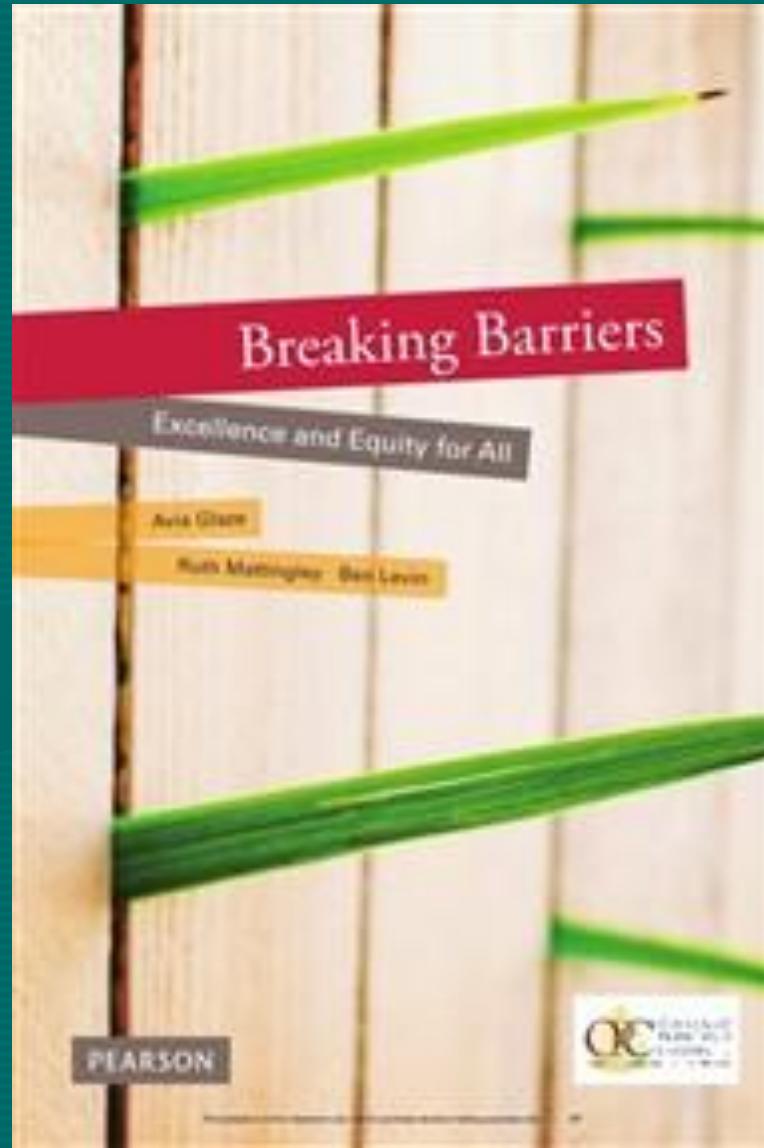
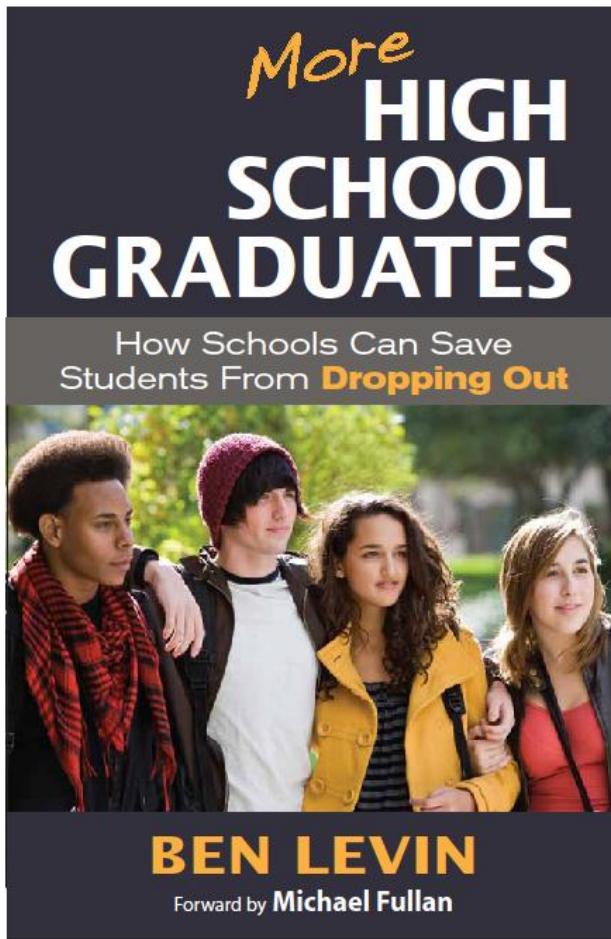
Evidence Base

- International studies
- Research on large-scale change
- Direct experience
 - Ontario
 - Internationally

HOW TO
CHANGE
5000
SCHOOLS

A
PRACTICAL
and
POSITIVE APPROACH
for
LEADING CHANGE
at
EVERY LEVEL

BEN LEVIN



Why Education Matters

- Related to every important life outcome
 - Economic and social
 - For societies and for individuals

Health

Employment

Longevity

Earnings

Life
Satisfaction

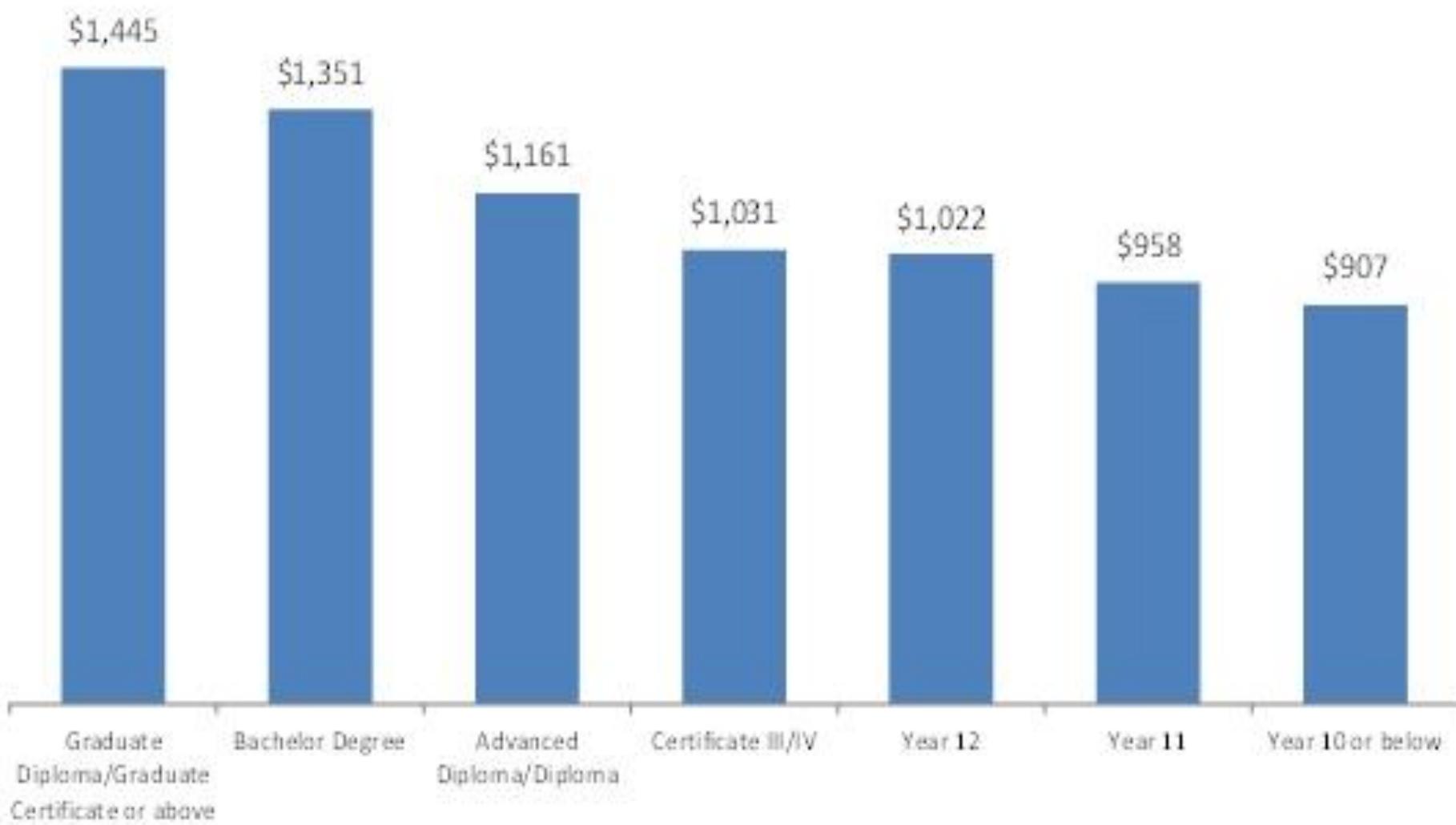


Figure 27: Median weekly earnings by education level⁴²

History of Public Education

- Great accomplishments
- Much more to do

World Challenge

- Better outcomes than ever before
- In a broader range of areas than ever before
- For more students than ever before
- With less inequity than ever before
- And within fiscal constraints

