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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
APY	Anangu Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
CDEP	Community Development Employment Projects
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
DEEWR	Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations
ESL	English as a Second Language
FaHCSIA	Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
LBOTE	Language Background other than English
MCEECDYA	Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (previously MCEETYA (Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs))
NAPLAN	National Assessment Plan—Literacy and Numeracy
NSSC	National Schools Statistics Collection
SCSEEC	Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (replaced MCEECDYA in March 2012)
SEAM	School Enrolment and Attendance Measure

Executive Summary

The situation

In 2008, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) reduced the Indigenous education target from *fix the problem in four years* to *fix half the problem in 10 years*. The first four year's NAPLAN results show that only Queensland and Western Australia have made significant progress. All states and territories will struggle to reach the reduced target. On the education ministers' timetable, Indigenous children will not have the same education as non-Indigenous children until 2028.

Most Indigenous Australians live and work in cities and towns. Their children—more than 110,000—attend mainstream schools and achieve minimum national literacy and numeracy standards like non-Indigenous students. Indigenous students have the same intellectual capabilities as non-Indigenous students. The education industry's focus on 'indigeneity' is a politically driven distraction. If indigeneity was the problem, the majority of Indigenous students would not be passing. School failure is the problem.

Some 20,000 students attend Indigenous schools—those with 75% or more Indigenous students. But only a handful of these schools are delivering effective literacy and numeracy.

Another 40,000 Indigenous students attend underperforming mainstream schools, side-by-side with many more non-Indigenous students. Poor education delivered by these underperforming schools is the principal cause of educational failure in Australia for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

The evidence

This is our fourth review of Indigenous education. The main findings are:

School and student numbers

Matching enrolment with population data shows that virtually all Indigenous children—more than 168,000 in 2011—are enrolled across Australia's more than 9,000 schools.

The Indigenous percentage of Australian students is 4.8%, or twice the 2.4% of Indigenous people in the Australian population. Indigenous and non-Indigenous birth rates are similar. The high Indigenous student percentage is mainly due to mixed marriage parents recording their children as Indigenous.

Measuring literacy and numeracy 2008–12

The majority of Indigenous students pass NAPLAN tests, but there is also a significant poorly performing minority. Queensland and Western Australia have made the most progress. But other states and territories—and therefore Australia as a whole—are not on track to meet COAG targets. Even where COAG targets will be met by 2018, Indigenous student failure rates will still be above those of non-Indigenous students.

Causes of Indigenous education failure

Evidence shows that indigeneity, remoteness and a non-English speaking background are not the reasons for high Indigenous failure rates. Non-performing schools are the principal cause of Indigenous student failure. Welfare dependence, with entrenched low parental and student expectations, is a major contributing factor.

COAG and Indigenous education

By adopting politically correct rhetoric instead of numeracy and literacy solutions, COAG—the peak government body—contributes to the lack of progress.

Pre-schools

The COAG target of a pre-school place for every four-year-old child by 2013 will be met for most middle- and upper-income families. It is unlikely to be met for those Indigenous children who would benefit most.

Underperforming schools

About 200 Indigenous schools have the lowest NAPLAN results in Australia. A larger group of mainstream schools in cities and towns deliver below average education to their Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Under existing policies, only a handful of these schools are being reformed.

Indigenous education expenditure

Indigenous education is well funded. Much of the \$360 million per year of 'Indigenous specific' education expenditure is, however, wasted on counterproductive 'feel-good,' 'culturally appropriate' programs that take time and attention from classroom instruction.

Post-secondary education

Indigenous participation in post-secondary education splits sharply into two groups:

- Children of Indigenous working parents in cities and regional towns participate in mainstream vocational courses (70,000) and universities (10,000) at the same rate as the non-Indigenous population.
- Despite numerous affirmative action programs, students from Indigenous schools and underperforming mainstream schools do not have a base from which to continue on to higher education.

Trapped by illiteracy on Indigenous lands

The lack of education for the 70,000 Australians living on Indigenous lands is compounded by a lack of job opportunities. In response, governments have created pretend jobs and training programs that lead nowhere.

Recommendations

- 'Halving the gap' is not an acceptable target. Governments must deliver equal outcomes for all Australian students—especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders—by 2018.
- Non-performing and underperforming schools must perform at mainstream standards. Principals must be given sufficient autonomy in hiring and firing, budgeting, and managing schools if they are to be held accountable for NAPLAN results. Specifically, principals must be adequately funded for and have control over:
 - hiring and managing staff
 - managing capital budgets
 - control of operating expenses, including the right to reject programs they consider unproductive, and
 - managing before and after school, vacation and similar programs.
- Student, parent and school expectations for attendance and education must change for children of welfare-dependent families. Government initiatives to improve attendance and raise expectations are undermined by their failure to reform welfare and increase Indigenous employment. Training reforms should therefore:
 - abolish pretend vocational training and pretend jobs, and
 - link training for the unemployed to actual job offers.

1. Introduction

Despite the attention given to Indigenous* education by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), and ministers for education and their departments, Gary Banks, Chairman of the Productivity Commission, when releasing the 2011 issue of the authoritative *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage*, pointed to very limited improvement in Indigenous education.¹

This monograph asks two principal questions:

- Why has government policy failed?
- What are the policy changes necessary to enable Indigenous students to reach the same outcomes as non-Indigenous students?

This is our fourth report on Indigenous education.² We again give special attention to the estimated 20,000 (of a total 170,000) Indigenous students enrolled in Indigenous schools in 'bush' communities on Indigenous lands. These students have been the principal victims of separatist education philosophies for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. In Indigenous schools, 90% literacy and numeracy failure rates have been, and often still are, common. Another 40,000 Indigenous students attend underperforming mainstream schools with above-average failure rates, side by side with non-Indigenous students. However, the majority of Indigenous students—more than 110,000—attend quality mainstream schools where they are achieving national minimum literacy and numeracy standards; these students are therefore not the subject of this report. Unwillingness to recognise these Indigenous students' high literacy and numeracy pass rates has fed low expectations of Indigenous students' abilities.

In sections 2 and 3 we establish the numbers of Indigenous students, present the evidence of trends in Indigenous and non-Indigenous student outcomes, and compare these with COAG targets.

In Section 4, we analyse why failure rates for Indigenous students are higher than for non-Indigenous students. In Section 5, we describe how rhetoric leads governments to bypass the real causes of failure.

Sections 6 to 9 review pre-schools, primary and secondary schools, and education expenditures on counter-productive programs.

Section 10 discusses trends for students who successfully move from school to a combination of jobs and vocational and higher education. Section 11 examines the consequences for students for whom governments have failed to provide even basic literacy and numeracy, let alone a full education.

Section 12 describes the policy reforms necessary for all Indigenous students to meet national minimum literacy and numeracy standards, enabling them to have the same life choices as other Australians.

2. School and student numbers

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) provides population data by age based on five-yearly census data and school enrolment data from the annual *National Schools Statistics Collection*. These data contradict the commonly held view that there has been an Indigenous population boom, and that large numbers of Indigenous children are not enrolled in school. A higher proportion of Indigenous students than of Indigenous people in the Australian population is mainly explained by significant numbers of school students recorded as Indigenous who are children of intermarriage between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

* For simplicity, the word Indigenous, despite its ambiguity, has been used in this monograph for persons identifying as Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

Why has government policy failed?

2.1. School numbers

Table 2.1.1: Primary, secondary and combined schools by state and territory (2011)³

State / territory	Primary	Secondary	Combined	Total
New South Wales	2,124	523	301	2,948
Victoria	1,563	344	231	2,138
Queensland	1,152	251	243	1,646
South Australia	499	87	145	731
Western Australia	663	109	221	993
Tasmania	156	36	58	250
Northern Territory	77	23	85	185
Australian Capital Territory	78	24	22	124
Total	6,312	1,397	1,306	9,015

More than 85% of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders live in major cities and regional towns. The children of these Indigenous Australians are dispersed throughout 9,000 mainstream schools. Welfare-dependent Indigenous urban families often live in public housing so their children are concentrated in higher numbers in schools in low socio-economic suburbs. These are often underperforming mainstream schools, that is, schools with 30%-40% NAPLAN failure rates. In addition, a small minority of Indigenous students attend Indigenous schools, variously defined as schools with more than 75% or 85% Indigenous students. There is no listing of Indigenous schools; estimates of their number range from 200 to 250. Only in the Northern Territory do a significant proportion of Indigenous students attend Indigenous schools.

Data on government and non-government schools (Table 2.1.2) shows 15% of Indigenous students attend non-government schools compared to 35% of non-Indigenous students. Working Indigenous families are still skewed towards lower occupations and incomes, and a higher proportion of Indigenous families than non-Indigenous families are welfare dependent. The Northern Territory's history of mission schools, some still operating under Catholic Education, accounts for its relatively high proportion of Indigenous students in non-government schools.

Table 2.1.2: Indigenous enrolment in government and non-government schools (2011)⁴

State / territory	Indigenous student enrolment		Percentage enrolled in non-government schools	
	Government schools	Non-government schools	Indigenous students	Australian students
New South Wales	45,184	7,171	14%	35%
Victoria	9,201	1,443	14%	37%
Queensland	41,576	7,467	15%	34%
South Australia	8,662	1,134	12%	36%
Western Australia	19,498	3,630	16%	36%
Tasmania	4,824	859	15%	29%
Northern Territory	13,150	2,948	18%	31%
Australian Capital Territory	1,104	284	20%	43%
Total	143,199	24,936	15%	35%

2.2. Population size and enrolment

ABS data show no discrepancy between total school-age population and enrolment. As with total Indigenous population, NSW has the largest number of Indigenous students, followed by Queensland.

More than 85% of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders live in major cities and regional towns. Their children are dispersed throughout 9,000 mainstream schools.

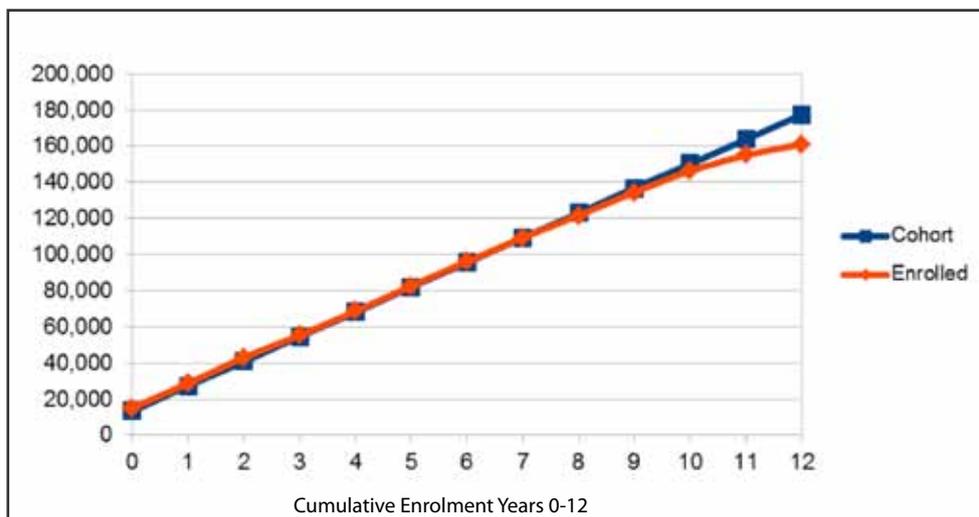
Table 2.2.1: Indigenous school-age population and school enrolments (2011)⁵

	Indigenous population	Indigenous students	Indigenous state/territory students as % of Australia
	Total school age (6–18)	Total enrolments	
New South Wales	49,749	52,443	31.1%
Victoria	10,943	10,659	6.3%
Queensland	49,471	49,420	29.2%
South Australia	9,089	9,821	5.8%
Western Australia	22,140	23,140	13.8%
Tasmania	5,868	5,770	3.4%
Northern Territory	19,373	16,162	9.6%
Australian Capital Territory	1,354	1,388	0.8%
Total	167,986	168,803	100.0%

Three trends emerge from school enrolment data:

- ABS data (Figure 2.2.1) show that in primary grades, Indigenous enrolment is consistent with school-age populations. In higher secondary grades, however, Indigenous enrolment as a percent of the relevant age cohort declines.
- School funding depends primarily on the number of students enrolled. Schools therefore have a strong incentive to ensure that all children are enrolled. Some remote schools make special efforts to enrol students by distributing sweets and other favours on the first day of school and other school census days.⁶
- School-by-school data from the *My School* website show that the falling-off in secondary enrolment is higher in Indigenous schools and underperforming mainstream schools.

Data do not support the claim that substantial numbers are not enrolled in school.

Chart 2.2.1 Indigenous population aged 6–18 versus school enrolment (2010)⁷

2.3. Indigenous students as a percentage of all students

The Indigenous classification in databases is based on a person self-identifying as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or both. The number and percentage of Indigenous Australians, therefore, vary by data source. For example, in the 2006 Census, more than one million respondents refused to answer the ‘Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?’ question. The initial count of 455,000 Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in the 2006 Census was increased to 517,000 after the Census Post Enumeration Survey. Using previous census data, ABS has

projected Indigenous population size to 2021.⁸ Despite the care taken, these projections are less robust than census data.

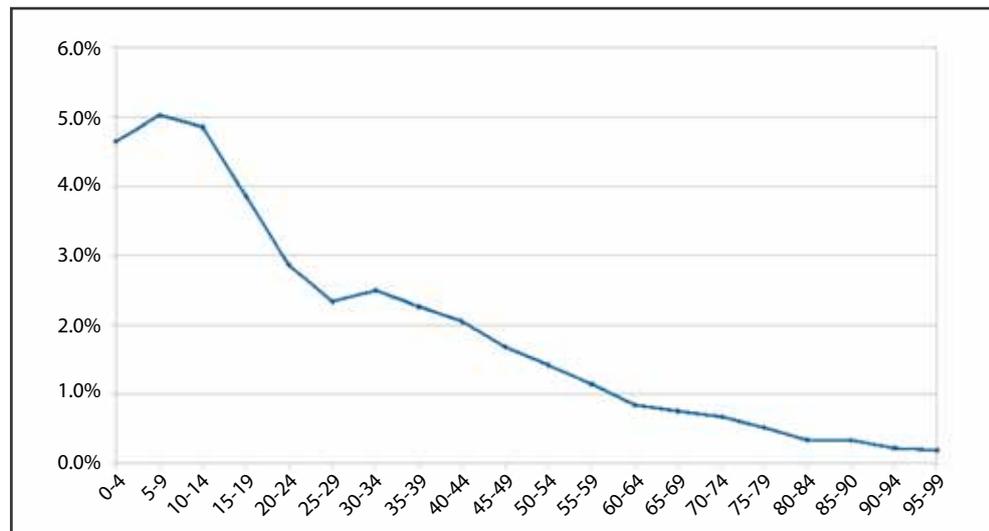
The Indigenous school-age population is 4.8% of the total school-age population. This is twice the 2.4% of the Indigenous percentage of the Australian population.

Table 2.3.1: Indigenous Australians as a percentage of total Australians (2011)⁹

	Indigenous students as percentage of total students	Indigenous population as percentage of total population (2006 census)
New South Wales	4.6%	2.2%
Victoria	1.2%	0.6%
Queensland	6.7%	3.4%
South Australia	3.8%	1.8%
Western Australia	6.3%	3.3%
Tasmania	6.9%	3.8%
Northern Territory	40.8%	29.3%
Australian Capital Territory	2.3%	1.3%
Total	4.8%	2.4%

The Indigenous school-age population is 4.8% of the total school-age population. This is twice the 2.4% of the Indigenous percentage of the Australian population.

Chart 2.3.1 Indigenous population as percentage of Australian population by age (2010)¹⁰



It is often claimed that there has been an Indigenous fertility boom. But ABS fertility data show that between 1996 and 2006, the fertility of Indigenous women was 2.1% to 2.2%, only slightly above the fertility of non-Indigenous women.¹¹ The higher percentage of Indigenous students reflects other factors:

- Self-identification rose in the decades leading up to the 2006 Census. As discrimination declined, pride in being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent and identification as Indigenous rose. The trend peaked in the 1990s.
- Early Indigenous death and the consequent absence of older people from population cohorts, most notably in welfare-dependent communities, account for some of the higher percentages of younger Indigenous people.
- Allocating children of intermarriage between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians to the Indigenous cohort appears to be a significant contributor to the high percentage of Indigenous students.

The Northern Territory is an outlier. Despite high Indigenous death rates, it has the smallest difference between Indigenous students and Indigenous population percentages. The likely reasons are a lower rate of intermarriage and a younger non-Indigenous population than in other states and territories.

Joseph and Maria Lane have pointed out that Indigenous families have settled in urban areas without ‘losing a sense of difference and pride in one’s Indigenous background: their ancestors will forever be Indigenous, and their ancestral places will always be Indigenous.’¹² Students with an Indigenous and a non-Indigenous parent take pride in both their heritages—Indigenous and Anglo-Celtic, Chinese, Jewish or whatever the origin of their parents and grandparents.

3. Measuring literacy and numeracy (2008–11)

When the 2011 NAPLAN results were released, Peter Garrett, the Commonwealth Minister for Education, noted that more than 93% of Australian students achieve at or above the national minimum standard in literacy and numeracy.¹³ He failed to note that more than three-quarters of Indigenous students were among these successful Australian students. Focusing policy on disproportionately high Indigenous failure rates is obviously essential if these students are to achieve the same results as other Australian students, but the fact that Australia-wide only a minority of Indigenous students are not meeting NAPLAN standards cannot be ignored. Only in the Northern Territory are most Indigenous students not meeting national minimum standards.

The introduction of annual NAPLAN tests in all Australian schools in 2008 not only made it possible for parents and students to follow their progress, but also provided robust data on broad educational trends. NAPLAN data are particularly valuable for outlier groups of students—those performing above or below average.

3.1. NAPLAN tests

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) conducts NAPLAN tests and provides results in reading, writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation, and numeracy for years 3, 5, 7 and 9. It is well understood that NAPLAN tests do not test education as a whole, but students must be able to read, write and count to be able to learn other subjects. Literacy and numeracy test results are highly correlated with overall and long-term education outcomes.

Results for the four literacy tests—reading, writing, spelling, and grammar and punctuation—are highly correlated, so this monograph only reports reading and numeracy results. For ease of expression, ‘achieving the minimum national standard’ is referred to as ‘passing,’ and ‘failing to achieve the minimum national standard’ is referred to as ‘failing.’

The NAPLAN testing system is only in its fourth year. Ensuring tests are of comparable difficulty from year to year is not easy. Variability in tests and marking may be greater than actual improvement or decline in student performance. For example, Year 3 Numeracy appeared to have too generous a pass rate in 2008, so that failure rates for non-Indigenous as well as Indigenous students in most states rose in 2009 before falling again in 2010.¹⁴

Enrolled students fall into four categories:

- **Assessed.** These students sat the NAPLAN test. Results are recorded in bands that also determine passes or failures.
- **Exempt.** These students, often with educational disabilities, are exempted by their school from sitting NAPLAN tests. They are recorded as having failed to meet the national minimum standards. The exempt percentage varies from 1% to 2%.

Variability in tests and marking may be greater than actual change in student performance.

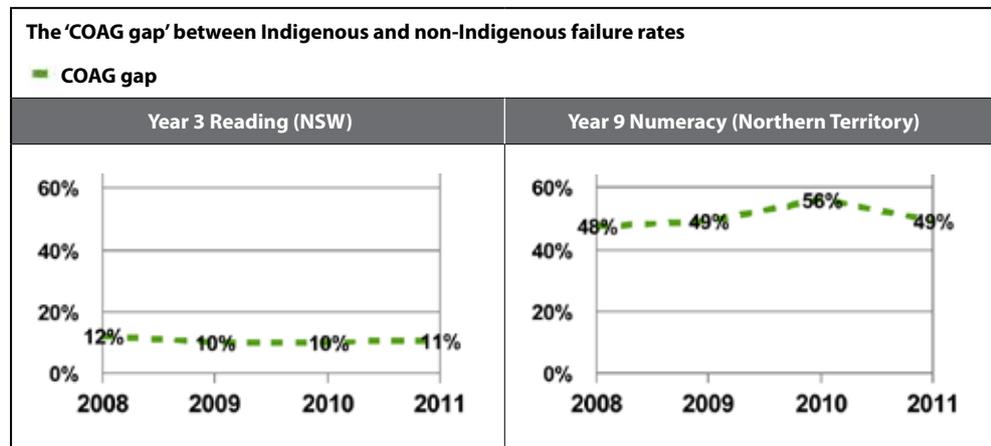
- **Withdrawn.** These students are withdrawn from the tests by their parents. They do not appear in NAPLAN results. The withdrawn percentage varies from 0% to 2%.
- **Absent.** These students were not at school on the days of the tests, and do not appear in NAPLAN results. The normal absentee rate in a mainstream school is about 5%. In later grades and in underperforming schools, however, absentee rates rise to 20%, and can be as high as 60% in Indigenous schools.

