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## Poor schools don't spell poor results

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A TREASURY study has proved what many parents already know to be true: the quality of a school can have an important impact on students' academic performance.

But the findings, released today, counter fatalistic arguments that students in poor schools will always under-perform when measured against schools in wealthier areas.

"These results provide some evidence in favour of the proposition that socioeconomic status does not determine a school's destiny," say the report's authors, Andrew Leigh, an economist from the Australian National University on secondment to the Treasury, and Hector Thompson.

"There appears to be considerable variation between schools of a similar socioeconomic status."

The study compared school performance against socioeconomic status - the occupation, education and income of households within a 2.5-kilometre radius of the school - in primary schools in Western Australia, the only state where test-score performance is reported for all government schools.

It found that 70 per cent of the variation in schools' performances could be explained by family background. However, the remaining 30 per cent was driven by other factors such as facilities, the principal or teaching quality.

Because the socioeconomic status of a school did not entirely determine education outcomes, students at risk of falling behind the state average could be pulled up by a good school.

"This highlights that for students who are at risk of not meeting the benchmark, being in a better-performing school can make a difference," the report says.

The results appear to support the Federal Government's push to have school results published. "This knowledge is important in assisting governments, principals, teachers, parents and the community to improve the performance of all schools."

The study also found a higher degree of persistence in high-performing schools. Schools that over-performed in one year were also found to be "extremely likely" to over-perform the next year. Schools that over-performed in one grade were also likely to do so in other grades too.

"This suggests that it is likely that this residual component of school performance captures something important about a school," the report says.

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school," the report says.

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## Quality schools get best results

Justine Ferrari, Education writer | October 22, 2008

**THE school a child attends can make a substantial difference to academic success, with a Treasury analysis saying one-third more students pass literacy and numeracy tests at a good school than at an average school.**

The study found there was considerable variation between schools with students of similar socio-economic backgrounds.

One in five schools performed better than the average for similar schools, with an extra 5 per cent or more of students passing literacy and numeracy benchmarks.

For the top 2 per cent of schools, an extra 15 per cent or more of students met the benchmarks. To overperform by 15 percentage points is equivalent to the average school raising its proportion of students passing the tests from 84 per cent to 99 per cent.

Education Minister Julia Gillard said the study, published in the Treasury's latest Economic Roundup, supports the federal Government's contention that reporting school performance can assist struggling students.

As part of the federal Government's commitment to transparent reporting by schools, it is developing a model in which schools report their students' results against a group of similar schools.

Ms Gillard has said the purpose is not to shame schools but to identify those in need of extra assistance, and those performing above expectations so they can share their expertise.

The Government's reporting regime will be overseen by a new independent national body charged with implementing the national curriculum, national literacy and numeracy tests, assessment and reporting.

Ms Gillard is expected to introduce into parliament today legislation to form the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, which from next year will take over the work of the interim National Curriculum Board. The body will be a statutory authority reporting to federal parliament and to the ministerial council of education ministers.

The authority will have a 13-member board of directors with federal, state and territory governments, and the Catholic and independent school systems, each nominating one member.

In agreeing to the authority at the last meeting of the Council of Australia Governments, the states and territories effectively relinquish control of their individual school curriculums.

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