Australia

- High levels of achievement
- But not improving
 - NAPLAN results steady
 - Some decline in PISA

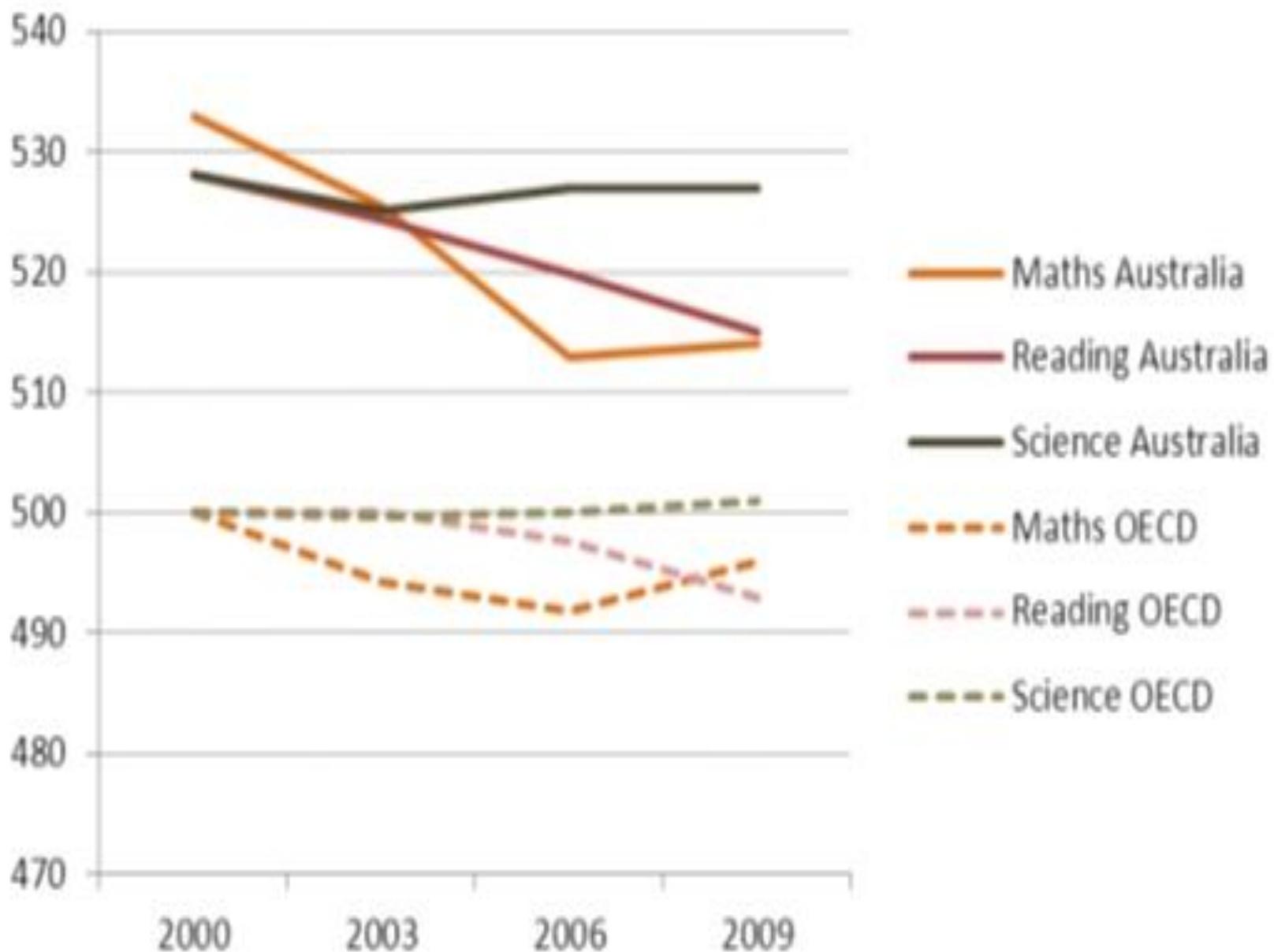


Figure 6: Australian PISA scores from 2000 to 2009

Australia

- High levels of achievement
- But not improving
- Significant inequities

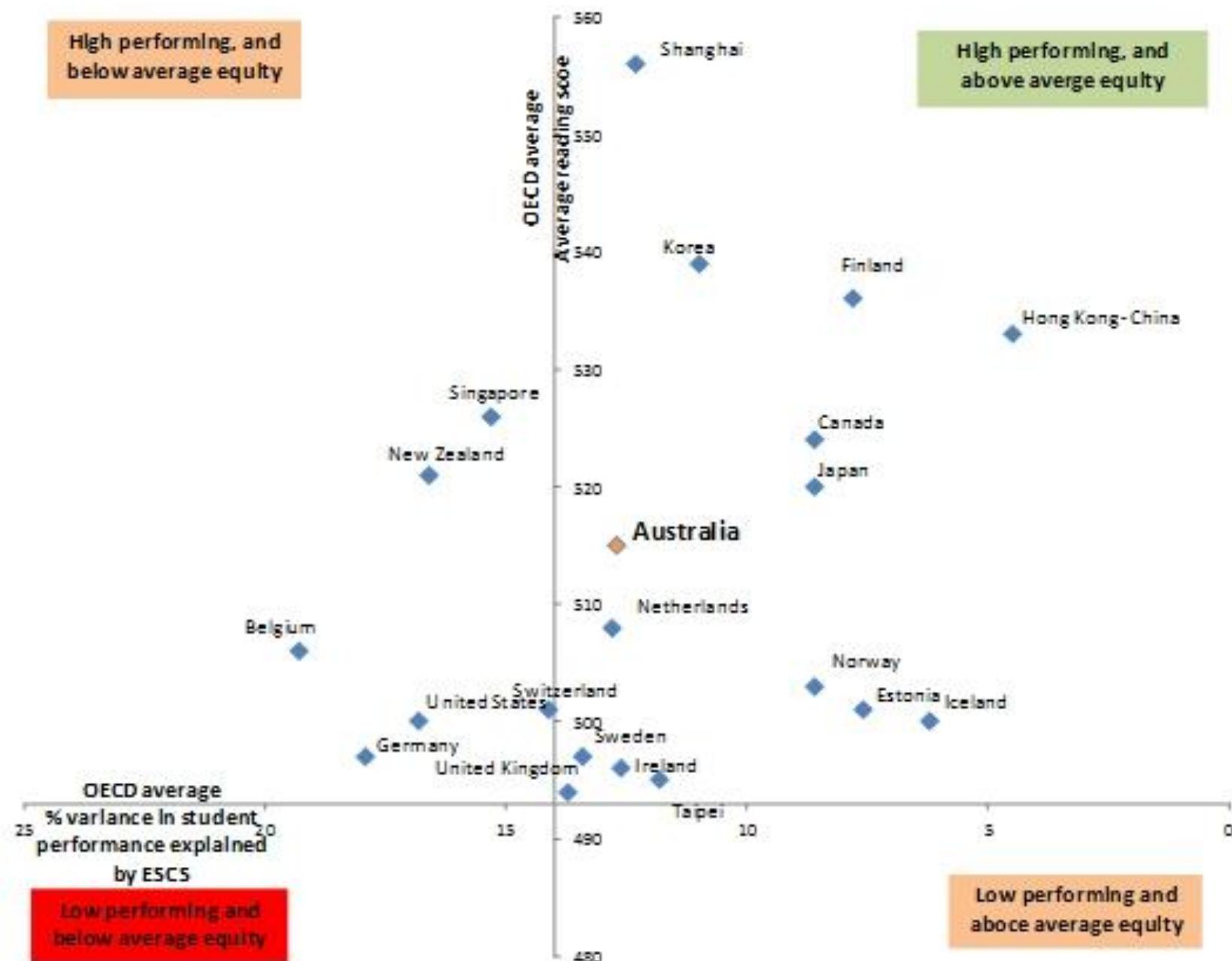


Figure 2: PISA 2009 Reading results - outcomes and equity

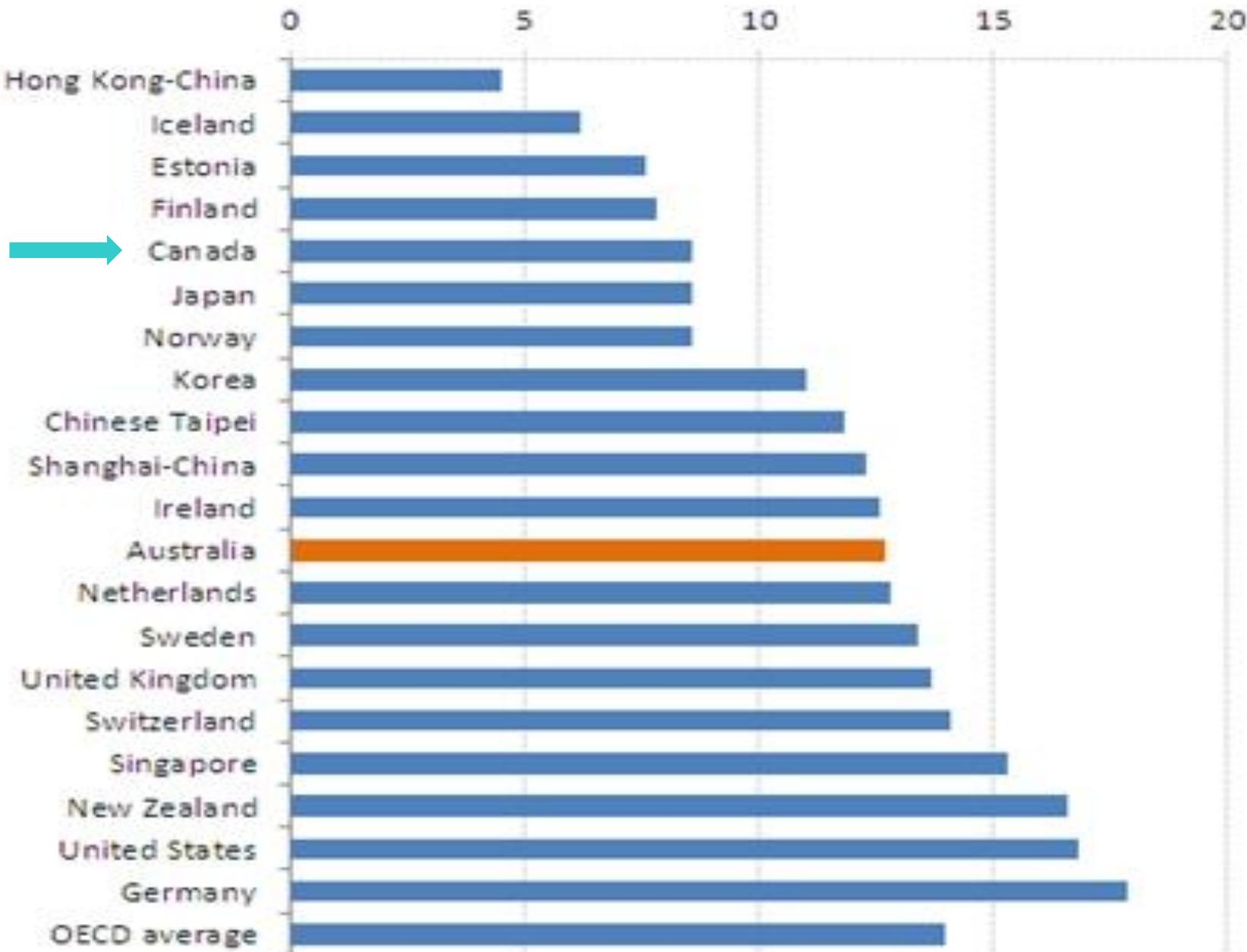