3.2. NAPLAN results

The government’s Indigenous targets, whether for education, life expectancy, or other measures, are each described as ‘closing the gap’ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. For literacy and numeracy, this ‘COAG gap’ is the Indigenous failure rate minus the non-Indigenous failure rate. Chart 3.2.1 shows the ‘COAG gap’ in selected grades and subjects.

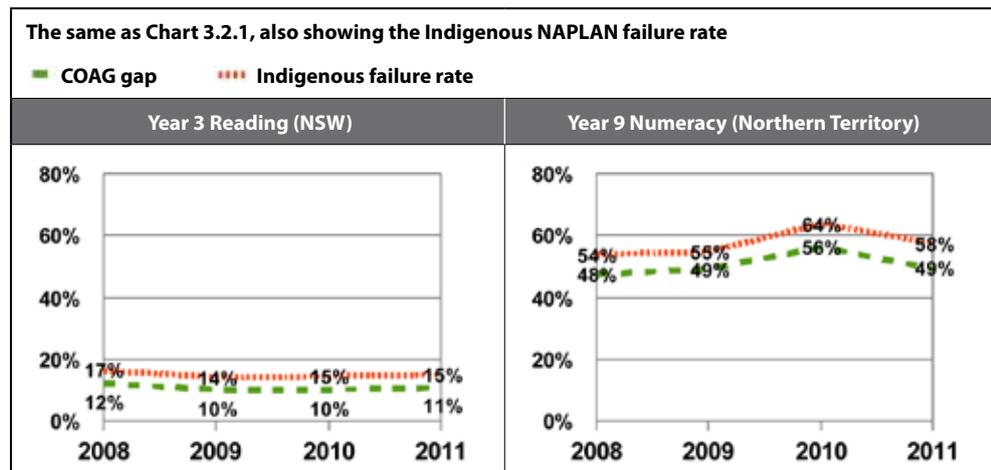
Students absent from school on NAPLAN test days do not appear in results.

Chart 3.2.1: The ‘COAG gap’ = non-Indigenous—Indigenous failure rate



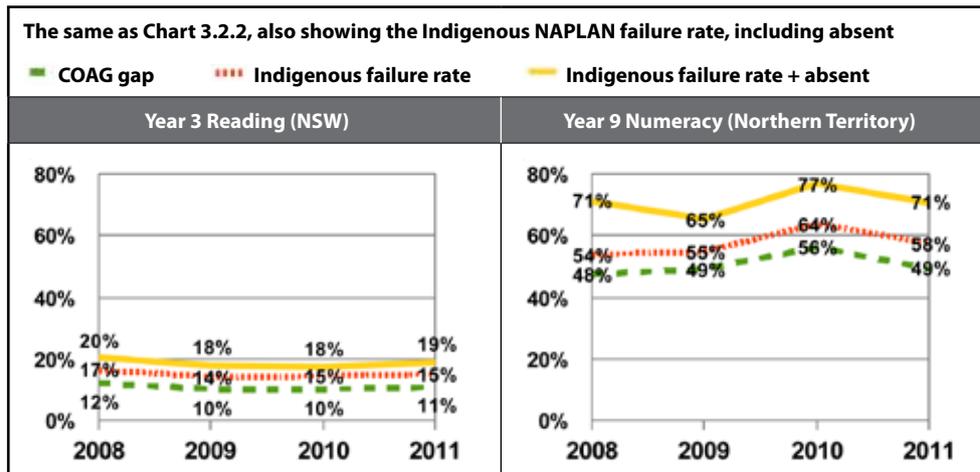
Because the ‘COAG gap’ is the difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous failure rates, it will always be lower than the actual Indigenous NAPLAN failure rate, as shown in Chart 3.2.2.

Chart 3.2.2: ‘COAG gap’ compared to Indigenous failure rate



Where welfare is high and expectations low, attendance at school is a chronic problem. Students regularly absent from school rarely pass NAPLAN tests. Not including absent students significantly under-reports NAPLAN failure rates, as shown in Chart 3.2.3.

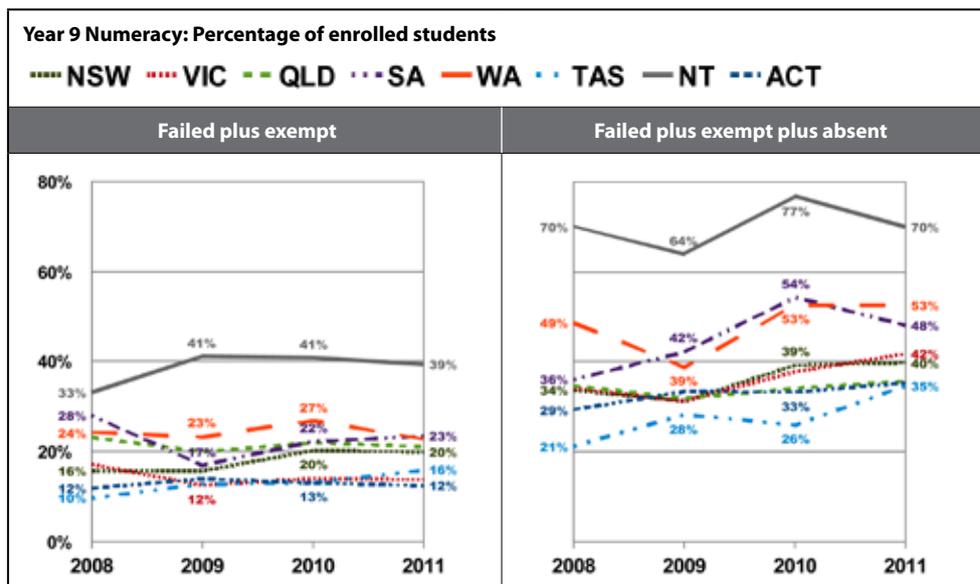
Chart 3.2.3: 'COAG gap,' Indigenous failure rate, and Indigenous failure, including absent



3.3. Participation in NAPLAN tests

The participation rate for NAPLAN tests significantly affects results. Fluctuations in the numbers of 'absent and withdrawn' are so great by Year 9 that they outweigh the number of students failing (Chart 3.3.1). Not including absent students in NAPLAN results leads to misleading conclusions about literacy and numeracy trends.

Chart 3.3.1: NAPLAN failure compared with NAPLAN failure, including absent



Students regularly absent from school rarely pass NAPLAN tests.

Several distinct trends emerge from participation for years 3 and 9 Reading in 2011:

- Enrolment declines most in the Northern Territory and Western Australia by Year 9; the latter also has the lowest participation rates in NAPLAN. A considerable proportion of students in the Northern Territory and Western Australia attend Indigenous schools in almost entirely welfare-dependent communities where absenteeism is high.
- Queensland, which also has a considerable number of Indigenous schools in welfare-dependent bush communities, has retained a higher proportion of students to Year 9 and has higher participation rates, particularly in Year 9.
- South Australia has low participation rates but a relatively small fall in Year 9 participation of students in NAPLAN. This small decline may be because

students in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara (APY) communities on Indigenous lands may not be enrolled in early primary years.

- Victoria, the ACT and Tasmania have low participation rates, particularly in Year 9. This is surprising as they do not have large welfare-dependent communities on Indigenous lands. In NSW, with comparable socio-economic backgrounds, Indigenous students had markedly higher participation, particularly in Year 9.

Table 3.3.1: Indigenous student enrolment and participation¹⁵

Reading (2011)	Indigenous enrolled			Participation %	
	Year 3	Year 9	% Change	Year 3	Year 9
New South Wales	4,257	4,234	-0.5%	93%	80%
Victoria	892	939	5.3%	88%	71%
Queensland	4,585	4,267	-6.9%	93%	84%
Western Australia	1,968	1,019	-48.2%	85%	70%
South Australia	714	709	-0.8%	81%	71%
Tasmania	435	470	8.1%	95%	82%
Australian Capital Territory	103	105	2.0%	87%	70%
Northern Territory	1,492	957	-35.9%	81%	70%

3.4. Trends in Indigenous literacy and numeracy

The principal NAPLAN finding (Table 3.4.1) is that the majority of Indigenous students (more than 80% in NSW, Victoria, Tasmania and the ACT) are achieving at or above national minimum standards even when absent students are included. Results vary by discipline and year, but the Year 3 results are representative of high Indigenous student pass rates. Only in the Northern Territory do a majority of Indigenous students fail NAPLAN.

Table 3.4.1: Percentage of Year 3 Indigenous students passing NAPLAN (2011)¹⁶

Indigenous students NAPLAN Year 3 (2011)	Reading		Numeracy	
	Pass rate	Pass rate adjusted for absent	Pass rate	Pass rate adjusted for absent
New South Wales	85%	81%	89%	85%
Victoria	88%	80%	90%	80%
Queensland	80%	76%	87%	81%
South Australia	72%	62%	79%	67%
Western Australia	70%	60%	80%	68%
Tasmania	86%	82%	90%	86%
Northern Territory	40%	32%	59%	47%
Australian Capital Territory	87%	84%	89%	85%
Australia	76%	70%	84%	76%

But NAPLAN also shows that significant minorities of Indigenous students in each state and territory do not achieve minimum national standards.

Students sitting Year 5, 7 and 9 NAPLAN tests in 2011 started school under policies prevailing before COAG's 2008 commitment to reducing the 'gap.' It is obviously more difficult to correct the failures of earlier years than to start with

The majority of Indigenous students are achieving at or above NAPLAN standards.

a new slate. Students who sat the Year 3 NAPLAN tests in 2011, however, enrolled under the new policies. They will sit the Year 9 tests in 2017, a year before the COAG target date. The results of this cohort are therefore critical.

Greater progress has been made in numeracy than in literacy, perhaps because early numeracy is less affected by language skills. Like migrants, some Indigenous children start with the disadvantage of not speaking English at home, but unlike migrants, few receive intensive ESL instruction.

Australia-wide data mask individual problems but show improvement in numeracy in years 3 and 5, reflecting some progress in Queensland and Western Australia. Students in other states and territories, and therefore in Australia as a whole, are not on track to meet COAG targets.

In the few jurisdictions where COAG targets will be met by 2018, Indigenous student failure rates will still be above those of non-Indigenous students. At COAG's pace, it will take a generation to achieve parity for Indigenous students.

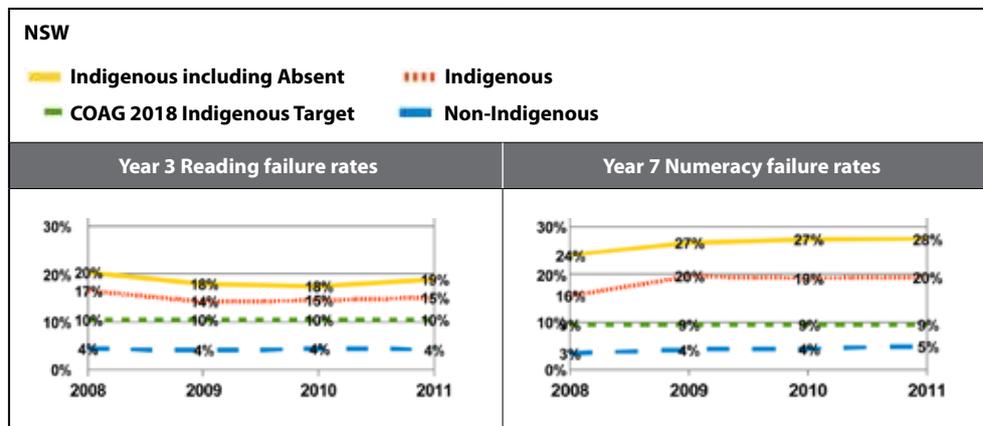
Summaries of each state and territory's performance are presented below. They include sample charts from detailed state and territory results presented in Appendix A.

3.4.1. New South Wales

NSW has the largest number (52,000) of Indigenous students. Most attend quality mainstream schools and pass NAPLAN tests, but a significant minority are failing with failure rates rising from 17% in Year 3 to 25% in Year 9. Twenty percent of students did not participate in Year 9 tests. Most NSW numeracy and literacy test results showed little improvement from 2008 to 2011, underlining the O'Farrell Coalition government's concern with the state's past education policies. The greatest improvement was in Year 5 Numeracy (children who sat their first NAPLAN test in 2008) but the highest failure rates were in Year 9 Numeracy. All Reading tests showed almost no improvement.

Most NSW literacy and numeracy results show little improvement since 2008.

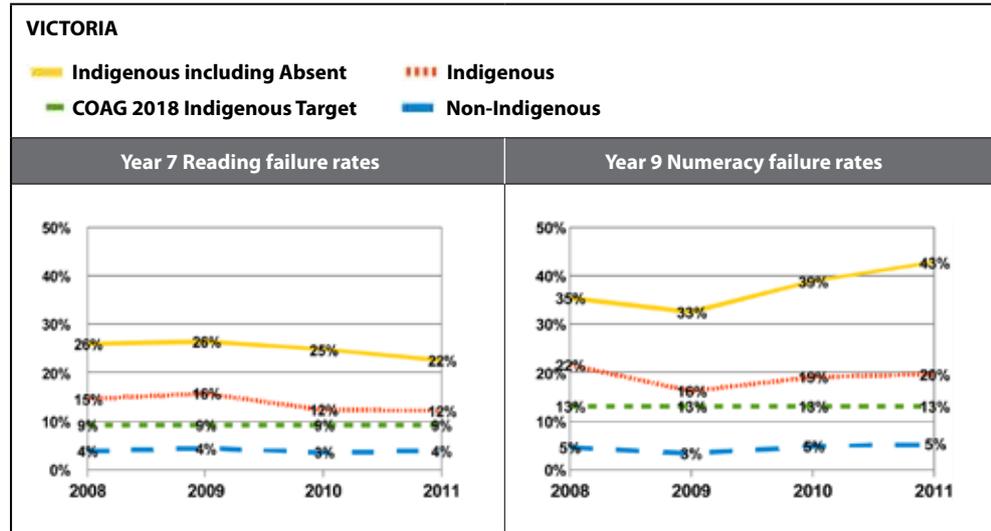
Chart 3.4.1.1: NSW NAPLAN failure rates, Year 3 Reading and Year 7 Numeracy



3.4.2. Victoria

Victoria has a small Indigenous student population (11,000) with no remote settlements. It is an outlier in showing almost no improvement. Only Year 7 Reading and Numeracy showed a lower failure rate in 2011 than in 2009, and these changes were marginal. Several 2011 failure rates were higher than in 2008. The Victorian Department of Education's establishment of 'Indigenous' schools clearly did not improve performance.

Chart 3.4.2.1: Victoria NAPLAN failure rates, Year 7 Reading and Year 9 Numeracy

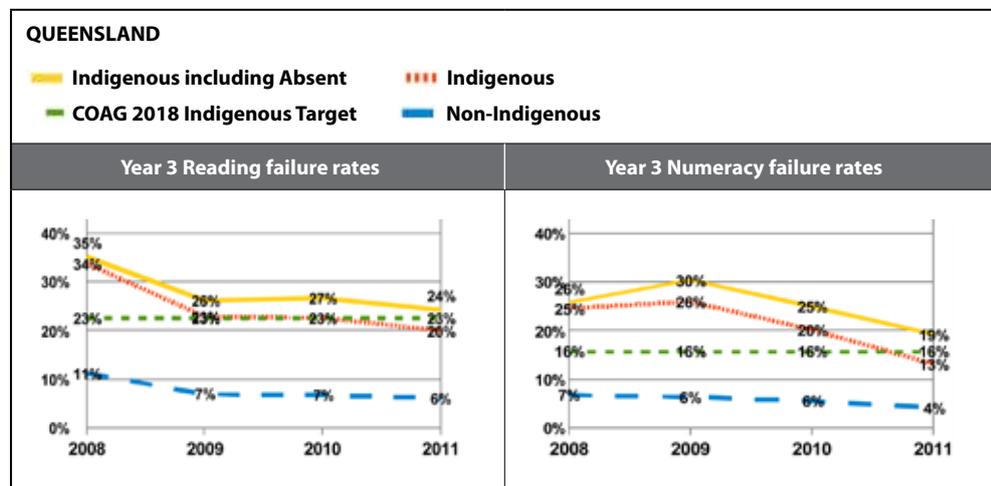


Queensland schools showed the most improvement of any state or territory.

3.4.3. Queensland

Queensland has a relatively large Indigenous student population (49,000), mostly in Brisbane and in regional cities, which are more widely dispersed than in the rest of Australia. Queensland has about 30 Indigenous schools. Yet Queensland showed improvement in years 3, 5 and 7 Reading and years 3 and 7 Numeracy. This was the best result of any state or territory. The trends are steady and will hopefully be sustained.

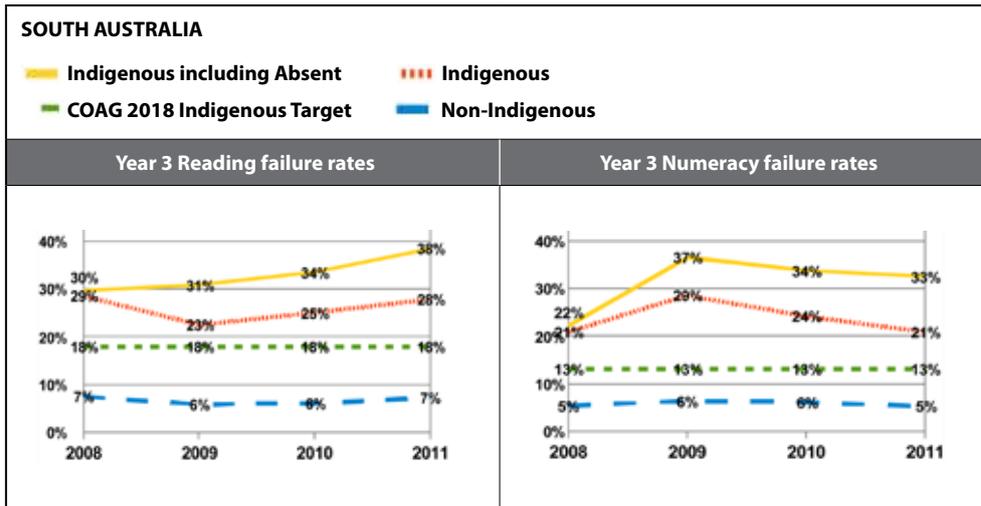
Chart 3.4.3.1: Queensland NAPLAN failure rates, Year 3 Reading and Year 3 Numeracy



3.4.4. South Australia

South Australia has a small Indigenous student population (10,000), mostly in Adelaide and regional towns. There are about 20 Indigenous schools with low pass rates. Only two of the nine Indigenous schools in the APY lands had enough students sit NAPLAN tests to show results on *MySchool*.¹⁷ South Australia's Indigenous NAPLAN performance has fluctuated more than that of any other state or territory. Some of this may be due to data errors. In 2008, virtually no students were recorded as absent in any year.

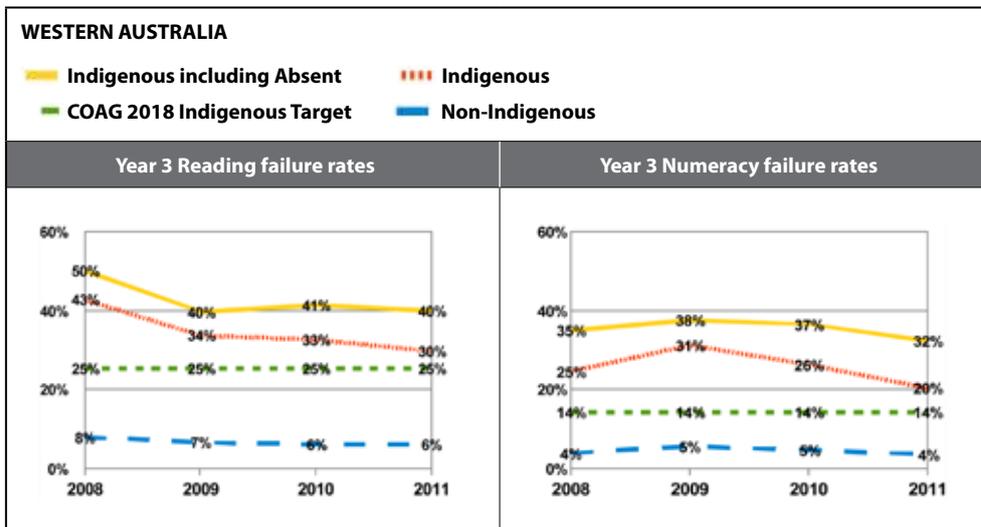
Chart 3.4.4.1: SA NAPLAN failure rates, Year 3 Reading and Year 3 Numeracy



3.4.5. Western Australia

Western Australia has the third-largest number of Indigenous students (23,000), It is the only jurisdiction other than Queensland to show an appreciable improvement. Enabling principals to choose a considerable degree of autonomy in managing schools has evidently been effective.