Figure 10: Impact of socio-economic status on reading outcomes

■ Figure II.3.6 ■

Percentage of resilient students among disadvantaged students



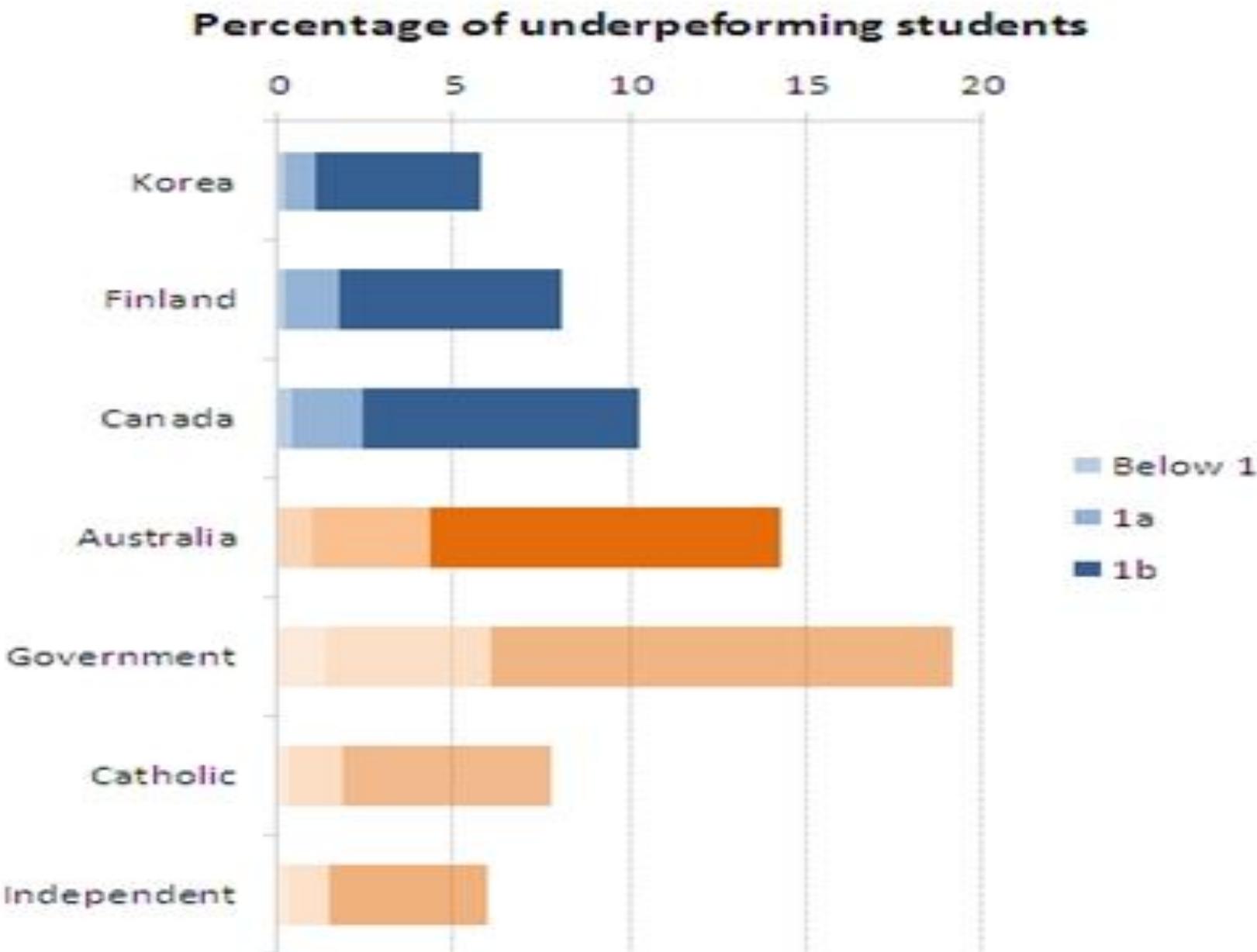


Figure 31: Percentage of underperforming students by country and sector 56

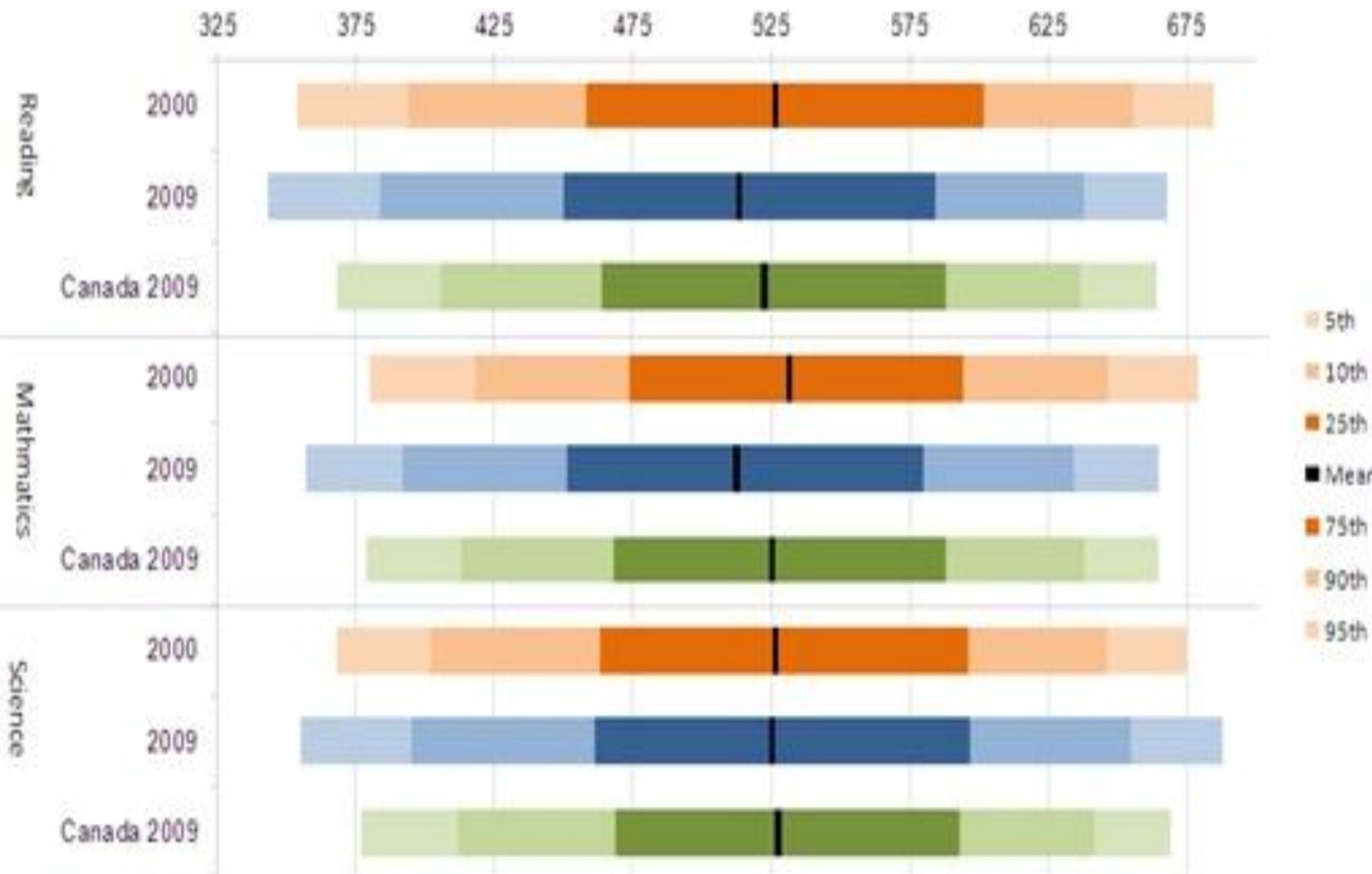


Figure 8: Australia's PISA distributions, 2000 and 2009

Inequality in Education in Australia

- More within than between schools
- Closely related to ‘sectors’
- Schools are stratified to a considerable extent
- School composition has an independent effect on outcomes
- Aboriginal learners lag

Figure 1b – Regression of School Average Literacy Scores on School Average SES scores

Regression of School Mean Literacy Score on Average School SES

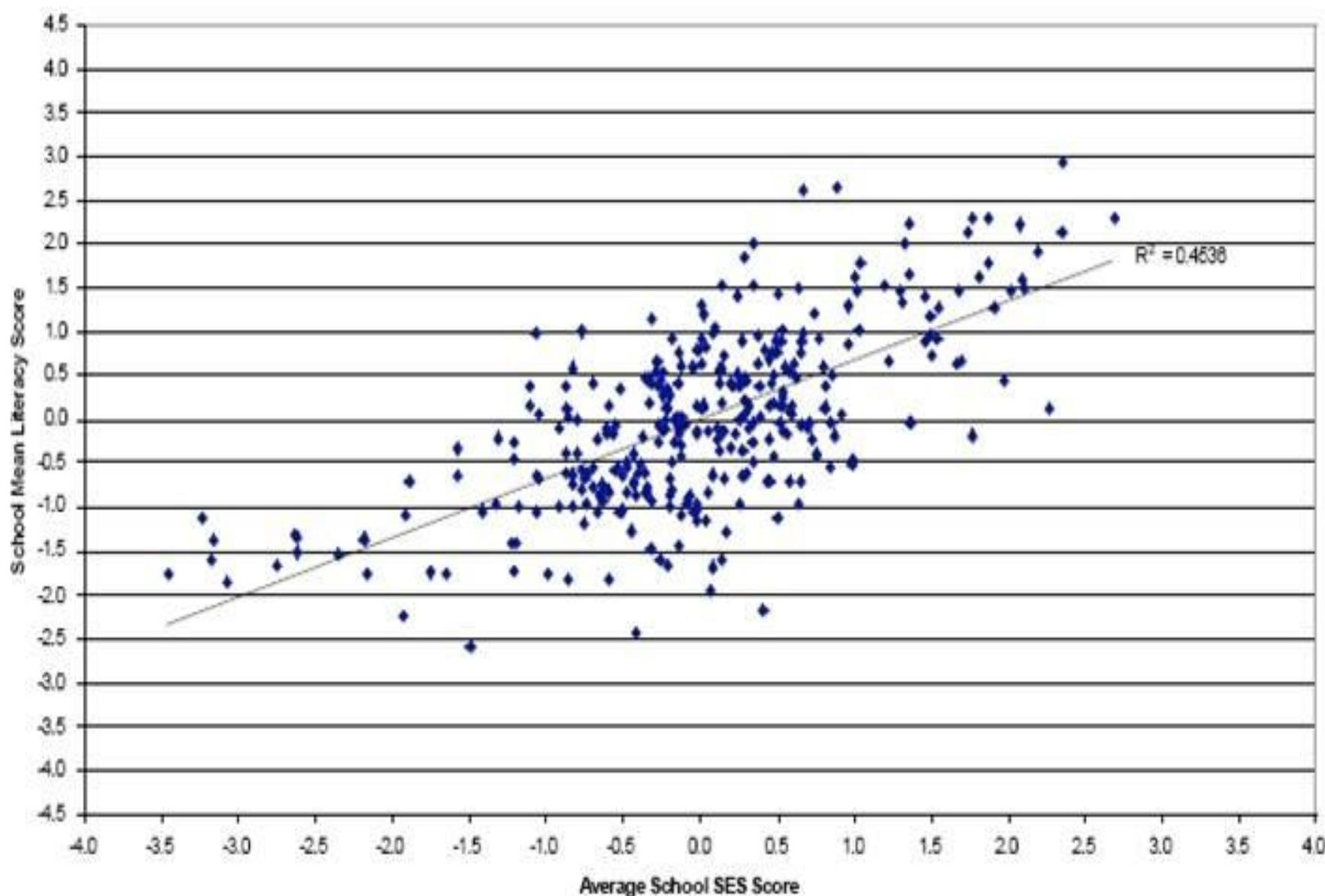




Figure 18: NAPLAN 2010 – Schools' performance and average school ICSEA (sample state)