Chart 3.4.5.1: WA NAPLAN failure rates, Year 3 Reading and Year 3 Numeracy

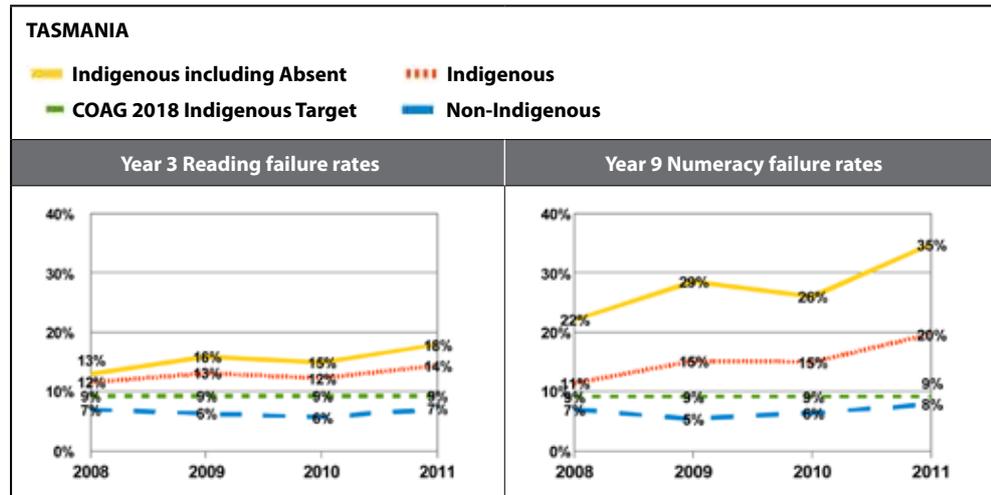


3.4.6. Tasmania

Tasmania only has a small number of Indigenous students (6,000) all attending mainstream schools. Yet failure rates have risen in numeracy and literacy every year. In 2011, failure rates ranged from 14% in Year 3 Numeracy to 33% in Year 9 Literacy and 35% in Year 9 Numeracy.

Enabling principals to choose a degree of autonomy in managing schools has been effective in Western Australia.

Chart 3.4.6.1: Tasmania NAPLAN failure rates, Year 3 Reading and Year 9 Numeracy

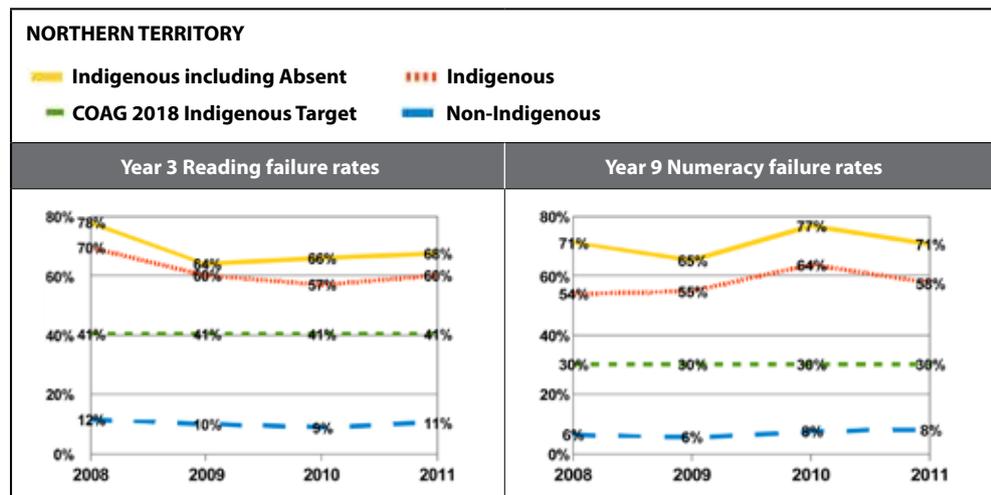


The Northern Territory has the highest COAG gaps and failure rates—and hence the greatest need for improvement.

3.4.7. Northern Territory

The Northern Territory has the fourth-largest number of Indigenous students (16,000), but they are the highest proportion of its student body. It also has the highest proportion of students in Indigenous schools, the highest ‘COAG gaps,’ and the highest failure rates—and hence the largest need for improvement. All failure rates in the Northern Territory have fallen since 2008, but trends are far from steady. The Northern Territory’s 100 Indigenous schools and 40 Homeland Learning Centres have the worst results in Australia by a significant margin, with more than 90% failure rates in Indigenous schools.

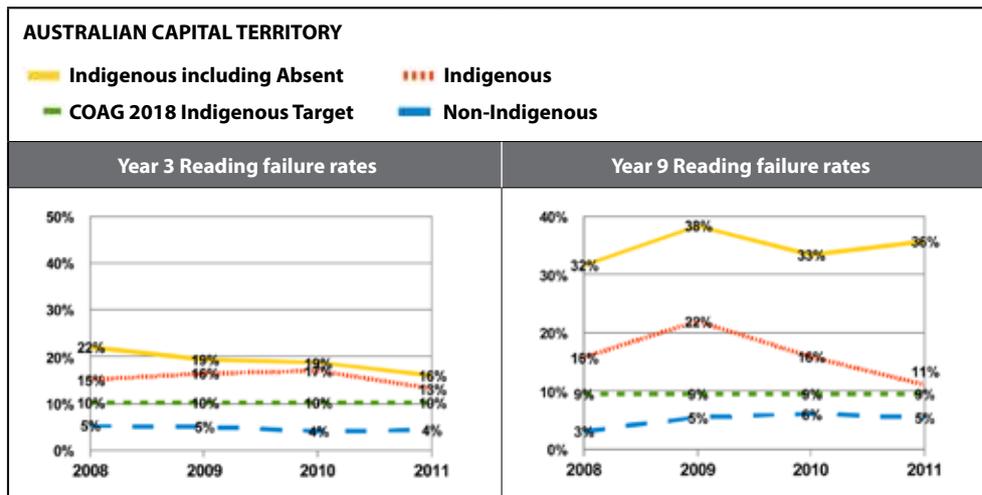
Chart 3.4.7.1: NT NAPLAN failure rates, Year 3 Reading and Year 9 Numeracy



3.4.8. Australian Capital Territory

Like Tasmania, the ACT has small Indigenous student numbers (1,400) attending mainstream Canberra schools, so the high failure rates are surprising. Years 3 and 5 showed improvement from 2008 to 2011, but failure rates in years 7 and 9 have risen.

Chart 3.4.8.1: ACT NAPLAN failure rates, Year 3 Reading and Year 9 Reading



4. Causes of Indigenous education failure

Student ability and motivation are clearly important determinants of individual students’ educational achievement. Some private school and selective government schools attempt to select such students by entrance examinations and this is reflected in their high NAPLAN results. In most of Australia’s more than 9,000 schools, however, there is no such selection. Policies have to take into account that classes and schools have a mix of ability and motivation.

Noel Pearson, Bernardine Denigan, and Jan Götesson in 2009 made a breakthrough in Indigenous education when they argued in *The Most Important Reform* that the appalling shortcomings of Indigenous schools were the principal cause of the failure of education in communities on Indigenous lands. They identified the collapse of social norms that resulted from welfare dependence as a contributing factor.¹⁸ Their conclusions were remarkable because they contrasted sharply with the nine Commonwealth, state and territory education departments’ steadfast refusal to admit that the principal determinant of low educational outcomes was the poor schooling—quality of instruction and school ethos—for which they were responsible.

Julia Gillard, then Minister of Education, courageously established the *My School* website, which includes NAPLAN results, enabling parents to inform themselves about the school their children attend. But comparing schools became politicised. Parents were not able to compare their school with groups of neighbouring schools. Instead, the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) was created to group schools with similar educational disadvantages.¹⁹ The objective was to identify the causes of educational failure, but when creating ICSEA, departments of education selected only those characteristics for which they were not responsible: ethnicity, remoteness, language background other than English, and socio-economic status. ICSEA only accounts for 68% of the causes of educational outcomes. But unless all determinants are modelled, the weights attributed to each cannot be accurately assessed.

The following discussion shows that not only have the most important determinants—quality of instruction and school ethos—been excluded, but several of the included determinants (notably indigeneity) have not been correctly specified. The modelling has not been challenged because only ACARA has access to all NAPLAN data. The NAPLAN database should be public to enable the assumptions that underpin the modelling and ICSEA to be assessed.

When creating ICSEA, departments of education selected only those characteristics for which they were not responsible.

Policy can only be effective if it is evidence-based. Although flawed, ICSEA has now been proposed as a guide to school funding in the Gonski report. The following discussion uses published NAPLAN and other data to evaluate the causes of Indigenous educational failure, finding substantially different explanations of NAPLAN performance to the assumptions of departments of education and ACARA.

4.1. Indigeneity

The view that indigeneity is at the root of Indigenous literacy and numeracy failure dominates Indigenous education policy. The ICSEA modelling follows this assumption. It uses the proportion of Indigenous students in schools to purport to show that indigeneity contributes to poor NAPLAN results. But correctly specified, the high proportion of Indigenous students is a proxy for underperforming Indigenous and mainstream schools. The following show that poor education in these schools, not indigeneity, determines NAPLAN outcomes.

- 1 NAPLAN tests show the majority of Indigenous students (more than 80% in NSW, Victoria, Tasmania, and ACT) are achieving at or above national minimum standards.
- 2 Wherever principals and teachers introduced rigorous instruction and a strong school ethos in failing Indigenous schools, students performed as well as non-Indigenous students. They reach normal secondary levels, and some go on to university.
- 3 Several programs take students from failing Indigenous schools and place them in quality mainstream boarding schools, far from their bush environment. These students catch up and perform like their non-Indigenous classmates.

If indigeneity was a cause of failure, none of these students would meet NAPLAN standards.

Worldwide research indicates that differences in cognitive ability are greater within than between ethnic groups. Linking cognitive ability with ethnic origin (or gender) is repugnant in civilised society. It cannot be a factor in Australian government policy.

Indigeneity must not be confused with culture. The culture of Australia's first inhabitants is one of the oldest in the world, and its preservation and development have a high value for Australia and the wider world, not just Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. But culture is not a determinant of learning. People of all cultures—Czech, Japanese, amaZulu or Quechuan—learn to read, write and count in mainstream languages to live and work in the modern world. Fewer resources are required when cultures are similar. For example, it is easier for French than for Chinese speakers to learn English. But the costs of learning mainstream languages must be met in every cross-cultural situation.

4.2. Remoteness

NAPLAN uses Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEEEDYA) geographic classifications of metropolitan, provincial, remote and very remote. Pass rates do decline somewhat from metropolitan to provincial and remote to very remote, but socio-economic factors are the principal cause of this decline. Pass rates are highly correlated with parents' education and skill levels, and metropolitan locations have by far the highest concentrations of highly educated parents working in senior managerial and professional occupations. Some decline in performance in remote areas must therefore be expected. The effect of a different socio-economic profile on the remoteness results is not discussed in the ACARA modelling.

Wherever principals and teachers introduce rigorous instruction and strong school ethos, Indigenous students perform as well as non-Indigenous students.

Table 4.2.1: Students achieving minimum national standards by remoteness²⁰

Year 3 Reading 2011		Metropolitan	Provincial	Remote	Very Remote
New South Wales	Indigenous	87%	84%	78%	59%
	Non-Indigenous	96%	95%	95%	92%
Queensland	Indigenous	83%	81%	72%	68%
	Non-Indigenous	94%	93%	93%	89%
South Australia	Indigenous	79%	71%	NA	48%
	Non-Indigenous	93%	92%	91%	89%
Western Australia	Indigenous	77%	76%	65%	59%
	Non-Indigenous	94%	93%	92%	91%
Northern Territory	Indigenous	NA	69%	59%	25%
	Non-Indigenous	NA	88%	92%	93%

Pass rates for Indigenous students in remote bush locations fall precipitously.²¹ These students attend failing Indigenous schools and live in communities where 100% of the population is welfare-dependent.²² In very remote locations in Northern Territory, pass rates in 2011 for Year 3 Reading were 25% for Indigenous but 93% for non-Indigenous students.

All remote schools—Indigenous and non-Indigenous—entail additional costs in teachers' remuneration, services and supplies. This contributes to high expenditures in the Northern Territory and Western Australia, which have high proportions of remote and very remote students. Yet Queensland, which also has a number of remote and very remote schools, has one of the lowest Indigenous expenditures per student but the greatest improvement in NAPLAN results. Actual expenditures per student do not reflect the weight of remote schools in state and territory expenditures.

Conclusive evidence that remoteness is not the cause of poor performance is shown by the many instances of remote locations that have both a high-performing mainstream school and an underperforming Indigenous school.

In remote areas, high performing mainstream schools next door to underperforming Indigenous schools prove that remoteness is not the cause of failure.

Table 4.2.2: Two examples of Indigenous versus non-Indigenous schools in one location²³

2011 NAPLAN pass rates		Location 1		Location 2	
		Indigenous school	Non-Indigenous school	Indigenous school	Non-Indigenous school
Year 3	Reading	NA	96%	19%	87%
	Numeracy	33%	99%	10%	94%
Year 5	Reading	6%	86%	NA	86%
	Numeracy	14%	86%	8%	97%
Year 7	Reading	67%	89%	NA	91%
	Numeracy	NA	67%	NA	94%
Year 9	Reading	NA	80%	NA	80%
	Numeracy	NA	100%	NA	91%

The Indigenous schools had a 100% Indigenous enrolment and the non-Indigenous schools between 10% and 20% Indigenous enrolment. These two pairs of schools varied in size from nearly 200 students to nearly 300 students. All four were large enough to report results for all years, but 30% of students in the two Indigenous schools were 'absent or withdrawn' from tests so their test results fell below reporting levels. Both Indigenous schools had separate curriculums. The parents in both these Indigenous schools were highly welfare dependent and had low expectations of their children's school achievement.

Remoteness in itself is not a reason, though it is constantly used as an excuse for poor literacy and numeracy outcomes in Indigenous schools.

4.3. Language background other than English

If students or their parents or guardians do not speak English at home they are classified as LBOTE (language background other than English). NSW and Victoria have higher proportions of families where English is not spoken at home than the Northern Territory, but this does not affect their pass rates.

ACARA found that LBOTE students whose parents had low education did not perform as well as other students. At the other end of the scale, however, many students with non-English backgrounds but highly educated parents are among top NAPLAN performers. Overall, the difference between students with a non-English background and others is only a percentage point or two. ACARA did not note the positive effects of ESL programs on immigrant students in mainstream schools. Similar ESL programs still do not exist for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who speak Indigenous languages or 'Aboriginal English' at home. In the Northern Territory in 2011, the Year 3 Reading LBOTE pass rate was 46% and the non-LBOTE pass rate was 88%—highlighting the lack of effective ESL programs.

4.4. School size

My School NAPLAN data show no correlation between pass rates and school size. Australia has more than 2,000 schools with fewer than 100 students; most have mainly non-Indigenous students; and most of these have NAPLAN results within average ranges. Some have outstanding results.

- Mallacoota is a fairly isolated coastal community of fewer than 1,000 people on the border of NSW and Victoria—smaller than Maningrida, Wadeye, Aurukun and many other Indigenous townships. Its Year P–12 government school has 139 students. It has very high NAPLAN pass rates—in 2011, no Year 3, 5 or 7 student failed NAPLAN. The school offers a range of academic and vocational secondary subjects to Year 12 and has a rich sporting and cultural 'club' program. Its teachers also make considerable contributions to civil society, participating in musical, drama, sporting and other activities.
- Cann River, also in Victoria, is not as isolated but has only 50 students in its P–12 government school. In this community of about 400 people, NAPLAN failures are rare in any year in any discipline. A higher than average proportion of students are in the top academic band. The school offers a wide range of subjects, uses advanced technologies, and contributes to civil society.
- The Miltaburra Area School near Streaky Bay in South Australia has 60 students from small surrounding settlements. NAPLAN results show only one failure across all disciplines from 2008 to 2011.

Small schools, like remote schools, may have to be more innovative and work harder than larger schools, but many are doing so and outperforming much larger schools throughout Australia.

4.5. Funding

My School shows that funding per student ranges from an extremely high \$130,000 for the Louth government school in rural NSW to \$7,000 for Trinity Catholic School in rural Victoria.²⁴ There is no correlation between school funding and literacy and numeracy results.

NAPLAN data on MySchool shows there is no correlation between school size and pass rates.

Schools for children with learning difficulties, remote schools, those with LBOTE students, and small schools clearly require additional funding to achieve the same results as schools without these characteristics. *My School* shows that these schools receive higher funding, though this may not be proportional to their needs.

Comparing NAPLAN outcomes to state and territory education expenditures (discussed in Section 9 below) shows that neither mainstream or Indigenous specific education expenditures are correlated with education outcomes.

A surprising finding, but one consistent with the lack of correlation between school expenditures and educational outcomes, is that high levels of funding may lead to low educational outcomes. If Indigenous specific programs distract from classroom teaching, additional funding lowers literacy and numeracy pass rates.

Historical expenditure data indicate that Australian expenditures per student have increased substantially while overall educational outcomes have declined.

International data also indicate that funding volumes are not correlated with educational outcomes. Several countries ahead of Australia in educational outcomes spend less per student than Australia.²⁵

School funding clearly has to be adequate and take special needs into consideration. ‘Adequate’ funding levels have to be defined and met, but once funding is adequate there is no evidence that large increases improve educational performance.

4.6. Socio-economic factors

NAPLAN reports two socio-economic characteristics—parents’ education and parents’ occupation—but data are limited by the number of people who did not state their education or occupation. For example, for Year 3 Reading in 2011, there is no parents’ education data for 11% of students and no parents’ occupation data for 15% of students. In the Northern Territory, there is no parents’ education data for 15% of students and no parents’ occupation data for 36% of students.²⁶ NAPLAN pass rates are strongly correlated with levels of parents’ educational and occupational status, with pass rates falling for the lowest education (Year 11 or less) and occupation (not in paid work) groups.

Table 4.6.1: Parent occupation, education and student pass rates (2011)²⁷

Student pass rates, Year 3 Reading (2011)			
Occupation of parents or guardians		Education of parents or guardians	
Senior management and qualified professionals	98%	Bachelor degree or above	98%
Other business managers and professionals	97%	Advanced diploma/diploma	96%
Trades people clerks, skilled office, sales and service staff	95%	Certificate I to IV	94%
Machine operators, hospitality staff, assistants, labourers	91%	Year 12 or equivalent	93%
Not in paid work	86%	Year 11 or equivalent or below	86%
Not stated	88%	Not stated	89%

Socio-economic characteristics have recently entered Australian education discussions. In February 2012, Ben Jensen’s *Catching Up: Learning from the Best School Systems in East Asia* found that Australian school standards were dropping behind world leaders in East Asia.²⁸ The Gonski report confirmed that whereas in 2000, only one country outperformed Australia on international literacy and numeracy tests, by 2009 five East Asian countries (China (Shanghai), South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan) and Canada outperformed Australia.²⁹ Both studies noted that the relatively large difference between high and low socio-economic background student results probably contributed markedly to Australia’s declining international rankings.

Once funding is adequate, there is no evidence that large funding increases improve educational performance.

About 20,000 children attend Indigenous schools in bush communities on Indigenous lands.

Socio-economic factors in student results are thus not only an Indigenous issue but of concern in Australian education. They are of particular importance for Indigenous students because a much higher proportion of Indigenous than non-Indigenous parents fall into the bottom educational and occupational categories.

The ICSEA recognises that parents' education is a factor in NAPLAN achievement, but does not include the destruction of family and social responsibility by inappropriate government policies in communities on Indigenous lands. Family dysfunction combines with non-performing Indigenous schools to create the highest Indigenous failure rates

NAPLAN data are not available (and may be too incomplete) to estimate Indigenous socio-economic characteristics of Indigenous students, but 2006 Census data on employment, homeownership and education suggest that the 170,000 Indigenous students fall into three groups.³⁰

- Perhaps 110,000 children of Indigenous families working in cities and regional towns attend quality mainstream government and non-government schools. Students and parents expect these students to achieve the same NAPLAN results as non-Indigenous students. Their NAPLAN pass rates are similar to non-Indigenous students. They include the majority of Indigenous students in NSW, Victoria, Tasmania, ACT and Australia as a whole.
- Some 40,000 children of Indigenous welfare-dependent families in cities and regional towns attend underperforming mainstream schools. The data to enable comparisons between NAPLAN results for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in this socio-economic grouping are not published. The pass rates of Indigenous students in this group may be lower than those of non-Indigenous students because schools' and parents' expectations of Indigenous students' performance may be lower than their expectations for non-Indigenous students.³¹
- Perhaps 20,000 children attend Indigenous schools in bush communities on Indigenous lands. These schools have had separate curriculums, teaching methods, and often inferior buildings and equipment to mainstream schools. This group includes 40 Homeland Learning Centres in the Northern Territory. These schools historically have had low expectations of students' ability to achieve minimum national standards in literacy and numeracy. Because most adults in these communities are welfare dependent, students and parents have low expectations of learning. Government policies have created family and social dysfunction and condemned men and women in these communities to welfare dependence without role models of people working. Consequently, school attendance and discipline are serious problems.

Welfare dependence affects motivation, discipline, responsibility and expectations. In addition, Chris Sarra has identified 'victimhood' as affecting expectations, and called on Aboriginal Australians to cast aside their adopted status as victims and take control of their own lives.³²

The socio-economic composition of Indigenous students (40% from welfare-dependent families) is thus markedly different from non-Indigenous students (10% welfare dependent).

4.7. Schools

Noel Pearson, Bernardine Denigan, and Jan Götesson in *The Most Important Reform* stressed the importance of class instruction and school ethos. In their experience in Cape York Indigenous communities, school failure stood out as the most important cause of Indigenous student failure.³³ A well-equipped combined primary and secondary school at Aurukun had almost no educational output. Similar large, well-equipped Indigenous schools were also not functioning in Wadeye,

Galiwinku and other townships in the Northern Territory, North Western Australia, and in the APY lands in South Australia. Smaller outstation/homeland Indigenous schools and Homeland Learning Centres failed to deliver even elementary literacy and numeracy. Sarra highlighted the critical role of low expectations—by students, parents, teachers and schools—in Indigenous educational failure.³⁴

Jensen stresses the importance of teaching, the management of teachers, and similar issues more broadly in mainstream Australian schools. Students in quality government and private schools continue to perform well, but underperforming schools with poor classroom teaching, poor discipline, and poor school ethos are clearly becoming a serious cause of Australia's lagging performance in international league tables. Minister for Trade Craig Emerson has referred to parents fleeing 'residualized-government schools for private schools.'³⁵ Where social mores have been eroded in low socio-economic communities, adherence to post-modern educational philosophies makes it impossible to enforce class and school discipline, driving away committed teachers. It becomes difficult for students to learn, encouraging a downward cycle of underperformance.

By only enabling school comparisons by ICSEA group, *MySchool* hides underperforming schools. Students, parents, educators and taxpayers should be able to compare underperforming with performing schools to see the scale of the problem. The role of government schools is to offset socio-economic disadvantage, ensuring equality of opportunity for all Australian children.

4.8. Weights for causes of Indigenous failure

The discussion of the relative importance of the determinants of NAPLAN outcomes—the weights attributed to each cause—is not merely of academic interest. Policies are failing because ministers for education and their departments do not weight causes of Indigenous failure correctly. School principals cannot focus their efforts on classroom teaching and school discipline but are deluged by programs that reflect prejudices rather than facts.

5. COAG and Indigenous education

In 2008, the Rudd government's *Closing the Gap* program became the dominant theme of Indigenous reform. Specific targets were to:

- halve the gap in mortality rates for children under five by 2018
- ensure access to early childhood education for all Indigenous four-year-olds in remote communities by 2013
- halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy for Indigenous children by 2018
- halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates by 2020, and
- halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians by 2018.

In February 2010, in his *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report*, Kevin Rudd reviewed progress toward these targets. He stressed the importance of transparency and accountability in Indigenous policy. A first review by the COAG Reform Council was promised for May 2010, and the *Closing the Gap Clearing House* was established 'to provide a central source of information on what has been demonstrated to work in closing the gap.'³⁶ Although not always on dates promised, a flow of reports has followed. Annual NAPLAN testing provides solid information on literacy and numeracy targets.

Underperforming schools with poor teaching, discipline and school ethos are becoming a serious cause of Australia's lagging performance.

In 2008, the Rudd government reduced the Indigenous education target from 'fix the problem in four years' to 'fix half the problem in 10 years.'

5.1 The retreat from equality

Australian governments have been concerned with lagging Indigenous education since the *Hobart Declaration* (1989) agreed on national goals for schooling.

- In 1995, the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Taskforce* 'set as an objective that literacy and numeracy outcomes for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders will be similar to those of non-Indigenous Australians.'
- In 1997, the Australian ministers for education stated: 'Every child starting school from from1998 will achieve minimum acceptable literacy and numeracy standards within four years.'
- In 1998, reviewing the *Hobart Declaration*, the ministers declared that by 2002, 'education and training systems/providers demonstrate significant increase in the proficiency of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander children in literacy and numeracy to levels comparable to mainstream Australian children.'
- In the 1999 *Adelaide Declaration*, the goal of education ministers was to ensure 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have equitable access to, and opportunities in, schooling so that their learning outcomes improve and over time, match those of other students.'
- In 2008, the *Melbourne Declaration*, followed by COAG's *National Indigenous Reform Agreement*, retreated from these objectives by lowering the target to *halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within 10 years*.
- In 2009, the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) began developing an *Indigenous Education Action Plan*. Submissions from the public closed in December 2010. A final *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014* was adopted by COAG in mid-2011, endorsing the 'halve the gap by 2018' target.
- On 1 July 2009, MCEETYA evolved into MCEECDYA (the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs).

MCEECDYA became the entity responsible for Indigenous (and other) education policy. Agreements and partnerships were negotiated by the Commonwealth Department of Education with state and territory education departments to implement reforms in Indigenous education. They included:

- National Indigenous Reform Agreement
- National Education Agreement
- Early Childhood Education National Partnership
- Indigenous Early Childhood Development National Partnership
- National Information Agreement for Early Childhood education and Care
- Smarter Schools—Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership
- Smarter Schools—Low Socio-economic Status School Communities National Partnership
- Smarter Schools—Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership
- Youth Attainment and Transitions National Partnership

On 1 July 2009, MCEECDYA evolved into SCSEEC (the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood). Existing targets and policies remained unchanged.

5.2. The Indigenous Education Action Plan

MCEETYA set *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005–2008* in 2006, and followed with a review of Indigenous education by prominent Australian Aboriginal academics.³⁷ After two years of discussion, an *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan Draft 2010–2014* was created by a ‘national group of senior officials, many of whom are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians’ and made available for public comment and submissions.³⁸ More than 100 written submissions were received, as well as ‘extensive consultation with stakeholders.’³⁹

The final *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–2014*, issued in mid-2011, begins with the following policy principles:

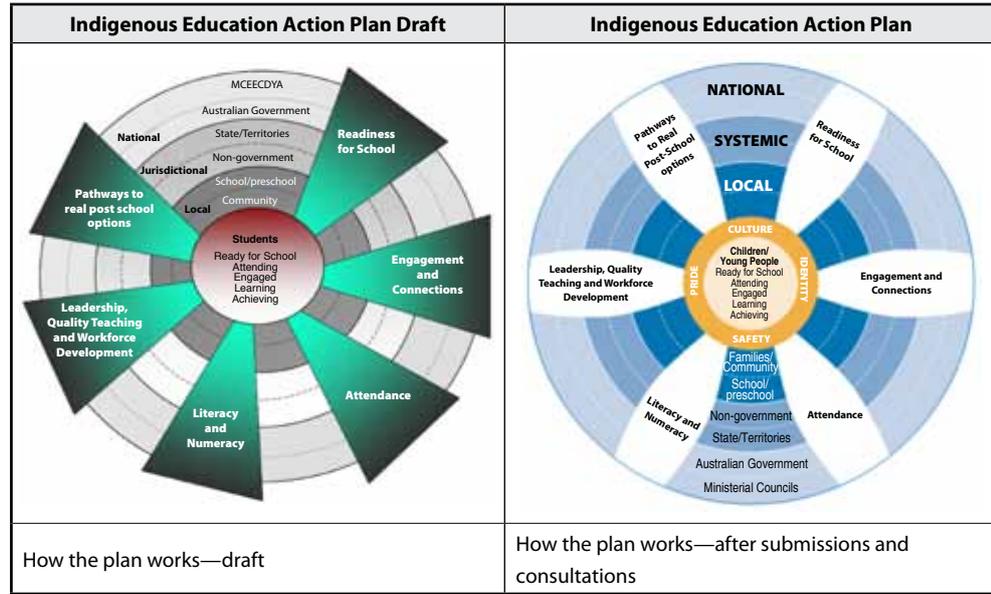
- **Priority:** Programs and services contribute to closing the gap by meeting targets endorsed by COAG while being appropriate to local community needs.
- **Engagement:** Engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, students and communities is central to the design and delivery of programs and services.
- **Sustainability:** Programs and services are directed and resourced over an adequate period of time to meet COAG targets.
- **Access:** Programs and services are physically and culturally accessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people recognising the diversity of urban, regional and remote needs.
- **Integration:** There will be better collaboration between and within governments at all levels and their agencies to effectively coordinate programs and services.
- **Accountability:** Programs and services will have regular and transparent performance monitoring, review and evaluation.

These principles are unexceptionable boilerplate, and skim over ‘readiness for school,’ ‘attendance,’ and ‘literacy and numeracy.’ ‘Phonemic awareness’ and ‘an integrated approach to numbers’ receive a mention, but the report hardly touches on the measures needed to counteract counterproductive practices and introduce rigorous teaching of English and mathematics. Measures necessary for disciplined, productive school environments are missing in discussions on leadership, as are commitments by educators to train ESL teachers to the same level as those teaching immigrant children. There are no measurable targets to be achieved each year from 2010 to 2014, no identification of curriculum inadequacies, poor teaching practices or school cultures that do not promote strong learning environments,.

The *Action Plan* concludes with figures that predict dramatic improvement in NAPLAN results, starting in 2011. This has not happened. The following graphic from the *Action Plan* shows how failure rates will be addressed.

COAG principles are boilerplate that skim over readiness for school, attendance and literacy and numeracy.

Chart 5.2.1: Indigenous Education Action Plan⁴⁰



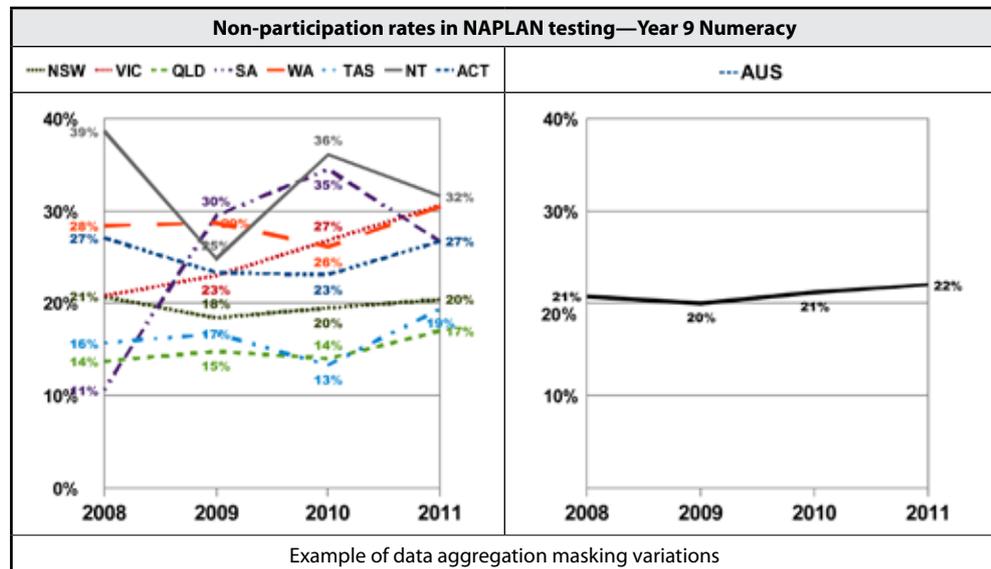
5.3. Aggregating data

Aggregating data to may be useful to identify trends, but it masks problems and leads to the belief that indigeneity is the principal cause of Indigenous student failure.

Aggregating data to Australian, or even to state and territory totals, may be useful to identify trends, but it masks problems and leads to the belief that indigeneity is the principal cause of Indigenous student failure. For example, the *Prime Minister’s Report 2010* stated: ‘It is clear that Indigenous children are consistently underperforming (in literacy and numeracy) in 2008.’⁴¹ No, Mr Rudd, it is clear that a minority of Indigenous children are consistently underperforming.

The ‘COAG gap’ minimises the size of the problems. By definition, the gap is always less than the actual failure rate. For example, for Year 3 Reading in the Northern Territory in 2010, the gap was 48%. The Indigenous failure rate, however, was 57% (66% when the effect of non-attendance was included). Chart 5.3.1 uses Year 9 outcomes to show how aggregating state and territory data to Australia-wide data masks variations.

Chart 5.3.1: Year 9 Numeracy, gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous participation rates (2008–11)



5.4. Soft targets

The real education gap is not between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. It is between students who pass (most non-Indigenous and Indigenous students) and those who fail (a minority of non-Indigenous and a larger minority of Indigenous students).

The way the ‘COAG gap’ is defined means it could shrink even if the main problem areas—Indigenous schools and underperforming schools—are not fixed. Students from Indigenous schools are the worst performing, but comprise the smallest group of Indigenous students. Their results could remain abysmal while the ‘gap’ narrows if:

- pass rates improve for the majority of Indigenous students who are already passing, or
- pass rates decline for non-Indigenous students.

Only absolute failure rates show the size of the problem and any signs of progress.

5.5. Cherry picking NAPLAN results

The Commonwealth, state and territory governments clutch at straws for ‘good news.’ Each year, they scan the Indigenous NAPLAN results to find a grade or subject for a sign of some success and highlight it in their media releases and publications.

Commenting on the 2008 and 2009 Indigenous NAPLAN results in April 2011, the COAG Reform Council concluded: ‘There was mixed progress in literacy and numeracy achievement with improvements in Years 3, 5 and 7 Reading and Writing and Years 5 and 9 Numeracy.’⁴² When the council analysed the 2010 NAPLAN results two months later in June 2011, it cautioned: ‘Governments are not on track to halve the gap in important areas of literacy and numeracy achievement by 2018.’⁴³

The council went on to report:

In 2010 generally Australian governments are on track to meet the target of halving the gap for Indigenous students in literacy and numeracy by 2018 ...

But then noted:

Progress toward the national target of halving the gap fell significantly below the indicative trajectory in Year 9 for all domains—Reading, Writing and Numeracy—and also for Numeracy in Years 3 and 7 ...

and

For numeracy, NSW, Victoria, Tasmania and Northern Territory did not meet their progress points for Year 3, NSW, Tasmania and Northern Territory also did not meet progress points for Year 7, and NSW and the Northern Territory did not meet progress points for Year 9 ...

and

Furthermore, 2010 results in NSW, Victoria and Tasmania were significantly below the 2008 baseline in Year 3. Results were also below the baseline in NSW in Years 7 and 9.⁴⁴

In sum, the council was aware that its 2008–10 data showed that state and territory trends varied widely, and aggregating data to an Australian total masked these variations.

The COAG Reform Council said, ‘Governments are not on track to halve the gap in important areas of literacy and numeracy achievement by 2018.’

The real education gap is between students who pass (most non-Indigenous and Indigenous students) and those who fail (a minority of non-Indigenous, and a larger minority of Indigenous students).

5.6. Focus schools

A late draft, and the final *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2010–2014* created *Focus Schools*—a group that would receive special attention and \$30 million of funding.

The Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) invited territory and state education systems and associations of independent schools to nominate primary schools as Focus Schools.⁴⁵

1. In each state and territory, schools were ranked according to the number of enrolled Indigenous students.
2. From that list, the schools that accounted for 75% of the state or territory Indigenous student population were selected.
3. From that list, schools with 25% or more Indigenous students below NAPLAN standards were selected as Focus Schools.
4. Schools can be added or removed from the Focus Schools list if education authorities agree.

Table 5.3.1 shows that nearly 900 Focus Schools were selected. As the primary selection criteria were indigeneity and enrolment size rather than NAPLAN results, the resulting Focus School list is distorted. The ACT has 33 Focus Schools, but some NT schools with substantial Indigenous failure rates are not in territory’s 60 Focus Schools.

Table 5.3 1: Focus Schools by state and territory⁴⁶

	Number of primary schools	Number of Focus Schools	Focus Schools as % of primary schools
News South Wales	2,426	91	4%
Victoria	1,805	130	7%
Queensland	1,390	288	21%
South Australia	663	96	14%
Western Australia	879	109	12%
Tasmania	220	73	33%
Northern Territory	160	60	38%
Australian Capital Territory	100	33	33%
Total	7,632	880	12%

Sarra’s Stronger Smarter Institute at the Queensland University of Technology ‘will work with education providers, participating schools and their local community to agree on resource and action a plan to make measurable progress towards improving the outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.’

The Next Steps Plans will guide the utilization of school’s funding through a number of options including the provision of extra training, extra resources, or through the temporary employment of extra staff by schools.

Towards the end of 2013 information will be collected on the most successful strategies employed by participating schools. The Stronger Smarter Institute will compile a report on this information during 2014. The Australian Government hopes this information will be a valuable resource as school communities consider plans to lift the outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.⁴⁷

Sarra had an excellent record in transforming Cherbourg school. He understands that raising expectations has to be accompanied by good teaching in a disciplined environment. But the Stronger Smarter Institute cannot give principals the power to insist on solid curriculums, hire and fire teachers, and reject counterproductive programs pushed by state and territory education departments.

5.7. COAG's failures

ACARA administers the NAPLAN tests to ensure national consistency. But the replacement of the competitive federalism of Commonwealth, state and territory education departments by a maze of other COAG organisations, agreements, partnerships and reports has not been effective. Absorbing considerable staff hours with commensurate high costs, these agreements and organisations have removed responsibility from state and territory education departments to fix failing Indigenous and underperforming mainstream schools. The information flowing to ministers for education, other parliamentarians, and voters from COAG organisations verges on duplicity. State and territory education departments continue to pursue failed policies confident that they will not be exposed as neglecting their primary task, which is to deliver the same high education outcomes for all students.

6. Pre-schools

The view that education begins in the cradle, side by side with parenting, is now widely accepted. Children learn manual skills, social skills, and begin to learn literacy and numeracy before they start school. Child care, child minding, day care, playgroups, and pre-school are terms used for group child activities outside the home in the years before school. These range from child minding with little or no educational component to daily attendance at a pre-school taught by a qualified teacher. The content of education and parenting in early years is largely the responsibility of parents, but many children have some early child care outside the home to supplement parenting and enable parents to work.

A stimulating environment is important for child development. Whether structured teaching is better than unstructured stimulus remains a subject of debate. There is consistent evidence, however, that languages are more easily learned at younger ages. Early learning develops children's brains, and hence, their capacity for absorbing learning in later life. Where adults are neither literate nor numerate, or English is not spoken at home, quality instruction can compensate for the lack of parents' ability to read to children in English and otherwise educate them before they start school.

Pre-school facilities meet two needs: child care (mainly for working parents) and early childhood education. Australian pre-school arrangements are thus 'characterised by enormous diversity,'⁴⁸ ranging from child minding to formal pre-school teaching. State and territory governments have for many years set minimum standards for early child care facilities; introduced pre-school for four-year-olds; and, together with the Commonwealth, sought to make such facilities affordable by giving subsidies to low-income parents. In South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania, the Northern Territory, and ACT, pre-school services are provided mainly through the primary schools system. In NSW, Victoria and Queensland, mixed market systems operate with a variety of private and public arrangements. Throughout Australia, COAG is planning to set educational standards in pre-schools for four-year-old children.