Figure 4.20 Per cent of Year 5 students from different SES bands attending schools of different SES levels, Victoria 2009

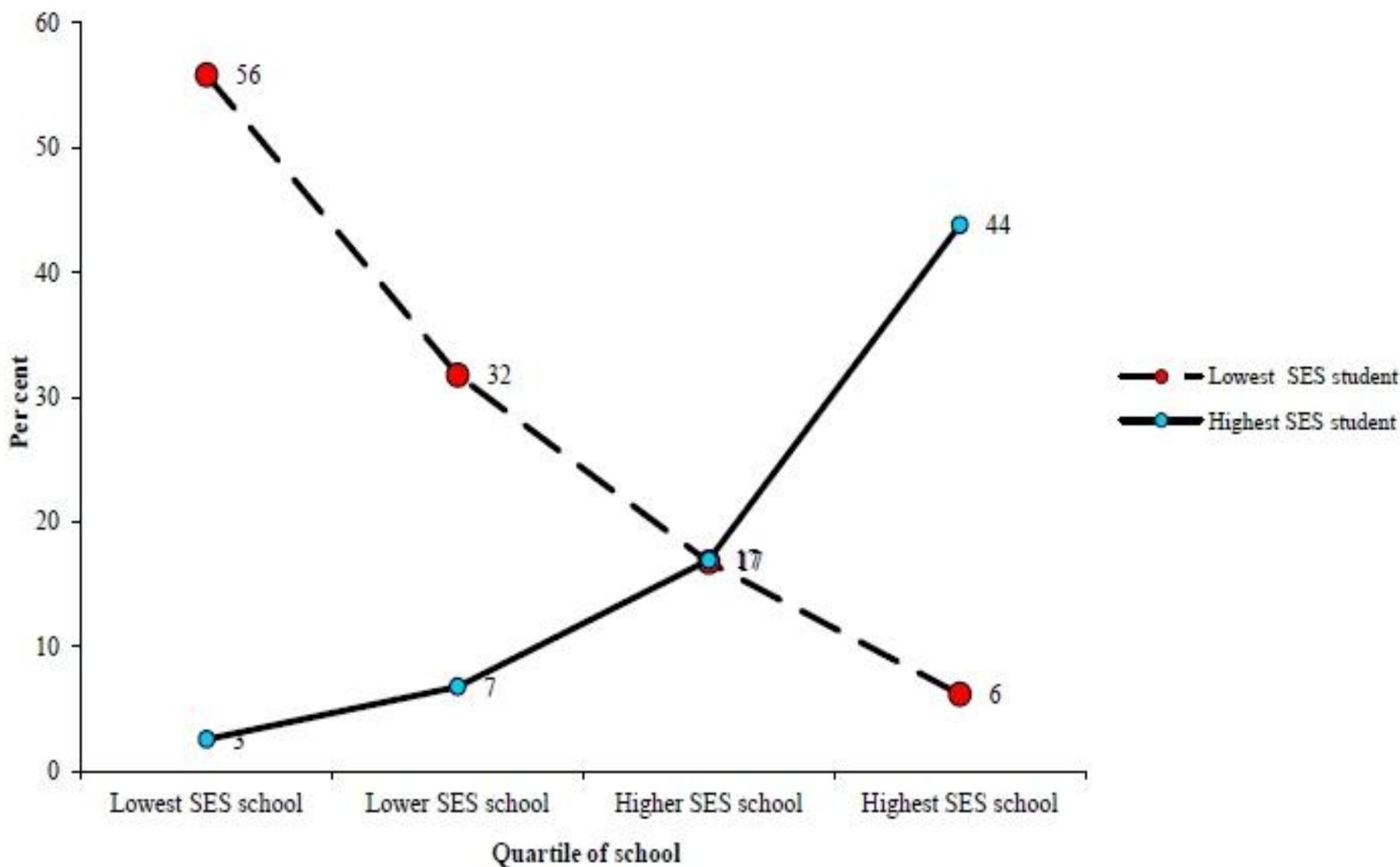
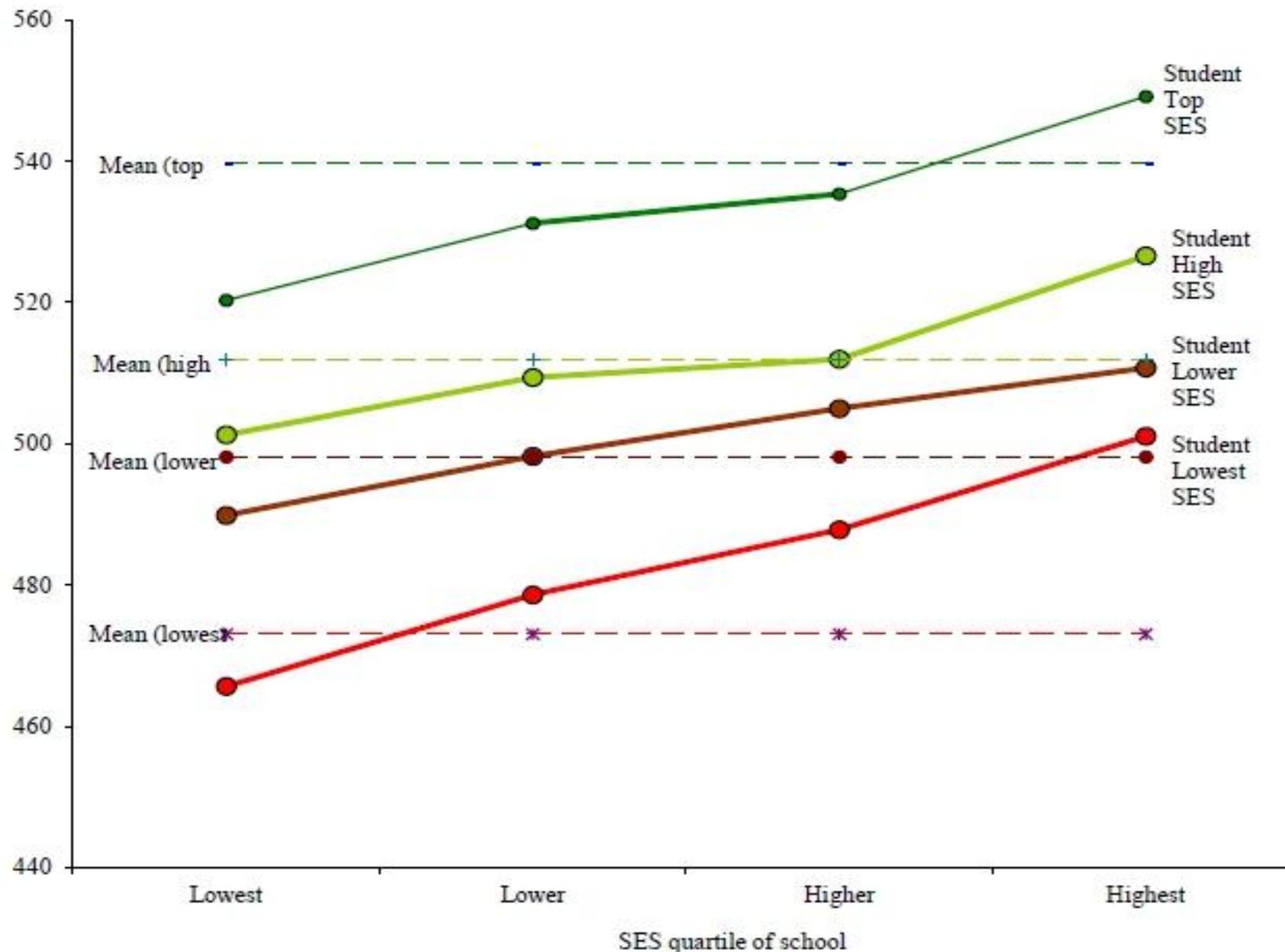


Figure 4.19 Year 5 students: average performance in reading by student SES and school SES, Victoria 2009