Information flowing from COAG organisations to ministers, other parliamentarians and voters verges on duplicity.

6.1. COAG pre-school policy

MCEECDYA developed an *Australian Early Childhood Development Index* covering the principal characteristics of early childhood development (physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills, communication skills, and general knowledge) and went on to measure these and the pre-school workforce in the *National Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census*. The COAG target of ensuring access to early childhood education for all Indigenous four-year-olds in remote communities by 2013 became a component of the *National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Development*, which promised to give every Australian four-year-old access to quality pre-school education, defined as the year before the first year of school taught by a four-year qualified teacher for 15 hours a week and 40 weeks a year. MCEECDYA had found that 47% of Indigenous children did ‘poorly’ on one or more of the *Australian Early Childhood Development Index* characteristics compared to 23% of all children ‘considered to be at educational risk.’⁴⁹ The *National Indigenous Education Action Plan Draft 2010–2014* in March 2010 included a target for a pre-school place for every child taught by a four-year qualified teacher.

MCEECDYA turned to a *National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care* to regulate child care and pre-school facilities. In mid-2011, draft regulations for the early education sector were released for discussion. While there is always a case for improving the quality of early childhood and pre-school education, increasing the qualifications of pre-school teachers and other child care staff unduly can be counterproductive. The Productivity Commission’s *Early Childhood Development Workforce Research Report* stressed that mandating increased qualifications for early childhood education workers would require larger subsidies for early childhood care and schooling.⁵⁰ It failed to point out that if child care and pre-school costs rise, and increased subsidies do not compensate low-income parents, they will be driven to informal child care that has low or no educational content.

The COAG Reform Council reported in April 2011 that there were ‘no data available’ on progress towards the 2013 target.⁵¹ Aware that the 2013 pre-school programs for Indigenous children were still little more than words, the *Early Childhood Office* of DEEWR produced an *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Universal Access Strategy* in June 2011. It repeated the Commonwealth’s wish ‘to ensure that by 2013 all children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, have access to 15 hours per week for 40 weeks a year of pre-school in the year before they start school.’⁵² The *Strategy* budgeted \$955 million ‘over five years’ to deliver this outcome, but did not include the number of Indigenous pre-school children, the number of places currently available, hours of instruction, and the number of additional places and staff required.

There appear to be no reliable data about the attendance of Indigenous four-year-olds in pre-school programs of various qualities. The MCEECDYA’s *Early Childhood Census* (2009) showed Indigenous enrolment in pre-school in the year before full-time school was 51% in major cities, 60% in regional towns, and 87% in remote communities. These numbers have been widely repeated, despite MCEECDYA warning that it had ‘significant issues.’⁵³ The difficulties of NT township pre-schools indicate that enrolment cannot be taken as a proxy for participation.

The Commonwealth government commissioned Allen Consulting Group to review the progress of early childhood education, mainly in terms of the availability of funding to reach the overall target of a place for all four-year-olds in a quality pre-school by 2013. The consultancy’s modelling produced the following participation figures in pre-schools for Indigenous four-year-olds in 2009: Queensland between 30% and 40%; Northern Territory more than 70%; Victoria more than

There appear to be no reliable data about attendance of Indigenous four-year-olds in pre-school programs.

70%; ACT nearly 80%; Tasmania more than 80%; NSW more than 90% (the only jurisdiction where ‘Indigenous’ participation was higher than ‘disadvantaged’); South Australia 100%; and Western Australia 100%.⁵⁴

Estimates of population are the building blocks of pre-school planning. The ABS projected that in 2011, there were 14,200 four-year-old Indigenous children in Australia. Broken down into states and territories, the numbers are small for the torrents of words devoted to pre-school policy.

Table 6.1.1: Pre-school years and numbers of Indigenous children aged four (2011)⁵⁵

	Pre-school year (Last year before school)	First school year (Year 0)	Indigenous population aged four
New South Wales	Pre-school	Kindergarten	4,300
Victoria	Pre-school	Preparatory	900
Queensland	Pre-school	Preparatory	4,200
South Australia	Pre-school	Reception	700
Western Australia	Kindergarten	Pre-primary	1,800
Tasmania	Kindergarten	Kindergarten	500
Northern Territory	Pre-school	Transition	1,600
Australian Capital Territory	Pre-school	Kindergarten	100
Total			14,200

6.2. State and territory pre-school programs

Territory and state education departments and the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Universal Access Strategy* provide qualitative information on the pre-school situation.

6.2.1. New South Wales

NSW pre-schools are predominantly not-for-profit and commercial, with the state playing a small role directly but supporting the sector with funding. In 2008, 85% of Indigenous enrolments were in non-government pre-schools—mostly in areas where parents were working—with parents contributing to costs. NSW has remote towns, but most of the remote population lives in towns with full private as well as public sectors—with shops, other businesses, schools, hospitals and other services. The NSW government is increasing payments to pre-schools for Aboriginal children to \$3,300 per year and proposes to encourage more Aboriginal parents to send their children to the free government pre-schools. With 30% of three- and four-year-old Indigenous Australians, NSW is aware that much of the additional enrolment created by the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Universal Access Strategy* will depend on its pre-school programs.⁵⁶

6.2.2. Victoria

Victoria does not have remote Indigenous communities. Pre-school programs are provided by local governments, non-government organisations, and private child care centres. Commonwealth funding is to be used to increase pre-school hours to 15. The government funds 65% of pre-school programs with additional subsidies for low socio-economic pre-schools. Victoria has a small Indigenous population that is mostly integrated in working communities, but it also has welfare-dependent Indigenous populations living side by side with much larger non-Indigenous welfare-dependent populations. Victoria claimed a 95% kindergarten participation rate for the total population, but less than 75% participation for Indigenous children. The number of Indigenous children, however, is so small that there is

There are 14,200 four-year-old Indigenous children. Broken down into states and territories, the numbers are small for the torrent of words devoted to pre-school policy.

Trained ESL teachers are being introduced into WA remote education, including in pre-schools.

no indication whether the participation of non-Indigenous children from low socio-economic welfare backgrounds is higher than that of Indigenous children from such backgrounds.⁵⁷ The pre-school needs of low socio-economic Indigenous populations have received more attention than those of non-Indigenous welfare-dependent families. Victoria has a 'range of linked initiatives ... building on a strong universal platform of early childhood services to address barriers to kindergarten participation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and promote increased participation in high quality kindergarten programs.'⁵⁸ *Balart Boorron (The Victorian Plan for Aboriginal Children and Young People 2010–2020)* was launched in August 2010 to fulfil the *Dardee Boorai (The Victorian Charter of Safety and Wellbeing for Aboriginal Children and Young People)* that 'includes key actions and measures of progress to improve Aboriginal children's safety, health, development, learning and wellbeing.'

6.2.3. Queensland

Queensland, with 30% of Australian Indigenous three- and four-year-olds began developing pre-schools relatively late. New government funding is for low socio-economic and remote locations. The addition of a pre-prep year in 35 discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities will serve remote communities that at present lack pre-schools. Twenty-four extra kindergarten services (of a total of 68) to be opened by 2020 will be in locations where at least 6% of the children are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Early childhood programs will include play groups, day care, and parent support. Queensland trusts in 'innovative solutions' 'where centre based care is not viable.'⁵⁹

6.2.4. South Australia

The SA government supplies most pre-school services. It proposes to use additional Commonwealth funding to increase average pre-school hours from 11 to 15 hours. It also proposes to fund expansion of non-government services. South Australia only has 5% of Australia's Indigenous four-year-olds. 'New delivery modes' are to be tested in the APY lands. School based pre-school programs are to be established in small communities with fewer than seven Indigenous children. Ten teachers are to be trained to work with Aboriginal three-year-olds in 10 communities, focusing on 'children's learning and dispositions; building capacity of early childhood staff to work with Aboriginal three-year-old children, their families and communities; using action research to document practice; and using IT to engage Aboriginal children, families and the wider community.'⁶⁰

6.2.5. Western Australia

Western Australia's pre-schools are mostly associated with government schools, with the rest attached to non-government schools. Pre-schools with significant Aboriginal enrolment were extended to 15 hours in 2010. Western Australia has 29 Aboriginal kindergartens that accept three-year-olds. Three-year-olds can also enrol in remote schools. Formal ESL delivered through ESL trained teachers and ESL training for other teachers is being introduced into Western Australia's remote education, starting in pre-schools.⁶¹

6.2.6. Tasmania

In Tasmania, all children are entitled to government pre-school places in the year they turn four after 1 January. There are no remote Indigenous communities, and only perhaps 500 Indigenous four-year-olds who can be easily absorbed into mainstream pre-school planning.

6.2.7. Northern Territory

The NT pre-schools are mainly provided by government and Catholic schools. Introducing qualified pre-school teachers in remote areas is very costly because it requires classrooms *and* houses for teachers.

The Northern Territory has the highest proportion of children living in remote bush townships and outstations/homelands. Bob Beadman, former Coordinator General for Remote Services in the Northern Territory, emphasised the importance of early childhood and pre-school education to offset dysfunction in the territory's 20 large Indigenous townships. These townships have populations equivalent to small country towns that have competent early childhood programs and pre-schools. Beadman recommended that 'the Australian and Northern Territory Governments acknowledge that current efforts in early childhood development are fragmented' so that townships can 'develop core targets.' Government efforts need 'to be progressively measured and reported in order for timely corrective work to be implemented if necessary, rather than lament at the end of target periods.'⁶²

The Northern Territory has some 400 small communities on Indigenous lands. For these, the Northern Territory has introduced a mobile 'hub' pre-school program that has one qualified teacher in a central location, servicing four to six small communities within a radius of several hundred miles. The hub teachers are supposed to visit each community to teach the children and train and supervise local staff perhaps once a week. The Menzies School of Health Research has undertaken an evaluation of the handful of these programs that are running, comparing the outcomes for children attending the mobile centres with those of children from similar remote communities not attending pre-school programs. As expected, the hub program was declared a 'success in improving pre-school participation and is popular in communities where it is run,'⁶³ but comparing the outcomes with those of children attending full-time pre-schools in Darwin or Sydney would have been more pertinent.

6.2.8. Conclusion

Allen Consulting concluded that 'the challenges of delivering universal access across Queensland and Northern Territory are likely to prevent these jurisdictions from fully realizing the objectives of the agreement during the time of the Agreement.'⁶⁴ This finding is not surprising. Queensland children only began schooling at the same age as other states and territories in 2008. Preparatory years were then added to primary schools for five-year-olds and pre-schools followed.

Overall, it seems most Australian parents who wish to place their four-year-olds in pre-school can already do so. This includes the children of the majority of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders who are working. States and territories are extending hours and teacher qualifications. The political promise to provide a pre-school place for four-year-olds will more or less be met.

Access to quality pre-schools by children from low socio-economic backgrounds—including Indigenous children from welfare-dependent families—seems less likely to be delivered, although these are the children who can benefit most from pre-school attendance.

7. Underperforming schools

Australia's decline in international educational league tables has returned attention from educational philosophies to the classroom. Confirming his earlier studies, Jensen argued that high teacher quality is the principal reason for leading countries' high literacy and numeracy scores on international tests.⁶⁵ He again drew attention

Children from low socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to be have access to quality pre-schools, although these are the children who can benefit most from pre-school attendance.

to the critical role of teachers in the classroom, and hence, to the importance of teacher training, teacher management, and support in schools. Greater autonomy for principals, teacher quality, and rewarding teachers with performance payments rather than seniority payments, are becoming more widely recognised with Victoria, Western Australia (with an opt in system), and most recently, NSW giving principals greater autonomy in teacher hiring and rewarding quality teachers.

The public debate about education thus strongly reinforces the conclusion that inadequate schools are the principal reason for low literacy and numeracy outcomes. Not all commentators agree. A ‘rocks and leaves’ school of thought that would have Indigenous students learn differently from non-Indigenous students is still in evidence but is now *sotto voce*.⁶⁶

7.1. Indigenous schools

Gary Johns, in *Aboriginal Self-Determination—The White Man’s Dream*, has drawn attention to the devastating effects of separate, ‘culturally appropriate’ education for Indigenous children.⁶⁷ A second post-modern stream of educational philosophy that replaced traditional instruction with ‘whole word’ literacy and ‘new maths,’ and replaced class discipline with self-esteem, has also contributed to high failure rates. Where parents did not supplement schools by reading to their children, the effects of this philosophy were even more damaging than in mainstream schools. Canada, for similar philosophical reasons, has had a similar experience.⁶⁸ Thus, the NAPLAN results of some 200 Indigenous schools are concentrated at the bottom of Australia’s more than 9,000 schools. The other schools at the bottom of the literacy and numeracy spectrum are those that cater for disabled children.

Table 7.1.1: Very remote Indigenous student NAPLAN pass rates⁶⁹

Reading		Northern Territory	South Australia	Western Australia	Queensland
Year 3	2008	14.3%	60.2%	39.3%	40.3%
	2011	25.2%	48.4%	58.7%	67.7%
Year 5	2008	7.9%	19.7%	30.8%	34.5%
	2011	10.7%	42.4%	32.3%	46.1%
Year 7	2008	13.7%	17.9%	36.9%	44.2%
	2011	24.8%	42.9%	50.0%	59.1%
Year 9	2008	13.6%	29.0%	39.0%	37.4%
	2011	13.4%	30.6%	41.7%	47.4%

NAPLAN results of some 200 Indigenous schools are at the bottom of Australia’s more than 9,000 schools.

Indigenous schools were created to provide separate Indigenous curriculums and ‘culturally appropriate’ teaching.⁷⁰ In those that claimed ‘bilingual’ intentions, English was not taught until Year 4 or 5, missing the years when children are most receptive to learning second languages. The result is their students cannot read, write or count in any language.

Most Indigenous schools are in bush communities, although some were also established in urban locations. These schools also lacked humanities and social and natural science curriculums, so that students did not learn about the world beyond the bush.

To replace a failing separate curriculum for Indigenous children in Victoria, the Victorian College of Koori Education, together with the Victorian Department of Education, established four new separate *Koori Pathways* schools at Glenroy (Ballarat), Swan Hill, Mildura and Morwell in 2009. Together, they had 65 students in 2011. The cost was \$42,000 per student, compared with an average of \$10,178 per non-Indigenous student in Victorian government schools. But Indigenous parents

did not send their children to these Koori schools, preferring mainstream schools. Sarra found that these schools became a ‘dumping ground for difficult students,’ but his advice, to shut them down and invest in early learning centres to prepare children for primary schools, was not followed. In March 2011, Ballert Mooroop College at Glenroy was finally closed because it had only one student for its 13 staff. This led to strong protests by Victorian Koori school supporters.⁷¹ A few Indigenous schools were also established in urban locations in other states.

Most Indigenous schools have poor discipline, in some cases leading to violence, and have high teacher and principal turnover. These reinforce each other. When a teacher had to be hospitalised after being stabbed in an Alice Springs school, the president of the NT branch of the Australian Education Union, Mathew Cranitch, claimed the stabbing was ‘symptomatic of deep seated violence in Territory schools.’⁷²

Schools, parents and students contribute to student failure through low expectations of academic success.⁷³ Teachers sometimes praise students for sub-standard achievements, hiding that they are not performing to mainstream standards. With limited curriculums and post-modern teaching, classes lacked content and discipline so that students became bored and fractious. Bullying and violence became rampant. Attendance has been as low as only 20% of students attending classes each day.⁷⁴ Students who want to learn are often unable to in class. Students have been running wild in gangs in Galiwinku, Maningrida, Wadeye, Nguiu, and other townships.⁷⁵ In smaller communities students just hang out.

NAPLAN results have put pressure on Indigenous schools to start teaching again. The annual reports of education departments show they are aware of the dismal performance of Indigenous schools, although they try to hide it as best they can. Letting go of the past is difficult.

Some non-government Indigenous schools—for example, the Northern Territory Christian Schools Association School at Gawa on the far northern tip of Elcho Island and some of the West Australian Christian Parent Controlled Schools and Aboriginal Independent Community Schools—have better discipline and school ethos, but their students still do not meet NAPLAN standards.

7.1.1. Homeland Learning Centres

Instead of schools, more than 70 Homeland Learning Centres were created in NT outstations/homelands. Like Indigenous schools, they have separate curriculums and teaching, and often dilapidated buildings and equipment. Some are derelict shacks. Qualified teachers drive or fly in one or two days in the week, but for several days every week, these schools are left in charge of untrained assistant teachers who often lack basic literacy and numeracy.⁷⁶ With the worst literacy and numeracy results of Indigenous schools, these centres are at the very bottom of Australia’s results.

The NT Department of Education has ceased reporting on Homeland Learning Centres in its annual reports and other publications. The NT and Commonwealth governments acknowledge that Homeland Learning Centres are not schools by paying parents the Commonwealth’s Assistance for Isolated Children allowance that is only available when there is no school in the community. In the last five years, two Homeland Learning Centres—Baniyala/Yilpara and Alparra—have been upgraded to schools while one, Mapuru, has become an independent Northern Territory Christian Schools Association School. There are no plans to upgrade any of the remaining 40 centres into schools or where possible make alternative arrangements such as bussing to the nearest school. Given the option of buying a bus and creating a job for a local driver, the NT Department of Education

More than 40 NT ‘Homeland Learning Centres’ still do not provide full-time qualified teachers for their students.

chose to spend \$500,000 building a new Homeland Learning Centre. Perhaps 700 Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory continue to attend Homeland Learning Centres that would be a disgrace in a Third World country.

Homeland Learning Centres have up to 25 Indigenous students. In contrast, at Dundee Beach, the NT government runs a school for 12 non-Indigenous students. Australia wide, in 2010, there were more than 109 schools with fewer than 10 students with full-time qualified teachers. Their students take distance education classes, including piano and language lessons.⁷⁷

7.1.2. Reformed schools

The Queensland government has joined the Cape York Partnerships in sponsoring three ‘academies,’ at Aurukun, Coen and Hope Vale, that have introduced the ‘Direct Instruction’ primary literacy and numeracy teaching system together with school discipline and a range of after-school ‘club’ activities, including cultural studies and sport. For the students attending these academies, a firm line has been drawn. From their first day at school, the students are on track to learn to read, write and count. There is immediate assistance for a student falling behind. Using the ‘Direct Education’ institutional structure means that schooling will not collapse if the principal leaves. A rigorous attendance reporting system partners the Family Responsibilities Commission, which follows up children not attending school and works with their parents for regular attendance. Education trust funds enable families to save for their children’s education. Parent participation in these funds is virtually 100%, with an average balance of more than \$1,000 per student.

A handful of other principals and teachers have also shown the leadership to create disciplined schools with high expectations of their students—a determination to teach not only mainstream literacy and numeracy but also humanities, social and natural sciences, and art and music, and to introduce vocational subjects as appropriate. They have dealt with difficult staff and refused to be intimidated by education department bureaucrats. Such principals, delivering mainstream standards in Indigenous schools, should be the norm, not the exception.

Perhaps 200 out of the 2,000 students starting in Indigenous schools in 2012 are assured of a mainstream education. Results for these fortunate few will not be evident until the 2015 Year 3 NAPLAN results are available. Even in these better performing Indigenous schools, teachers warn that their early classes include older students who missed out on basics and have illiterate, non-numerate parents unable to assist their child’s education.

7.1.3. Indigenous secondary classes

Without effective primary schools, secondary classes in Indigenous schools become little more than remedial literacy and numeracy. Having learnt nothing in years 1 to 6, students are often convinced that learning is not for them. Year 9 NAPLAN results show smaller student cohorts sitting tests, high and fluctuating absent and withdrawn student proportions, and erratic ‘gap’ results.

It remains common for Indigenous students to be steered into non-academic Year 11 and 12 subjects such as ‘Arts and the Community’ and ‘Work in the Community,’ which do not qualify them for an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR). Robin Hewitson discussed their effort in the early 2000s in Kalkaringi to move students from such courses to mainstream humanities and science courses.⁷⁸ Many students staying until Year 10, and even until Year 11 and 12, are still not literate or numerate when they ‘graduate’ from high school.

‘Completion rates’ showing students who received Year 12 certificates are meaningless—they merely show that the student has more or less attended school

Students attending the Cape York Academies are among the few in Indigenous schools assured of a mainstream education.

during the year. A proficiency certificate at the completion of Year 10 with real literacy and numeracy outcomes, and a list of other substantive academic and vocational subjects passed, would be of greater use. The Productivity Commission reports that only 7% of Indigenous students, compared to 40% of non-Indigenous students, qualified for an ATAR of 50%, which is considered by some higher education providers to be an adequate university entrance score.⁷⁹

7.1.4. Indigenous secondary boarding schools

A handful of independent schools have focused on providing secondary education for children from failed Indigenous primary schools. In the Northern Territory, they include the struggling Nyangatjatjara College (70 students) with four campuses in central Australian communities (its Yulara campus has a boarding facility through which students are supposed to rotate); the independent Tiwi College; Woolanig Homeland Christian College; and Yirara College. Western Australia has the Clontarf Aboriginal College (106 students in Perth) and Christian Parent Directed Wongutha Year 11 and 12 boarding school with 64 students near Esperance, which aims to prepare students for jobs. Worawa with 45 girls is in Healesville near Melbourne.

Marrara Christian College (a Year 12 school with 419 students, of whom 96 are Indigenous) and Kormilda College (with 976 students, of whom 273 are Indigenous) in Darwin also cater for Indigenous students with poor primary backgrounds. Djarragun is a predominantly Indigenous primary and secondary school near Gordonvale in Queensland with more than 600 students, of whom 90 are boarders.

Most of the students in these schools have inadequate primary backgrounds, and many come from dysfunctional families. The schools struggle to provide remedial literacy and numeracy in secondary classes, as well as restoring their students' social skills. Students sit Year 7 NAPLAN tests shortly after they arrive at the school. Despite trying to catch up six years of primary schooling plus two years of secondary schooling in two years, most students still lag behind in Year 9. Many students graduate with reasonable literacy and numeracy, while some proceed to years 11 and 12, vocational, and even university education.

Successful boarding models developed by these schools include family style houses with house 'mothers and fathers' replicating responsible family environments for small groups of students. Several of the remedial schools have been established in isolated locations to protect children from dysfunctional communities, following the pattern of Williams College established in remote New England in 1793 by anxious Boston families.

7.1.5. The politics of Indigenous boarding schools

In the run up to the 2007 election, Kevin Rudd promised to build three new boarding facilities in the Northern Territory for Indigenous secondary students. The first was to 'open in 2009 with the two other facilities to be completed in 2010.'⁸⁰ Where they were to be located and which children might attend was undefined. Three years later, in the lead up to the 2010 election, no progress had been made on this \$30 million election promise.

It was subsequently decided that the first boarding facility would be at Wadeye. Its 40-bed boarding facility is to open in mid-2012.

To choose the second location, KPMG was commissioned in 2010 to work with East Arnhem Land communities. The planned boarding facility was for students from East Arnhem Homeland Learning Centres as well as the townships of Galiwinku, Ramingining, Gapuwiyak, Milingimbi and Yirrkala. Each of these townships already has a Year 1–12 school, so the boarding facility is to be located in Garrthalala, a small outstation about 140 kilometres southwest of Nhulunbuy.⁸¹

Successful boarding models include family style houses with house 'mothers and fathers' replicating responsible family environments.

Australia has a record of providing quality secondary education to remote non-Indigenous families and communities.

Unlike the East Arnhem townships that were the other candidate sites for the boarding facility, Garrthalala has a Homeland Learning Centre but no school, all-weather road access, or other infrastructure. With eight schools in East Arnhem already offering secondary education, the consensus in East Arnhem is that the Garrthalala boarding school may never be built.

The third proposed location—somewhere in the Warlpiri communities—is yet to be decided. Agreement between clans may be difficult—Lajamanu parents are unlikely to send their children to, or accept children from Yuendumu, a community where violence has driven many members to seek refuge in Adelaide.

7.1.6. Mainstream boarding schools

With few effective independent Indigenous secondary schools in bush communities, mainstream boarding schools continue to be important in enabling academically gifted students from these communities to access a secondary education. The Australian Indigenous Education Foundation funds 2,000 scholarships and is the largest of these. The Yalari Foundation funded 167 scholarships in 2011. Since 2006, Cape York Partnerships has placed students in mainstream boarding schools. Other scholarships are funded by schools, Indigenous communities, and other foundations. Some Indigenous parents are supporting children in mainstream boarding schools. A government *Independent Boarding Scholarship Scheme* provides ABSTUDY living-away-from home allowances for scholarship students attending approved schools.

7.1.7. Secondary schools in small communities

Because of the critical state of Indigenous primary schools, a debate about the future of secondary schooling in communities on Indigenous lands is just beginning.

It has been argued that small remote communities cannot provide the environment in which secondary school students can develop to their full potential.⁸² The concern is not only with economies of scale necessary to provide full humanities, social and natural science, art, music and vocational subjects, but also that Indigenous students should be exposed to English-speaking environments and sporting and cultural activities out of school so they can learn the skills that will help them live independently if their work and career take them away from home. In extreme form, this view argues for all secondary students to be educated in quality boarding schools in cities and regional towns. But while boarding may be the best option for some students, it is not suitable for all.

There are other reasons why quality secondary schools are needed in communities on Indigenous lands. Schools play an important role in a community and contribute to civil society, cultural activities and sport. Depriving communities of all teenagers will diminish these communities.

Australia has a record of providing quality secondary education to isolated families and small remote communities, many of which have thriving Year 1–12 schools. There is no reason why the education provided in similar sized Indigenous communities should not be of the same quality.

7.2. Underperforming mainstream schools

Twice as many Indigenous students (40,000) attend underperforming mainstream schools in cities and towns than Indigenous schools.

Post-modern education philosophies have contributed to the creation of schools with low NAPLAN pass rates and poor academic and vocational education. Few of these underperforming schools are in middle-class suburbs. Because of their relatively high proportion of welfare dependence, many Indigenous students

attend these schools in low socio-economic areas of cities and regional towns. A few of these schools have a high proportion—more than 50%—of Indigenous enrolments. But more typically, Indigenous students are a minority in the classroom. These schools have low expectations of their non-Indigenous as well as Indigenous students. Employers complain that school graduates have poor literacy and numeracy and no work discipline. The teaching quality problems that Jensen has identified—poor training, no ongoing reviews and retraining, and poor management—are not evident in selective high schools or leading independent schools but are typical of underperforming mainstream schools.

7.3. Years 11–12—Academic versus vocational

For those students who already know in their mid-teens that they wish to proceed to further education, Year 11–12 academic subjects must, of course, be available. In some states and territories, the specialised role of these senior school years is recognised by the creation of separate colleges.

For a significant proportion of teenagers, full-time school at age 17 and 18 is not the best option. Many would prefer to work or combine work with further training. At school, these teenagers are bored and absenteeism is high. Combining vocational training—whether at school or TAFE—with work can be a much more productive option. With many pathways to further education for mature students now open, leaving school after completing a mainstream Year 10 that provides a foundation for further study in later years is preferable to students sitting in academic classes of no interest to them. Teenagers should be leaving school after Year 10 only if they have a full-time job.

Part-time jobs for 15- to 18-year-old school students are where most Australian teenagers obtain their first work experience. Neither part-time nor full-time jobs exist in communities on Indigenous lands. Paradoxically, Indigenous high schools have a greater role than mainstream high schools in using vocational education to develop and maintain teenagers' ability to work. Retaining students through Year 12 will not lead to labour force participation unless governments change their policies and allow private sector employment on Indigenous lands.

Low school attendance is a significant contributor to student failure.

7.4. School attendance

Low school attendance is a significant contributor to student failure. Accurate and consistent attendance data, however, are not available. Although daily attendance records for individual schools may be accurate, published summarised data are of little use. It is unclear whether '70% attendance' means 70% of students attend every day, 100% of students attend 70% of the days, or 100% of students attend every day for 70% of the school day.

Published attendance rates of 60% attendance in Year 9 classes in the Northern Territory may bear no relationship to actual attendance.⁸³ Commentaries on improving or worsening attendance from year to year are unreliable because of past inconsistencies in data definition and collection. NAPLAN participation data, although only a 'snapshot' of test days for years 3, 5, 7 and 9, appear to be the most reliable attendance data.

Education departments blame Indigenous parents for not sending their children to school. Commonwealth, state and territory governments have introduced 'carrot and stick' programs to improve attendance.

- The NT government raised its first offence truancy fine from \$200 to \$1,995 in 2011, and \$2,600 for a second offence.⁸⁴
- In November 2011, the NT government offered free text messages, movie and music downloads to students in six remote communities for good attendance.⁸⁵

- The Commonwealth's School Enrolment and Attendance Measure (SEAM) program allows Centrelink to suspend benefits for non-enrolment or poor attendance. In operation since 2009, it was adjusted in 2010 and more changes are planned in 2012. SEAM covers 14 schools (to be expanded to another 16 communities) in the Northern Territory and 30 schools in Queensland. Between January 2009 and August 2011, the Commonwealth government suspended welfare payments to 380 people for an average of 21 days. One parent was removed from welfare.⁸⁶
- 'Centrelink officers could be sent to children's homes to get them out of bed and on their way to school in cases where parents say they cannot motivate their children to attend.'⁸⁷
- In an attempt to improve attendance rates, the SA government included 'cultural business that takes students away from the classroom for up to a term at a time as part of the curriculum.' 'This learning ... was confirmed to be at an equivalent standard to learning in an accredited subject.' 'Remote Indigenous Services Co-ordinator General Brian Gleeson said the practice was working effectively in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara Lands community of Mimili, where school attendance rates were 63%.⁸⁸

Changes such as the introduction of more flexible school calendars to enable some NT schools to move their major school holidays to the dry season (when residents travel) may be more successful in raising attendance.

Fiddling with truancy laws is like moving the deckchairs on the *Titanic*. Underperforming schools and high unemployment/welfare dependence are the iceberg.

7.4.1. School quality versus attendance

In communities on Indigenous lands, many children and parents have given up on schooling because children who attend do not learn. They go to school for years and still cannot read or count. Wherever principals and teachers provide a quality school environment with rigorous classroom instruction, children attend regularly.

George and Robyn Hewitson succeeded in having the first remote Indigenous school students complete Year 12 at the small, remote school at Kalkaringi, 480 kilometres southwest of Katherine in the Northern Territory. They nurtured a strong ethos of responsible behaviour, ownership of learning, and expectation of the pursuit of excellence and success. The NT Department of Education recognised their achievement by partnering with Telstra to introduce the George and Robyn Hewitson Top Remote Year 12 Graduate Award.⁸⁹ Colin and Sandra Baker had full attendance and all students completing primary school in the small Warrego School.⁹⁰ More recently, the Bakers have attracted high attendance at a previously dysfunctional school at Elliott by introducing imaginative vocational components from early school years side by side with rigorous literacy and numeracy.

The Cape York academies have attracted dramatically higher attendance than their predecessor schools.⁹¹ Some non-government schools such as Gawa and Mapuru in the Northern Territory also attract high attendance by offering quality teaching and school discipline. With so little to occupy children and youngsters in communities that do not have shops, cafes, and sporting and other recreational activities, it is not difficult to make schooling more attractive than the alternatives.

7.4.2. High unemployment equals low attendance

A working family—where at least one parent is in steady employment—has a weekday rhythm. It is normal for children to go to school during the week.

Fiddling with truancy laws is like moving deckchairs on the *Titanic*. Underperforming schools and high welfare dependence are the iceberg.

With continuing unemployment and welfare dependence, such a normal rhythm does not exist. There is nothing to get up for in the morning, meals become haphazard, and every day of the week is like the weekend. This is a major cause of absenteeism. It is exacerbated by the absence of role models, and low parent and student expectations of education.

In Indigenous townships and outstations/homelands, with their crowded public housing and the absence of shops, sporting facilities and other amenities, extended attendance at funerals has become a respite from everyday pressures. Government policies that perpetuate the absence of real economies in these townships and outstations/homelands negate their efforts to increase school attendance.

Attendance is also a problem in underperforming mainstream schools, accounting for high numbers of students absent in Year 9. Welfare dependence is again the cause of low expectations and low attendance. Indigenous students are not the only ones affected.

8. Indigenous education expenditure

Governments of all persuasions in all portfolios—particularly in Indigenous Affairs—tend to measure their success by pointing to inputs—money spent—rather than outputs such as literacy and numeracy pass rates. The Jensen and Gonski reports have drawn attention to the substantial increases in spending on education in Australia during the 2000s when student performance was falling behind leading East Asian countries. Spending per student is considerably higher per student in Australia than in East Asia.⁹²

Spending on ‘Indigenous specific’ programs—which are in addition to normal mainstream expenditures and available only to Indigenous students—has risen faster than overall education. Programs based on ‘white man’s dreams’ accounted for a large proportion of Indigenous specific funding. Detailed matching of education expenditure and school programs is not possible, but large sums are clearly being spent on programs that are not merely ineffective but actually counterproductive.

8.1. Indigenous education expenditures in 2008–09

In December 2010, the Indigenous Expenditure Report Steering Committee provided the first comprehensive analysis of Indigenous government expenditures, covering the year 2008–09.⁹³

Table 8.1.1: Primary and secondary education expenditure (\$million)⁹⁴

2008–09 \$000,000	Indigenous specific	Indigenous mainstream	Total Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	All students
States and territories	\$279	\$1,691	\$1,970	\$29,220	\$31,190
Commonwealth	\$346	\$398	\$744	\$11,394	\$12,137
Total	\$359	\$1,702	\$2,062	\$29,730	\$31,792

The data compiled by the steering committee are not without problems. More than \$300 million of Commonwealth Indigenous expenditures could not be divided into primary and secondary and allocated among states and territories. At least 25% of total school expenditure was apparently not included in the steering committee’s report.⁹⁵

Education expenditure per Indigenous student was almost one and a half times (\$12,216) the \$8,800 per non-Indigenous student.⁹⁶ This comparison is, however, deceptive because much of the \$359 million Indigenous specific education expenditure was not spent on classroom teaching but on cultural programs.

Substantial increases in education spending occurred during the 2000s, while student performance was falling behind leading Asian countries.

Separating Indigenous specific expenditures from other Indigenous expenditures identifies the reasons why expenditure is higher for Indigenous than non-Indigenous students.

Table 8.1.2: Education expenditure per student⁹⁷

	Indigenous specific	Mainstream Indigenous	Total Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
New South Wales	\$1,470	\$8,314	\$9,784	\$6,938
Victoria	\$1,198	\$9,507	\$10,704	\$9,217
Queensland	\$ 852	\$10,083	\$10,935	\$8,986
South Australia	\$6,143	\$10,302	\$16,444	\$10,529
Western Australia	\$2,148	\$13,740	\$15,887	\$11,165
Tasmania	\$ 624	\$11,165	\$11,790	\$10,264
Northern Territory	\$3,175	\$17,420	\$20,595	\$14,050
Australian Capital Territory	\$2,635	\$11,046	\$13,681	\$10,420
Total	\$1,787	\$10,833	\$12,620	\$8,811

8.2. Education departments' plans for Indigenous education

Expenditure per non-Indigenous student in relation to NAPLAN results is lowest in NSW and Victoria, but in NSW the incoming O'Farrell government found expenditures on Indigenous programs generally and on education in particular not delivering outcomes. A Ministerial Task Force appointed to review Indigenous policies in August 2011 led to scathing reports on expenditures on Indigenous employment early in 2012. The Department of Education conceded that hundreds of millions of dollars were wasted on Indigenous student programs that had been endlessly continued without being evaluated.⁹⁸ The Minister for Education, Adrian Piccoli, charged the NSW Department of Education with developing new, effective policies to replace the failed 'strategies and agreements that underpin the very essence of providing a culturally inclusive, intellectually demanding and exciting curriculum for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students P-12.'⁹⁹ A *Community Discussion Paper* and an *Open Invitation* to Aborigines to elicit reviews on Indigenous education unfortunately do not show even an inkling of understanding of the reasons for the poor performance of Indigenous students in NSW schools. Issues to be reviewed and specific questions asked of Aboriginal respondents relate entirely to ethnic and cultural contexts, not to education, teaching and school discipline.¹⁰⁰ On 30 May 2012, the NSW government announced its *Connected Communities* strategy for Indigenous education. Fifteen schools will be given more autonomy and charged with working closely with their communities to improve Indigenous education.¹⁰¹

Victoria adopted a *Wannik: Learning Together—Journey to Our Future* strategy for Indigenous students in 2008 'in close partnership' with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. A devastating report by the Victorian auditor-general in June 2011 concluded that it had 'no targets and milestones' and could not demonstrate at the beginning of the fourth year 'whether it was on track to improve education outcomes for Koorie students.'¹⁰² *The Age* summed up the report succinctly: 'Koorie education plan slammed.'¹⁰³ The Victorian Department of Education does not appear to be aware that its programs to improve Indigenous education are not on track. It considered that its Indigenous education 'plans and strategies currently in place' were 'working towards developing further initiatives to enable and improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' engagement,

The Victorian auditor-general concluded there were 'no targets and milestones' and the department could not demonstrate 'whether it was on track to improve education outcomes for Koorie students.'

retention and academic success in all schools.¹⁰⁴ Unfortunately, while the auditor-general's report noted the complete failure of the *Wannik* strategy, it also assumes that the causes of high Indigenous failure rates are ethnic. It states that 'Koorie students generally have lower rates of literacy and numeracy, school attendance and school retention than their non-Indigenous peers.' This ignores the large majority of Victorian Indigenous students who achieved minimum national standards in all NAPLAN tests. The low pass rates of non-Indigenous students from the bottom of Victoria's socio-economic cohorts were ignored even though failing Indigenous and non-Indigenous students sit side by side in the classrooms of non-performing Victorian schools. Because the underlying assumption of the auditor-general's report was that their ethnicity was the cause of their low performance, it failed to see that the 38 components of the separate *Wannik* strategy, by taking attention away from classroom teaching, have contributed to Victoria's failure to improve its literacy and numeracy results. The recommendation for more intensive implementation of *Wannik* will further delay improvement.

Queensland's targets are directed towards 'improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander attendance and retention,' with attention given to 'building the skills of teachers and school leadership teams ... improved in-school support for teachers ... improved reward structures for teachers ... and enhanced access to digital teaching and learning opportunities.'¹⁰⁵ The education department produced a *Closing the Gap Education Strategy* after the 2008 NAPLAN data were available, showing some awareness of its disparate Indigenous student populations in breaking its coverage into Far North, North, and Central Southern regions. 'Schooling support' has delivered the best improvement (with Western Australia) in NAPLAN participation and pass rates, although per capita student expenditure is relatively low. The Department of Education has also been remarkably innovative in joining with Noel Pearson's Cape York Partnerships in establishing the 'Direct Instruction' academies in Aurukun, Coen and Hope Vale.

Western Australia's offer of increased autonomy to principals and teaching innovations such as increased ESL teaching in communities on Indigenous lands has paid off with improved NAPLAN results. 'Empowerment of local public schools' and 'engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and enhancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readiness for schooling' remain in the rhetoric, but 'improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in literacy, numeracy, attendance and school completion and up-skilling the education workforce' have been implemented in some schools.¹⁰⁶

South Australia has the highest per capita Indigenous specific expenditure per student for the lowest literacy and numeracy results. Yet for 2010–14, its emphasis is on 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community engagement; professional learning to support the cultural competence of educators and education systems; and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment.'¹⁰⁷

The Northern Territory is conscious of its high proportion of Indigenous students attending Indigenous schools, but its priorities are not improving schools but 'the engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities and the policy emphasis on evidence-based planning' and a 'Closing the Gap National Partnerships focused on whole school development.' Its Smarter Schools program has a shopping list of 'student enrolment and attendance, improving literacy and numeracy, the recruitment and retention of high quality teachers and the development of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.'¹⁰⁸ The NT Department of Education continues to be as incapable of radical improvement to its failing Indigenous schools and Homeland Learning Centres as Sarra and James Ludwig found in 2009.¹⁰⁹ A large proportion of the education department's staff are outside the schools rather than in classrooms engaging in classroom instruction. Many Indigenous schools have been described as 'sheltered workshops.'

South Australia has the highest per capita Indigenous specific expenditure per student, for the lowest literacy and numeracy results.

The relatively high mainstream expenditure per student in Tasmania and the ACT is puzzling. They do not have jobless communities on Indigenous lands, and while Tasmania has had some unemployment, this has not been a problem in Canberra. Tasmania seeks to ‘build the capacity of every school to meet the educational needs of all students, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and to successfully engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and culture through effective, evidence-based learning practices and partnerships.’ The ACT has an *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy* and the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Matters: Strategic Plan*. These include ‘targeted support to students not meeting attendance, literacy and numeracy benchmarks’ and financial assistance for Indigenous students.¹¹⁰ All these fine words have not made any inroads into low sitting and passing rates.