Difference in Indigenous and non-Indigenous reading scores, 2009

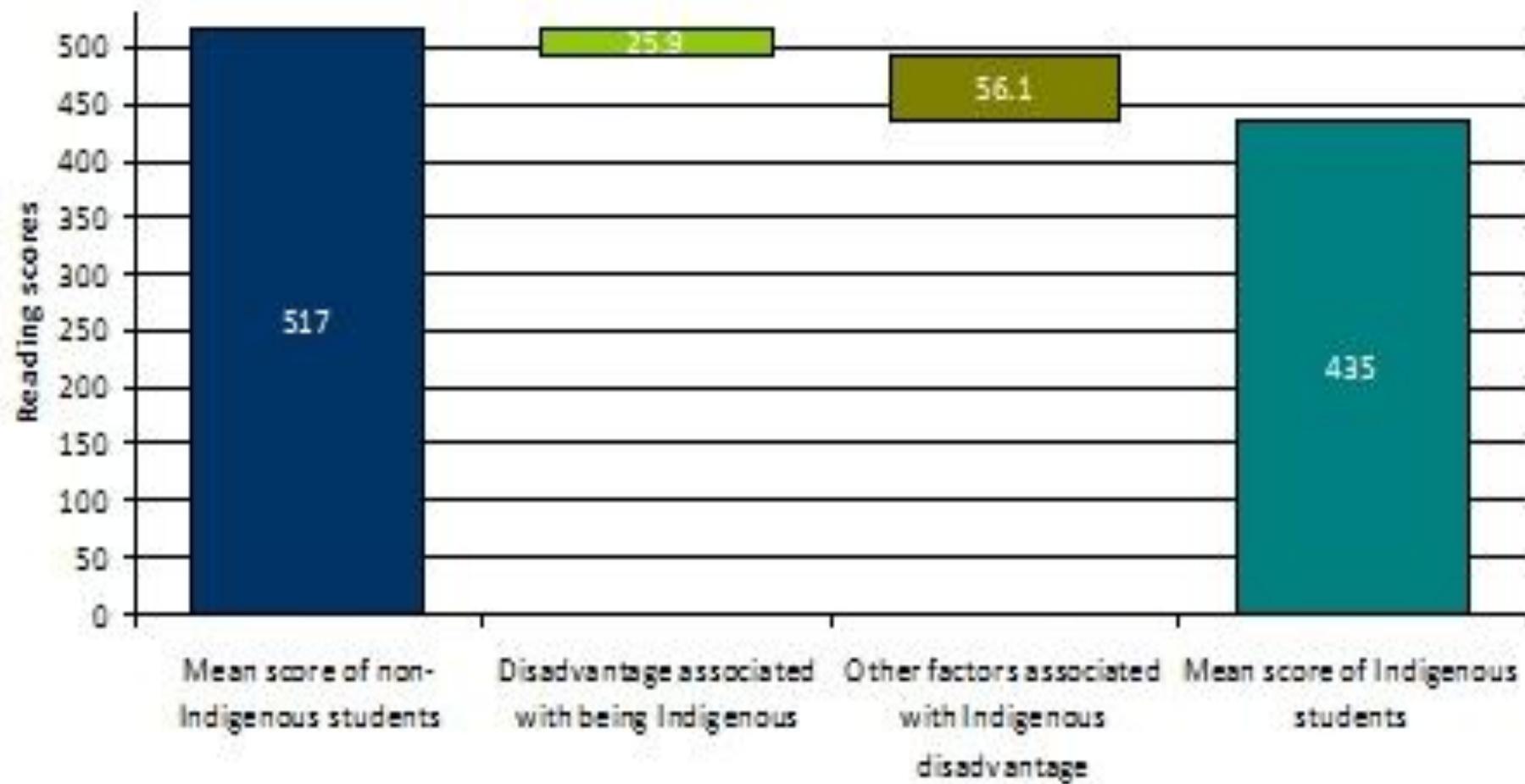


Figure 22: Mean reading scores of Indigenous and non-Indigenous and the magnitude of disadvantage by factor, 2009²²

Schools and Society

- Schools cannot do everything
- Social policy is also vital to good education
 - Housing, employment, health, child care
- More equitable societies have better outcomes



The Spirit Level

Why
More Equal
Societies
Almost
Always Do
Better

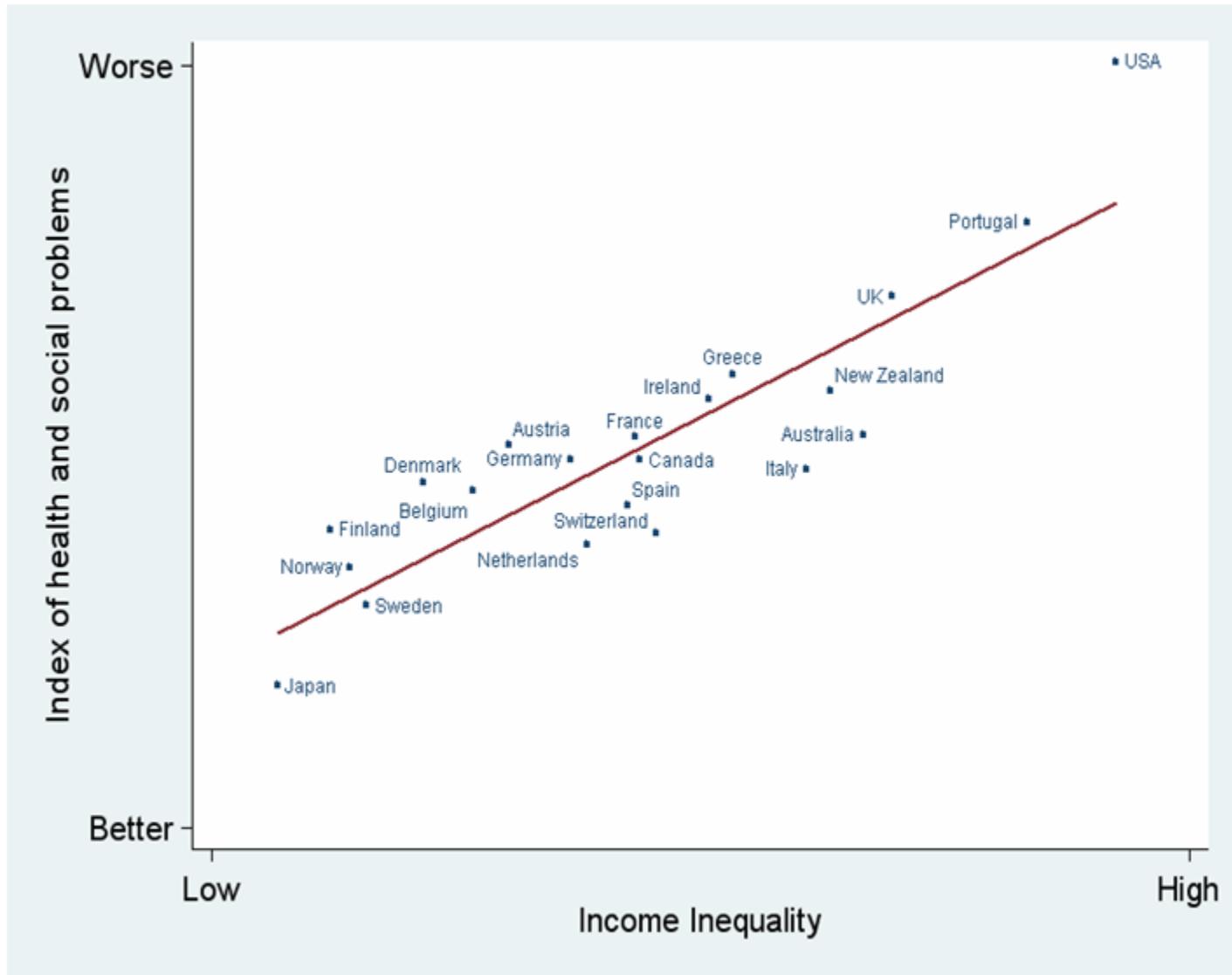
Richard
Wilkinson
and Kate
Pickett



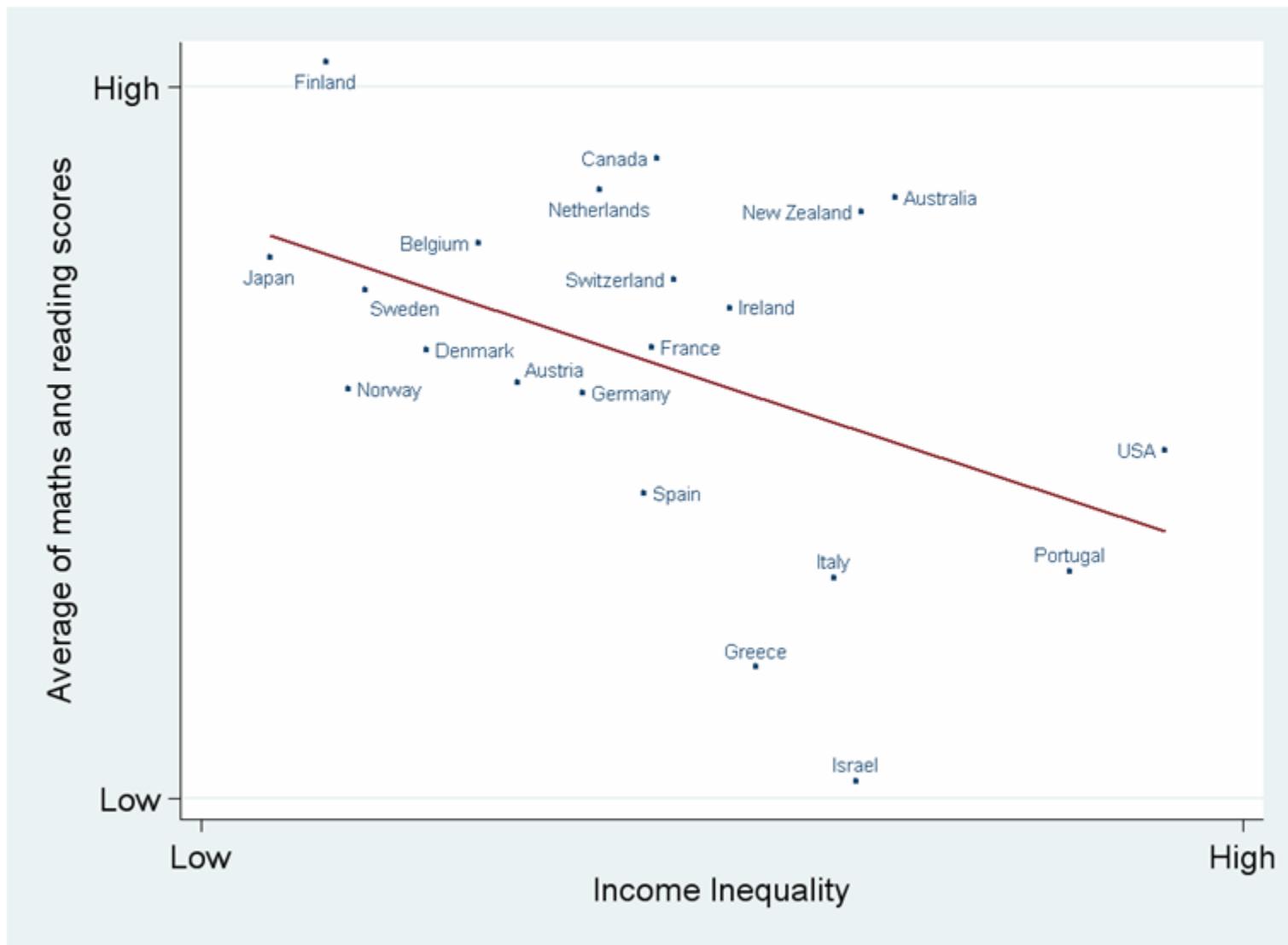
Health and Social Problems are Worse in More Unequal Countries

Index of:

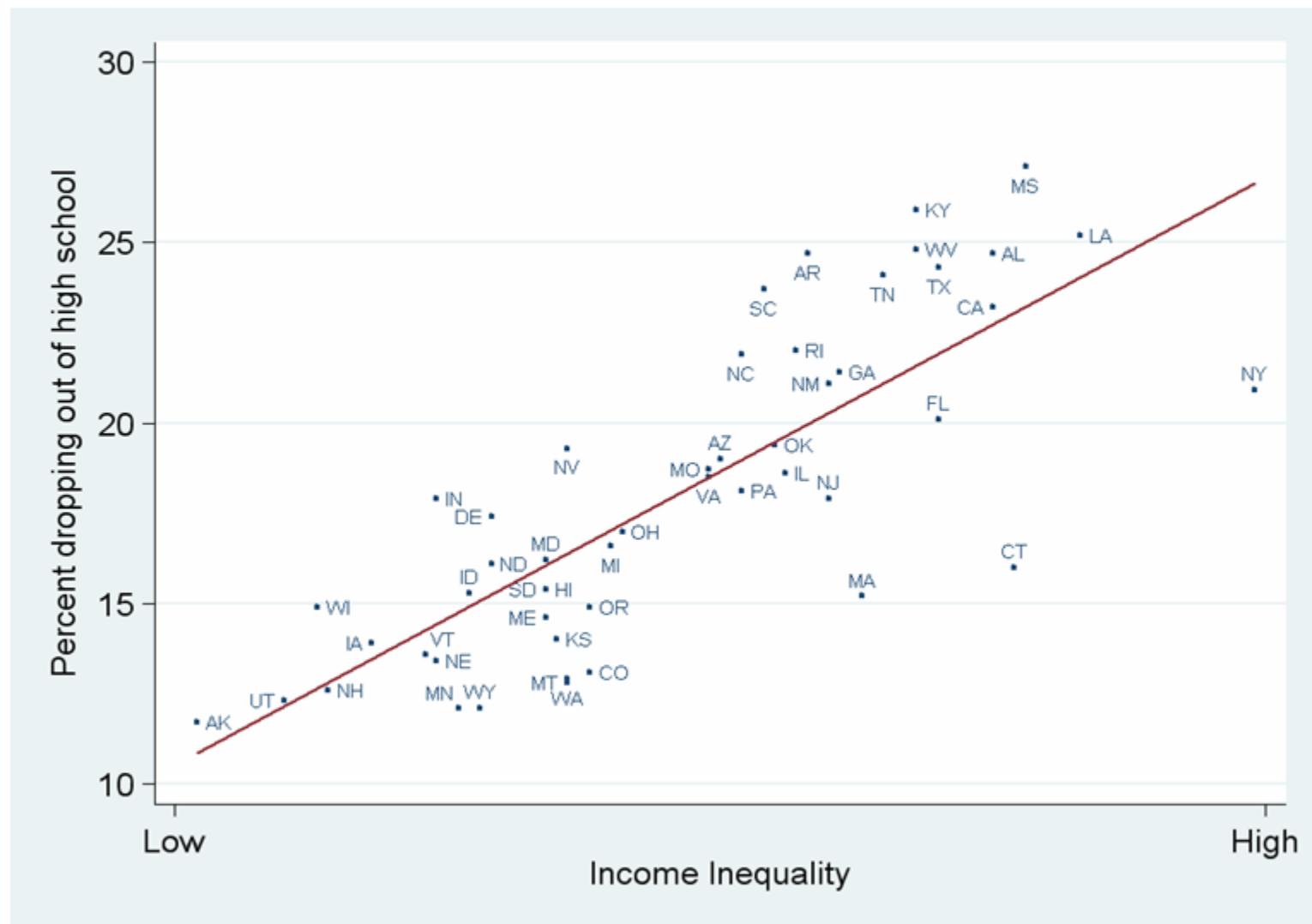
- Life expectancy
- Math & Literacy
- Infant mortality
- Homicides
- Imprisonment
- Teenage births
- Trust
- Obesity
- Mental illness – incl. drug & alcohol addiction
- Social mobility



Educational Scores are Higher in More Equal Rich Countries



More Children Drop Out of High School in More Unequal US States



Schools cannot solve social inequalities

- And should not be blamed for them

But they can make an important contribution to reducing them

Key Messages

- It is possible to improve student outcomes across an entire system
- Requires a clear, comprehensive and sustained strategy
- Requires support but also pressure
- Implementation at least as important as policy
 - Manage politics as well as education

Wrong Strategies

- Silver bullets – single solutions – don't work
- Relying primarily on accountability or other external pressures
- Relying primarily on choice and competition
- Decentralization alone will not do it
- Punishment does not tend to generate effort or improvement
- Hope is not a strategy



Yes, it's quite a noise - but are we having any impact?