8.3. Indigenous-specific expenditures and NAPLAN results

Indigenous specific expenditure per student shows a similar pattern to Indigenous mainstream expenditure but with greater variation. The total Indigenous specific expenditure is not clear, with nearly \$280 million spent by state and territories and another nearly \$350 million by the Commonwealth but with some double counting between these sums. The Indigenous Expenditure Report Steering Committee estimated a total of nearly \$360 million Indigenous specific expenditure.

The Northern Territory’s Indigenous specific expenditure per student is the second highest—about half of South Australia’s—but this has not delivered literacy and numeracy. The ACT follows with the third-highest Indigenous specific expenditure per student. Western Australia also has relatively high Indigenous specific expenditures. Queensland’s Indigenous specific expenditure per student is even more modest than its Indigenous mainstream expenditure and non-Indigenous student expenditure. Yet Queensland has made the strongest progress in literacy and numeracy.

Indigenous specific expenditures cover a wide range of programs. Some programs attached to schools encourage student attendance by having students participate in sport. The Clontarf program is the largest. Established in 2000, it has 45 Clontarf academies attached to schools in the Northern Territory, Western Australia, and Victoria, and attracted 2,568 students in 2011. ‘No football—no school’ seeks to have participating boys attend school 80% of the time by developing their ‘self-esteem and positive attitudes towards health, education and employment.’ But Clontarf cannot influence the quality of classroom teaching. Their boys may attend school regularly, but when subjected to dumbed down curriculums and ineffective teaching, Clontarf’s efforts are wasted. Clontarf has been extended to support students to stay in senior grades and find employment on leaving school.¹¹¹

Many student mentoring programs are intended to improve attendance, classroom attentiveness, and retention into secondary years. The Smith Family works with nearly 3,000 children in the Northern Territory, Shepparton, Cherbourg and Perth. It recognises that low educational achievement is a socio-economic problem; only 14% of its ‘positive educational experiences and role models’ program are Indigenous.¹¹² The David Wirrpanda Foundation’s *Deadly Sista Girlz* targets Indigenous girls aged 12 to 17 in 11 WA locations and others in Victoria and NSW to encourage them to stay in school.¹¹³ The Cathy Freeman Foundation has a similar program on Palm Island.¹¹⁴ There are hundreds of other mentoring programs.

Another class of programs seeks to enhance literacy by supplementing or replacing regular class instruction. There are thousands of these programs, and before NAPLAN, there was no way of evaluating their effects.

Some are remedial programs. Multilit is a research-based initiative of Macquarie University that provides training for Multilit teachers, monitoring and evaluation.

Northern Territory Indigenous specific expenditure per student is the second highest—but this has not delivered literacy and numeracy.

Its principal clients are non-Indigenous children with reading difficulties. The Exodus Foundation took children failing literacy from Darwin, Sydney and Gladstone schools into remedial Multilit programs of varying lengths. Before creating its academies, the Cape York Partnerships organised a remedial Multilit program in Coen.

Others programs include regular teaching ranging from purely commercial to education department sponsored programs from a variety of suppliers. In the mid-2000s, the Northern Territory funded the *Ychad Accelerated Literacy Project*, initially designed for Ethiopian children to learn Hebrew.¹¹⁵ The Productivity Commission included it in its ‘Things That Work’ because ‘the program’s stakeholder’s report includes anecdotal evidence of the positive outcomes of the program.’¹¹⁶ The program has been dropped. By August 2008, the widespread *Scaffolding Literacy and Accelerated Literacy* programs based on whole word reading had morphed into a *National Accelerated Literacy Program*. It was adopted in more than 70 schools in the Northern Territory and 30 more were to introduce it.¹¹⁷ A well-funded, large-scale evaluation effort was mounted. It could not come to a conclusion, however, ‘because *Accelerated Learning* does not include collection of the data necessary for monitoring and evaluation.’¹¹⁸ A subsequent qualitative evaluation reported, ‘The Northern Territory Education Department had neither the project management nor logistical skills to control the quality implementation of such a complex program.’¹¹⁹ As NAPLAN results underlined the ineffectiveness of *Accelerated Literacy*, the Northern Territory followed with a trial of the Canadian ABRACADABRA literacy program. This included some monitoring data and a randomised evaluation component, but the researchers concluded: ‘We had not controlled any of the variables and thus could not say with confidence that the improvements were really to do with ABRA and not simply a rise in outcomes because of the excitement of the new.’ As Tess Lea’s careful assessment concluded, many programs have a short-term ‘excitement’ effect, but even the best do not substitute effectively for quality everyday classroom teaching.¹²⁰

There are even more mathematics than literacy programs, both remedial and general. *Quick-smart-Improving Numeracy* is one of many remedial maths programs. In January 2010, the Prime Minister’s *Closing the Gap* singled it out as improving Indigenous students’ maths ‘speed and accuracy.’¹²¹ NAPLAN results did not. A federally funded program called *Deadly Maths* was mounted in Townsville in 2006 by Building Mathematics Education for Indigenous children.¹²² NAPLAN results in Townsville schools have unfortunately also not reflected this remedial math program’s effects.

Dance and music programs targeted at Indigenous students have become popular. These generally involve considerable absence from class in practising song and dance routines and from school when students participate in and travel to festivals. Although no evidence has been presented in the past decade that the Commonwealth’s *Community Festivals for Education Engagement* program has any outcome or that it is a cost-effective way of spending taxpayer dollars, 13 festivals were held in 2011 and sites and dates for 2012 were to be announced.

The aim of *Community Festivals* is to promote a greater understanding of the value of education and encourage students, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, to stay in school and complete Year 12 and to live healthy, positive lifestyles.

Community Festival activities typically include, but are not limited to, sporting and health clinics, educational and careers markets activities, displays by significant national, state or local institutions or organisations, displays of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures,

Tess Lea’s careful assessment concluded that many programs have a short-term ‘excitement effect,’ but even the best do not substitute for quality classroom teaching.

and representation by local community organisations, trades people and businesses. Many activities centre on the performing and visual arts i.e. singing, dancing, painting.¹²³

Some of these programs may be worthwhile after school ‘club activities, just as they are for non-Indigenous schools. But Indigenous festivals are held on school days, taking students away from their schools to teach them ‘it’s fun to be at school every day.’¹²⁴

On 19 April 2012, Peter Garrett, the Commonwealth Minister for Education, announced an \$800,000 program to place artists in ‘bush schools.’ The artists, who ‘include theatre specialists, puppeteers, visual artists and circus performers,’ will be in schools that do not have the funds to employ full-time qualified teachers for all their students.¹²⁵

A wide range of programs has been developed to supply the market opened up by a ‘culturally appropriate’ market in schools. For example, the Dinnawun Consultancy facilitates consultations surrounding the *Queensland Partners for Success* program in schools, conducts school-community planning workshops; develops school-community partnership agreements; and produces supporting documentation.¹²⁶ Catholic Education’s *Nidja Noongar Boodjar Noonook Nyininy* is ‘a very substantial and insightfully-designed’ program that uses Indigenous paintings ‘to call on a repertoire of general problem solving techniques, appropriate technology and personal and collaborative management strategies when working mathematically.’¹²⁷ Western Australia’s Aboriginal Perspectives Across the Curriculum (APAC) project ‘has been developed to provide teachers and schools with a wide range of resources, to enable them to improve the academic performance of Aboriginal students. All Department of Education and Training (DET) staff are obliged to undertake Cultural Awareness training. The APAC site contains resources, links and further information that will support staff to meet their obligations ... Teaching Aboriginal perspectives involves assisting your students to be able to look at the world from an Aboriginal point of view and understanding the different Aboriginal points of view on a range of issues.’¹²⁸

Before school broke up for the Christmas holidays in 2007, the SA Department of Education made funding available to promote the Yurrekaityarindi model of Regional Aboriginal Education Forums and Parent Committees, which incorporated ‘a wider and less formal view’ of Aboriginal Community Voice for ‘partnership structures and agreements determined by local community and local needs.’ In addition to school and district structures, the department established an interim *South Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Consultative Body* ‘to strengthen the links between and engage Aboriginal parents/caregivers and community in education, training and further education decision making.’¹²⁹ NAPLAN results did not improve.

8.4. Evaluation of Indigenous education programs

Although it has been evident for years that funding has not been followed by improving literacy and numeracy results, Commonwealth, state and territory governments have failed to establish evaluation criteria for Indigenous programs. Until 2009, the Productivity Commission did not apply its cost benefit evaluation standards to the ‘Things that work’ sections in its biennial *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* publications. Instead, as evidence of what works, it resorted to anecdote and the views of Indigenous program suppliers. The 2011 edition of *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* still lacked the cost-benefit analysis that the Productivity Commission applies to non-Indigenous programs, but the ‘Things that Work’ sections at least included some evaluation content.¹³⁰ Annual reports and other federal, state and territory government publications on Indigenous education programs show

Minister for Education Peter Garrett funded a program for artists and circus performers in bush schools that still do not have funds to employ full time qualified teachers.

that governments have continued to spend taxpayers' funds on without doing any cost-benefit analyses.

Indigenous specific programs are supplied to schools by academic, commercial, not-for-profit organisations and consultants. These often rely heavily on public sources of funding but also attract large donations from foundations and companies exercising their 'corporate social responsibility.' The remuneration and career prospects of many bureaucrats have become tied to these programs. No doubt many sponsors genuinely wish to end discrimination against Indigenous students but do not insist on objective cost-benefit evaluation of their programs. Many commercial and not-for-profit organisations have been established specifically to exploit this government funding. Adrian Piccoli, the NSW minister of education, warned:

It's always nice to announce new programs but it's always very difficult to get rid of them because people lose jobs, lucrative consultancies are lost. There's an industry around it. Stopping some of these programs even though they don't work is very controversial.¹³¹

It is clear that high Indigenous specific expenditures during the past decade have not led to even minimal literacy and numeracy improvement for failing Indigenous students.

A pragmatic solution would be to give principals the authority to choose between education department programs or receiving equivalent funds to spend on programs of the principal's choice

9. Post-secondary education

Vocational and university participation by Indigenous students is both a remarkable success and a resounding failure. The children of working, urban Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders are participating in post-secondary education at rates similar to those of the non-Indigenous population, with more than 70,000 students enrolled in mainstream vocational courses and nearly 10,000 students enrolled in universities. There are now more than 25,000 Indigenous university graduates.¹³² At the same time, participation by students from bush communities continues to be negligible because of the utter failure of Indigenous schools, while participation by students from urban welfare-dependent communities is low because of underperforming mainstream schools.

9.1. Vocational education and training

Indigenous participation in vocational education has been strong since World War II, when labour shortages eased the entry of Indigenous workers into skilled occupations. By 2002, nearly 60,000, and by 2011, more than 83,000 Indigenous students, were enrolled. In the 2000s, enrolment grew at 4.2% a year compared to 2.4% for non-Indigenous participants. Indigenous vocational students represented 4.6% of all vocational students, again double the percentage of the population.¹³³

Unfortunately, there are problems with these data. Vocational courses range from relatively short courses of a few weeks to full-time trade and diploma courses extending to several years. The vocational data include students enrolled in 'remote Indigenous vocational courses' that accept students who do not have basic literacy and numeracy and are not taught at the same standard as mainstream vocational courses. The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) gives a participation rate of 15%, or more than twice the non-Indigenous vocational participation rate of 7%. Comparing the number of Indigenous students in mainstream vocational courses (some 70,000) to the urban Indigenous population

'There's an industry around it. Stopping some of these programs even though they don't work is very controversial,' said NSW education minister Adrian Piccoli.

gives an even higher participation rate of 20%: almost one in five working-age Indigenous men and women are in vocational education or training.¹³⁴

The location of vocational students follows the geographic distribution of the Australian population. More than half of the non-Indigenous vocational students are from major cities, and only a small percentage from remote and very remote locations. Indigenous students are more heavily concentrated in regional locations in accordance with the geographic distribution of the Indigenous population. But their strong representation (26%) in very remote locations reflects ‘pretend’ Indigenous vocational courses. These account for perhaps around 10,000 of estimated vocational enrolments.

Table 9.1.1: Location of vocational students by remoteness (2010)¹³⁵

	Indigenous students		Not Indigenous students	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Major cities	21,194	25%	861,304	55%
Outer regional	15,632	19%	374,148	24%
Inner regional	23,531	28%	221,900	14%
Remote	6,299	7%	32,472	2%
Very remote	16,009	19%	16,921	1%
Other	498	1%	57,794	4%
Total	83,223	100%	1,564,539	100%

NCVER data shows Indigenous vocational participation rate is 15%—more than twice the non-Indigenous vocational rate of 7%.

Vocational location data use ABS remoteness classifications, so that ‘remote’ includes Alice Springs, Mt Isa, and Port Hedland, where vocational education and training is not as broadly developed as in the larger centres but is more focused on local industries, notably mining, transport (motor mechanics), and tourism (hospitality). Indigenous and non-Indigenous apprenticeships are concentrated in major cities, reflecting more varied and deeper economies. NCVER data indicates that Indigenous students appear to have higher discontinuation rates and lag in completing courses.¹³⁶ These findings may be affected by enrolments in pretend Indigenous vocational courses, but may not apply to Indigenous enrolment in mainstream vocational courses.

Table 9.1.2: Indigenous vocational students by state and territory (2010)¹³⁷

Indigenous Vocational Students	Number	Percentage	As percentage of Indigenous population aged 15–64
New South Wales	30,923	37%	29%
Victoria	6,058	7%	6%
Queensland	16,575	20%	27%
South Australia	5,231	6%	6%
Western Australia	12,080	15%	13%
Tasmania	1,839	2%	4%
Northern Territory	9,815	12%	12%
Australian Capital Territory	689	1%	4%
Total	83,223	100%	15%

NSW has a disproportionately high share of vocational students, confirming that children from working families are entering skilled occupations. Queensland, surprisingly, has a lower share of Indigenous vocational students than of the Indigenous population. Enrolments of nearly 10,000 in the Northern Territory are misleading because they include large numbers enrolled in pretend Indigenous vocational courses.

9.2. University education

Margaret Williams was the first Indigenous university student, qualifying for a diploma in physical education in the University of Melbourne in 1959. When other Indigenous students began to enrol in degree university courses in the 1960s, they had to overcome the difficulties that face all first-time university entrants from low socio-economic backgrounds. Some had to make the transition from bush communities to urban society. Enrolments grew rapidly, however, as Indigenous families moved from unskilled jobs in small country towns to trades and clerical jobs in larger regional centres and major cities, and sent their children to mainstream high schools. Their children began to choose academic streams in years 11 and 12 and go on to higher education.

Higher degree enrolment grew rapidly reaching 3,609 by 1990; 7,350 by 2000; and 11,088 by 2010, when commencements were 6% higher than in 2009, indicating continuing growth. The majority of these students were enrolled in universities; only about 200 were attending Bible, art and music colleges. The Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory enrolled 649 Indigenous students—twice the number at Charles Darwin University.

Table 9.2.1: University Indigenous student enrolment by state and territory (2009)¹³⁸

	Male	Female	Total
New South Wales	1,069	1,975	3,044
Victoria	385	768	1,153
Queensland	836	1,658	2,494
Western Australia	373	758	1,131
South Australia	199	432	631
Tasmania	84	186	270
Northern Territory	93	229	322
Australian Capital Territory	107	133	240
Multi campus	80	239	319
Total	3,226	6,378	9,604

A higher proportion of Indigenous than of all domestic students attend regional universities. The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university students come from working urban families. A study of Indigenous students at university found that more than three-quarters were not from low socio-economic backgrounds and that a high 44% were not the first in their family to attend university.¹³⁹

The participation of the children of working Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in university education is remarkably close to that of all Australians, indicating rapid progress for families and students with access to mainstream education.¹⁴⁰ Low literacy and numeracy results, which deny school students the opportunity to study the more advanced subjects required for Australian Tertiary Entrance Rank scores, are the reason why few Indigenous students from welfare-dependent and remote communities attend university. Their numbers are largely limited to those who win scholarships to mainstream boarding schools or whose families can board them with relatives in urban centres with access to mainstream quality high schools.

Higher university participation by women reflects Australia-wide trends. In 2010, more than half (56%) of nearly 860,000 domestic higher education students were women. The structure of education and training for skilled and management jobs tends to push boys towards university, but many boys opt for vocational qualifications in skilled trades. Girls who want to be nurses, librarians and primary school teachers qualify through university degrees. Boys who opt to be plumbers,

The participation of children of working Indigenous Australians in university education is remarkably close to that of all Australians.

motor mechanics, and fitters and turners do so through apprenticeships and traineeships combined with vocational courses. The high proportion of women in the Indigenous higher education cohort (66%) reflects their occupational choices. There are fewer opportunities for an emerging social group for such potentially well-remunerated positions as real estate or fashion, which attract many non-Indigenous girls from well-established social groups. Ascribing vocational choices to different 'cultural' behaviour ignores labour market realities. It depends on anecdote, not fact.

As Joseph Lane noted, when Indigenous students began going to university, they mainly enrolled in special entry, non-award, and other non-degree courses. The share of Indigenous students enrolled in sub-degrees was 30% in the 1990s, nearly 20% by 2000, and negligible by 2010.¹⁴¹

Table 9.2.2: Higher education student enrolment by field of study (2010)¹⁴²

	Number of Indigenous	Percent of Indigenous	Percent of non-Indigenous
Natural and physical sciences	482	4%	9%
Information technology	128	1%	3%
Engineering and related technologies	287	3%	7%
Architecture and building	135	1%	3%
Agriculture, environmental and related studies	264	2%	3%
Health	2,119	19%	16%
Education	1,989	18%	12%
Management and commerce	1,128	10%	19%
Society and culture	3,623	33%	27%
Creative arts	778	7%	8%
Multi field courses	540	1%*	1%
Non award courses	68	1%	1%
Total	11,088	100%	100%

* Multi-field courses include 453 double-counted courses and are excluded from percentage totals.

Indigenous students are still heavily represented in 'society and culture,' education, and health compared to non-Indigenous students, but they are increasingly choosing courses that provide access to senior professional qualifications. Within the broad fields of study, there has been a move to higher professional occupations, for example, from social workers to lawyers, from nurses to doctors, and from primary school teachers to secondary school teachers. The mining industry is stimulating interest in engineering and related technologies by offering university scholarships. Enrolment by such a small cohort cannot be compared strictly with total Australian domestic enrolment, and it is evident that Indigenous enrolment is still catching up to the mainstream. The 'overweight' in teaching and health is not surprising. Nor is the heavy engagement in 'society and culture,' given the pressures on Indigenous students to focus on 'cultural studies.'

The number of students enrolled in post-graduate courses, including PhDs, in 2010 rose to 1,739 in Australia. Some Indigenous post-graduate students are at prestigious overseas universities such as Harvard, Oxford and Cambridge.

9.3. Support services and affirmative action

Study support and mentoring was important for early Indigenous entrants. Support services were accordingly set up at universities. Maria Lane, manager of the Aboriginal and Islander support unit at the University of South Australia, discussed the

In 2010, the number of Indigenous post-graduate students rose to 1,739. Some are at Harvard, Oxford and Cambridge.

importance of summer schools, bridging courses, and ‘making sure that students experience a sense of integration and comfort with their studies and fellow students as soon as possible after commencement.’¹⁴³ Currently, however, most Indigenous students enrolling in universities are graduating from mainstream secondary schools.

Most Indigenous university students appear to have much the same experience as non-Indigenous students at university. Christine Asmar and Susan Page, in a relentless search for ways in which Indigenous students were different, found that the only statistically significant difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students was not in actual course completion but in stated intentions for leaving a university.

First year Indigenous students, for example, report almost the same levels of academic challenge as students in the non-Indigenous matched sample ... Indigenous students are particularly appreciative of high quality lectures, prompt responses from teaching staff, efficient use of technology and well run discussion.¹⁴⁴

Academics beware!