Main Elements – 1

- Public goals and targets
 - Simple, clear, with high consensus and well grounded in evidence
 - Realistic but also ambitious
 - Must pursue equity and excellence



GUCCS

Main Elements – 1

- Public goals and targets
- Clear strategy, strong leadership
 - At all levels
 - Beyond projects to system change
- Sector support
 - Positive two-way communication
- Policy is supportive rather than central
 - Curriculum, assessment, are not enough

Main Elements – 2

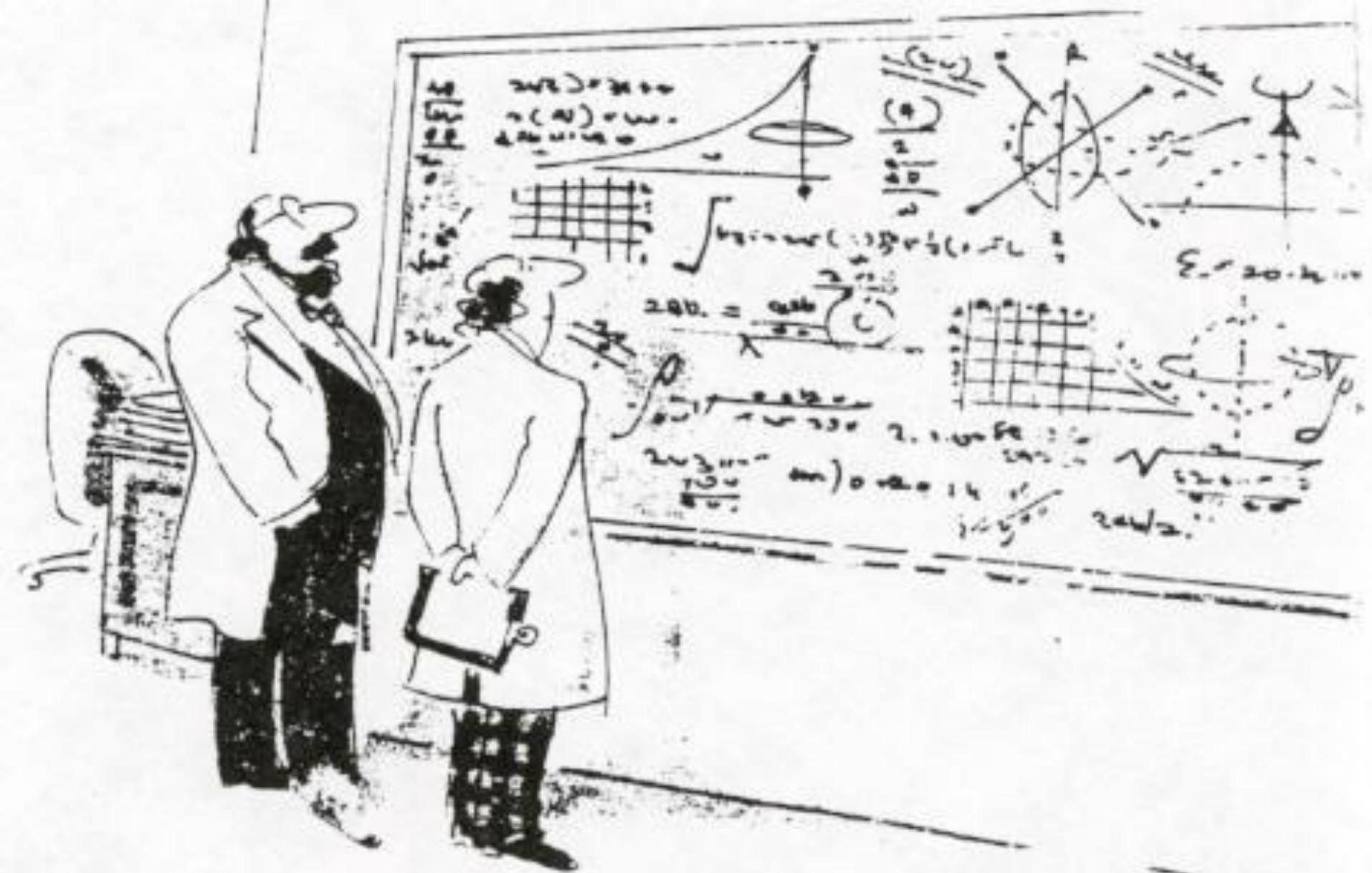
- Sector capacity
 - Helping people do better
- Support well-grounded practices
 - Build on what already works
 - Minimize “mandates” but work towards standard practice
- Stay focused over years
 - Adjust as needed
- Coherence and alignment

The Challenge of Inequality

- Must address socio-economic impacts directly
- ‘Don’t blame the kids’ - or their parents
- High variance in school outcomes with similar SES
- Expectations are key but hard to change
- We have clearly not reached the limits of either individual or institutional improvement
- Advocacy also matters

The Right Changes

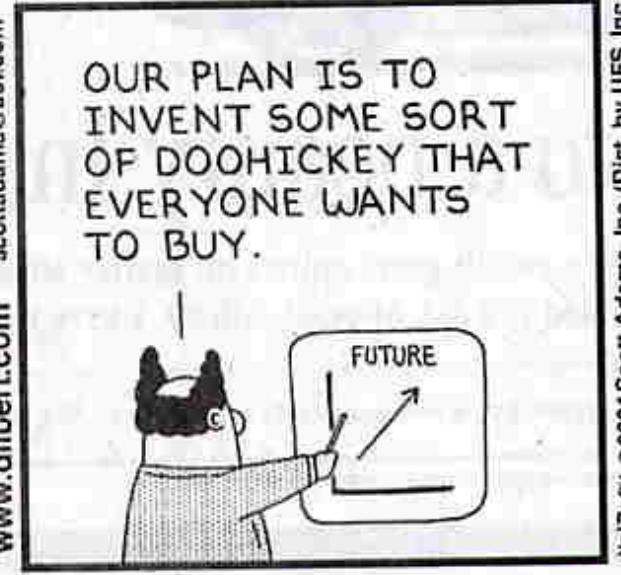
- Increase expectations for student outcomes
- Change teaching and learning practices in all schools
 - Best evidence
 - Student engagement
- Reach out to parents and community
- Build sector capacity and commitment
- Improve leadership skills



Seurat

"Oh, if only it were so simple."

Vision Is Not Enough



Implementation/ Delivery

- Very few places get this right
- Focus on lasting system and whole school changes
- Create infrastructure to deliver
 - Relevant to the size of the challenge
 - People as well as resources
 - Ontario examples – LNS, L18
- Build research, evaluation, and data capacity
- Be relentless about reminders, supports

Elementary and Secondary

- Different strategies
- Elementary more focus on teaching/learning
- Secondary more focus on knowing students and tracking progress
- Also different delivery strategies
 - More program issues in secondary
 - Influence of PSE and subject areas

Innovation – or Improvement?

- Innovation is necessary for learning
- But most innovations fail and can be costly
- Education has a long history of innovation leading nowhere
- Need much more disciplined innovation
- And even more, systems to turn successful innovation into common practice

Research

- Could be a much more important contributor to better education
- Requires a more strategic approach
 - Improvements in the research enterprise
 - Improvements in the sector capacity to use research
 - Better mediation between the two

The best plan will fail if
the politics are not right.

- Professional support
- Public support

Building Sector Support





"I'd thank you Harrison, but, as you well know,
yours is a thankless job."

Building Sector Support

- Strong political leadership
 - “Guiding coalition”
- Align with local leaders
- Processes for input and dialogue
- Respect all partners
- Appeal to educators’ ideals
- Develop public confidence and support

Communication





"It's a good speech—just a couple of points that need obfuscation."

Communication and Support

- Constant communication to sector
 - Enlisting support from leaders and teachers
 - Positive reinforcement
 - Respectful but with expectations
- Regular public communication
 - Successes and challenges
- Learn and adapt as you go
 - Feedback, critical friends
- Labor peace a key element

Money

- Moving the machinery does require lubrication
- Few systems match resources to needs very well
- There is room for better use of resources
 - Reducing failure
 - Keeping students in regular classes
 - Thoughtful staffing mix
- Skills in this area generally weak

Some Suggestions for Australia

- National focus on better outcomes
 - But with states setting specifics and being key to delivery
 - Better federal-state collaboration
- Stronger emphasis on helping the system improve rather than using accountability as the main driver
 - Work with the profession
- Reduce inequities across schools and sectors
- Strengthen contribution of research

Recap

- Delivery takes ongoing effort, on a consistent agenda, with strong support, sufficient infrastructure, and a positive message.

This Can Be Done



Good Luck!