Marcia Langton points to the dangers of isolating well-performing Indigenous students in university support centre enclaves and denying them friendships with non-Indigenous students that could be of great benefit socially and professionally. She argues that the centres can be ‘a huge weakness’ because they ‘offer [Indigenous] students a safe, comfortable zone where they don’t have to tread the pathway to a liberal arts education and professionalisation unless they are exceptional.’¹⁴⁵

Weak university entrants do need support. Remedial English and mathematics are often only a start with further support required in study methods, logic and assignment writing. Most universities fund such support services. Indigenous students are only a small proportion of students requiring such assistance. In addition, some universities appoint senior students as mentors to new students to introduce them to university life, facilitate their accommodation and other living needs, and ensure they integrate into undergraduate society. Weak Indigenous students do much better after learning with non-Indigenous students than in an Indigenous ghetto.

Schooling, not ethnicity or location, determines access to university. Young men and women from Indigenous and underperforming mainstream schools are without doubt being denied university education. Setting Indigenous participation targets for universities is futile until primary and secondary schooling meets mainstream standards.

10. Trapped in illiteracy on Indigenous lands

Indigenous Australians with poor literacy and numeracy residing in cities and towns have some possibility of employment—they reside in a real economy. In contrast, those living on Indigenous lands have a society without a private sector creating employment. Without literacy, numeracy or a real economy, these Indigenous Australians are going nowhere.

10.1. Pretend jobs and vocational training

For decades, students have ‘graduated’ from Indigenous schools on Indigenous lands without being literate or numerate. Faced with this large population of unemployed (and unemployable) teenagers, governments created pretend jobs for non-literate candidates instead of real jobs. Organisations provide pretend training—courses lasting from a week or two to a year and more—that qualify students for these pretend jobs.

‘Indigenous students are particularly appreciative of high quality lectures, prompt responses from teaching staff, efficient use of technology and well run discussion.’

Aboriginal Health Workers have 'the least educational preparation of any primary health care workers in the world.'

10.1.1. Pretend jobs

Pretend jobs are separate, Indigenous positions for which there are no equivalents in mainstream Australia. They include Aboriginal Health Workers, Assistant Teachers, Aboriginal Community Police Officers, and more recently, Indigenous Rangers. Common features of these pretend jobs are:

- Similar names to mainstream jobs.
- Candidates are not required to be literate or numerate; they are selected from communities on Indigenous lands for their 'cultural affinity with the community.'
- On completion of pretend vocational training, graduates are employed in separate (apartheid) positions only available to Indigenous men and women in Indigenous communities.
- The positions recognise the low level of education and training with very low rates of pay.
- There is no progression from these positions to mainstream careers. Aboriginal Health Worker certificates do not lead to nursing. Assistant Teachers cannot become registered teachers. Indigenous Rangers are not qualified for a ranger's job in a state, territory or federal national park.

Pretend job holders know their jobs are not the equivalent of well-remunerated mainstream employment opportunities in their field. The absence of a career path destroys motivation. Pretend jobs are Australian government apartheid.

10.1.2. Pretend vocational training

Aboriginal Health Workers were modelled on the barefoot doctors in Mao-Tse Tung's desperately poor countryside. However, China's barefoot doctors now run modern medical schools, unlike Aboriginal Health Workers who remain the undertrained and underpaid gatekeepers for access to qualified medical staff.

Training of Aboriginal Health Workers attracted more than 70 training organisations. They were whittled down to 36 by 2011. An additional 95 training organisations deliver courses to Certificate II in Health Support Services. Taking in candidates unable to read, write or count, pretend vocational health training is so abysmal that Aboriginal Health Workers have 'the least educational preparation of any group of primary health care workers in the world.'¹⁴⁶

Assistant Teachers initially had elementary training during missionary years, but with the growth of separate Indigenous schools in the 1970s, most Assistant Teachers were appointed on the basis of their 'traditional cultural knowledge.' The older Assistant Teachers who completed yearlong courses at the Batchelor Institute achieved some literacy and numeracy, but their skills deteriorated with years in Indigenous schools without any further training or re-training. They are not able to design or give lessons to their students to pass NAPLAN tests. More recently appointed Assistant Teachers who have attended short courses complain of not receiving further support. Some have progressed through three-quarters of a certificate, only to find that their course ended before Batchelor Institute staff returned to their school. Not surprisingly, students become frustrated and give up on what training was available. Assistant Teachers are nevertheless in charge of classes in Homeland Learning Centres on the days there are no qualified teachers, and often take classes in Indigenous schools when qualified teachers are not available because of illness or high turnover. Like Aboriginal Health Workers, Assistant Teachers are supposed to act as interpreters in classes taken by qualified teachers who do not speak local languages, but they rarely have enough English to be able to do this effectively. Through no fault of their own, most Assistant Teachers would not be able to pass

Year 3 NAPLAN literacy and numeracy tests. At best they can fill the role of teachers' aides. In 2009, in the Northern Territory, 281 Assistant Teachers were employed by the NT Department of Education in government schools and Homeland Learning Centres.¹⁴⁷ More are employed in Catholic Indigenous schools and paid by Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP). Queensland, Western Australia, and South Australia also have Assistant Teachers.

In response to critiques of Assistant Teachers in charge of classes who cannot spell simple words correctly on a whiteboard, some new two- and three-year part-time courses have been planned. The Commonwealth government is funding training for Assistant Teachers, but these courses will not qualify candidates to register as teachers in any state or territory in Australia.

Youngsters applying to be Aboriginal Community Police Officers in the Northern Territory are instructed to 'complete all sections of the application booklet yourself and in your own handwriting.' Training consists of a 12-week Aboriginal Community Police Officer course at the Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services College in Darwin. This is followed by 12 months of on-the-job training delivered by a senior general duties patrol partner. Aboriginal Community Police Officers can qualify for Certificates II, III and IV of Public Safety (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Policing).¹⁴⁸ This does not qualify them for a job as a police officer in the Northern Territory or in any other state or territory in Australia.

The NSW Police Force, in marked contrast, has developed courses with NSW TAFE in three locations (Casino/Lismore, Dubbo and Sydney) for Aboriginal men and women to enter the mainstream NSW Police Academy in Goulburn where they can then qualify to become members of NSW police. Police force candidates must be able to type at least 40 words a minute to be accepted.

More than 800 Aboriginal Rangers are the most recent and rapidly growing addition to pretend jobs. Equipped with smart uniforms, four-wheel-drive vehicles, and boats, their qualification is also 'traditional knowledge.' There are plans for adult literacy and on-the-job training by non-Indigenous qualified rangers who supervise and manage environmental and land care programs. Traditional knowledge can, of course, contribute to land care, but unless rangers are literate, they cannot safely use pesticides or equipment such as chainsaws without close supervision. Men and women appointed as rangers cannot get a job in a national park in a southern state or territory. There can be no exchange of trainees between Indigenous lands and mainstream national parks. Traditional knowledge is not sufficient to rid the land of the hordes of camels, goats, brumbies and other introduced feral animals destroying Indigenous fauna and flora. After years of neglect, restoring the bush is of urgent environmental concern, but it cannot be achieved without using advanced technology that requires vocational and university training. If they are not to remain janitors of the bush, Aboriginal Rangers must have the same education and training as other Australian rangers.

If they are not to remain janitors of the bush, Aboriginal Rangers must have the same education and training as other Australian rangers.

10.2. Other vocational institutions and courses

A stream of vocational education institutions delivers a broad range of other courses to the illiterate residents of communities on Indigenous lands. Some courses, like 'Suicide Prevention' may be for a week, while others build to Certificates I–IV in trades and disciplines such as business studies or information technology.

The Batchelor Institute is a principal source of training for Assistant Teachers, and Aboriginal Health Workers, Indigenous community workers and social workers. Entry requirements may be more rigorous than for smaller training organisations. Students must be 18 and 'have the support of their community or an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander organisation and have the chance within their community or organisation to undertake practical work experience.'¹⁴⁹ Most courses consist of blocks

Although participants cannot take notes or write assignments, they are awarded Certificates I to IV.

of several weeks at Batchelor, followed by a longer period of study in a community. Qualifications run from Certificates I–IV.

Charles Darwin University (CDU) delivers short courses to more than 100 remote locations in the Northern Territory. Courses include agriculture, marine studies, construction (carpentry, bricklaying, plastering), hospitality, motor mechanics, administration, computing, interpersonal skills, management, business studies, and social welfare. Courses may be as specific as two weeks for an ‘Eight Meter Inshore Coxswain Certificate’ or as general as inter-personal skills. At CDU, the five or six thousand remote vocational students comprise a third or more of total vocational enrolments, but only account for about 15% of vocational instruction hours delivered annually.¹⁵⁰

In addition to courses delivered in Indigenous townships, CDU negotiates agreements with Outstation Resource Agencies to supply vocational courses to remote outstations/homelands. Two CDU staff members typically visit small outstation/homeland communities to conduct ‘audits’ of the skills that the men and women in these communities wish to acquire. Potential candidates are asked about the training they have completed but not about their levels of literacy and numeracy. A menu of courses is read out from which candidates choose the ones they wish to take. Men and women in remote communities are led to believe that by signing up for the courses, they can become electricians, motor mechanics, computer operators, or business managers.

Some courses are delivered to very remote locations from smartly equipped mobile classrooms, while others are held in suitable local premises in townships and other centres so that students can be housed in motels or similar accommodation.

Although the participants cannot take notes or write assignments, they are awarded Certificates I–IV—only to realise that their new certificate does not lead to a job. There is, nevertheless, no shortage of candidates. Participants receive CDEP payments and travel and accommodation expenses for attending courses, so there is a constant churn of travel to vocational courses. Townships are constantly busy with training, and outstations/homelands can empty as candidates take their families to enjoy a break from the boredom of everyday life. Children are taken out of school while parents attend courses.

Delivery of training must change to target specific job opportunities. When a job and an applicant have been identified, training should be provided for that job.

10.3. CDEP—Indigenous ‘work for the dole’

CDEP is an Indigenous ‘work for the dole’ program created in the 1970s. Originally intended to provide training to enable Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in remote communities to transition to mainstream employment, CDEP rapidly evolved to fill several other roles.¹⁵¹

- Because communities on Indigenous lands do not have private housing or other private sectors, they have no income from rates or body corporate fees. CDEP is used to pay for rubbish collection, lawn mowing, and other services normally paid from this income.
- Communal enterprises such as art centres, supermarkets, and construction firms benefit from having employees paid by CDEP—they can run at a loss.
- Until recently, government departments such as education and health also benefited from employees paid by CDEP, rather than from departmental budgets.
- CDEP became a source of patronage, providing top-up incomes for well-connected residents, who receive this payment in addition to existing single parent, Newstart, and other allowances. The more favoured recipients became CDEP supervisors.

- An underlying belief that Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders are not capable of mainstream effort and productivity limited CDEP positions to 15 to 20 hours a week paid at \$15 per hour with the expectation of minimal effort. CDEP has thus become an entitlement to additional welfare, with CDEP positions such as home duties and payment for attendance at funerals. Not surprisingly, in the bush CDEP has earned the name of 'sit-down' money.

At its peak in the mid-2000s there were some 35,000 CDEP recipients, the majority in capital cities and regional towns amid tight labour markets, absorbing \$500 million of public funding.¹⁵² The Howard government ended CDEP in mainstream labour markets in July 2007. It foreshadowed the scheme's closure in remote communities by transferring CDEP recipients who worked in schools, health services or councils into to real jobs in those organisations. The Rudd government continued this policy, moving CDEP recipients to real jobs in NT townships and shires. A major reform came when the administration of CDEP was moved to Centrelink, reducing patronage, exposing egregious 'double dipping,' and generally improving administrative probity.

It is widely recognised that CDEP compounds the difficulties of filling real jobs such as cleaning schools in remote communities. Students tell teachers they do not need to attend school and learn to read, write and count because they do not need to be literate and numerate to get a CDEP job.

Jenny Macklin, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, has attempted to abolish CDEP four times since 2008. She has now agreed to a modified five-year program that 'grandfathers' 4,000 older (undefined) CDEP recipients. The Shadow Coalition Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Nigel Scullion, though believing CDEP should be reformed, concurred that scrapping CDEP would 'leave Indigenous people vulnerable.' This flawed Indigenous 'work for the dole' is thus set to continue.

10.4. Adult literacy and numeracy

The high numbers of Indigenous men and women with negligible literacy and numeracy are a supply constraint to employment. Residents are not qualified for the few real jobs that exist on Indigenous lands.

A typical adult literacy course on an outstation/homeland recruits perhaps eight men and women who are paid CDEP allowances for a two-week course. The participants have not learned to read and write or count at school. Computers are brought in because it is easier to acquire elementary writing skills with a keyboard than with pen and paper. At the end of 10 days' instruction, participants can read and write simple sentences, but they have no use for their new skill in their daily life. A year later, another adult literacy course comes to the community. Eight participants are again recruited. Some overlap from the previous year. But they, of course, have forgotten what they had learned. At the end of the course, all can again read and write simple sentences. Many of these candidates would like to be able to read a story with their children, read how many tablets to take the next time they have to take medicine, and manage their bank account online.

Townships with their larger populations can provide adult literacy and numeracy courses. It is difficult, however, to persuade teenagers (let alone adults) who have missed out on schooling to commit to the several months of effort to attend a TAFE literacy or numeracy course anywhere in Australia. Bob Beadman, former Coordinator General for Remote Services, repeatedly pointed to the 'failure to take punitive action against adults declining jobs and training.'¹⁵³ Newstart rules that require recipients of unemployment relief to either be employed or in training were initially not implemented in Indigenous townships because Indigenous people were regarded as being different from other Australians, and more recently because

Bob Beadman repeatedly pointed to the 'failure to take punitive action against adults declining jobs and training.'

of the sheer difficulty of persuading them that the effort is worthwhile. Remedial education is more likely to be taken up when combined with employment in real jobs.

11. Conclusion and recommendations

Australian governments—federal, state and territory—have been concerned with low Indigenous literacy and numeracy for more than a decade. Despite the small number of Indigenous students and Australia's large resources, progress is slow because governments do not consistently implement the quality schooling that has delivered literacy and numeracy throughout Australia for a century.

11.1. Reasons for failure

In 2008, Australian governments dropped the target of educational equality for Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders, replacing it with the soft target of 'halving the gap' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students by 2018.

NAPLAN results for the four years from 2008 to 2011 show only Queensland and Western Australia making significant progress towards that target; a target that will still see half the students in Indigenous schools in the Northern Territory, Queensland, Western Australia, and South Australia fail reading and numeracy tests in 2018.

Targets are easy to set and change when they get too hard. Governments and education departments refuse to face the evidence that school ethos and classroom instruction are at the heart of education problems. The failure to reform welfare also contributes to high failure rates through low expectations and attendance rates.

Indigenous students have the same intellectual capabilities as non-Indigenous students. The children of working Indigenous parents achieve the same NAPLAN results as the children of non-Indigenous parents. The education industry's focus on indigeneity is a politically driven distraction. So is remoteness and English as a second language. Non-Indigenous remote schools have high NAPLAN achievement rates. Migrant children are taught English successfully.

About 200 Indigenous schools are at the extreme of failing Indigenous performance. The Northern Territory's more than 40 Homeland Learning Centres, where students do not even have full-time qualified teachers, are at the bottom of Australia's more than 9,000 schools. Only 200 out of 2,000 students starting in Indigenous schools in 2012 are on a path to mainstream education. Each year, Indigenous schools add 2,000 non-literate and non-numerate teenagers to existing welfare-dependent communities on Indigenous lands.

Underperforming mainstream schools in cities and towns betray both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. The NAPLAN performance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in these schools cannot be fixed without improving the performance of the non-Aboriginal students sitting next to them.

Indigenous education is well funded. Most of the more than \$300 million Indigenous-specific expenditure, however, is spent on programs for which there is no evidence of positive impact. These programs are counterproductive because they take time and energy away from classroom teaching.

11.2. Recommendations

'Halving the gap' is not an acceptable target. Governments must have the objective of equal outcomes for all Australian students—especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders—within the decade.

Non-performing and underperforming schools must perform at mainstream standards. Principals must be given sufficient autonomy in hiring and firing, budgeting

Indigenous students have the same intellectual capabilities as non-Indigenous students.

and managing schools to be held accountable for NAPLAN results. Specifically, principals must be adequately funded for and have control over:

- hiring and managing staff
- managing capital budgets
- control of operating expenses, including the right to reject programs they consider unproductive, and
- managing before and after school, vacation and similar programs.

Student, parent and school expectations for attendance and education must change for children of welfare-dependent families. Government initiatives to improve attendance and raise expectations are undermined by their failure to reform welfare and to increase Indigenous employment. Training reforms should therefore:

- abolish pretend vocational training and pretend jobs, and
- link training for the unemployed to actual job offers.

Indigenous-specific programs are counter-productive because they take time and energy away from classroom teaching.

Appendix A: NAPLAN failure rates by state and territory

Chart A.1: NAPLAN failure rates, New South Wales

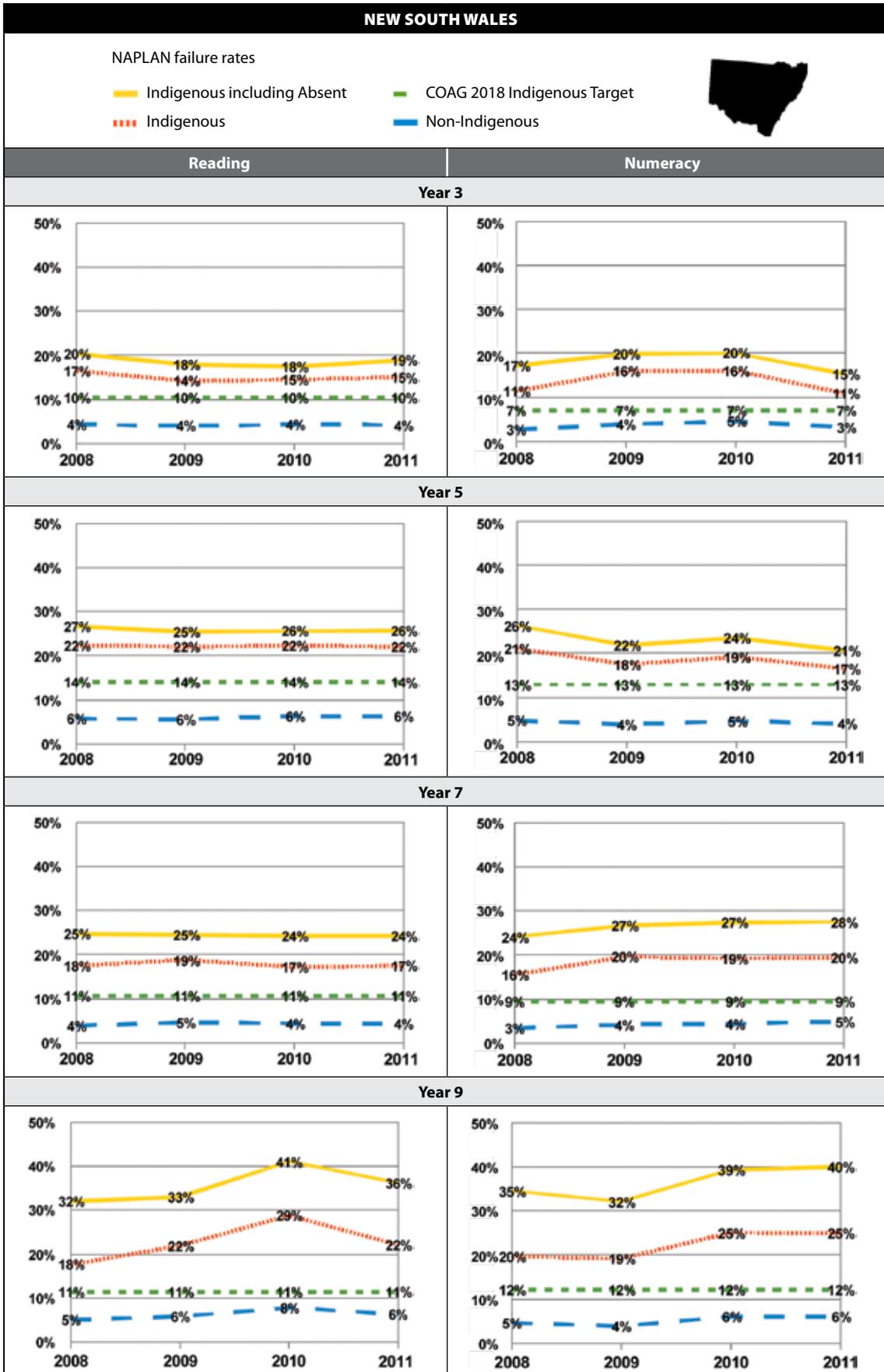


Chart A.2: NAPLAN failure rates, Victoria

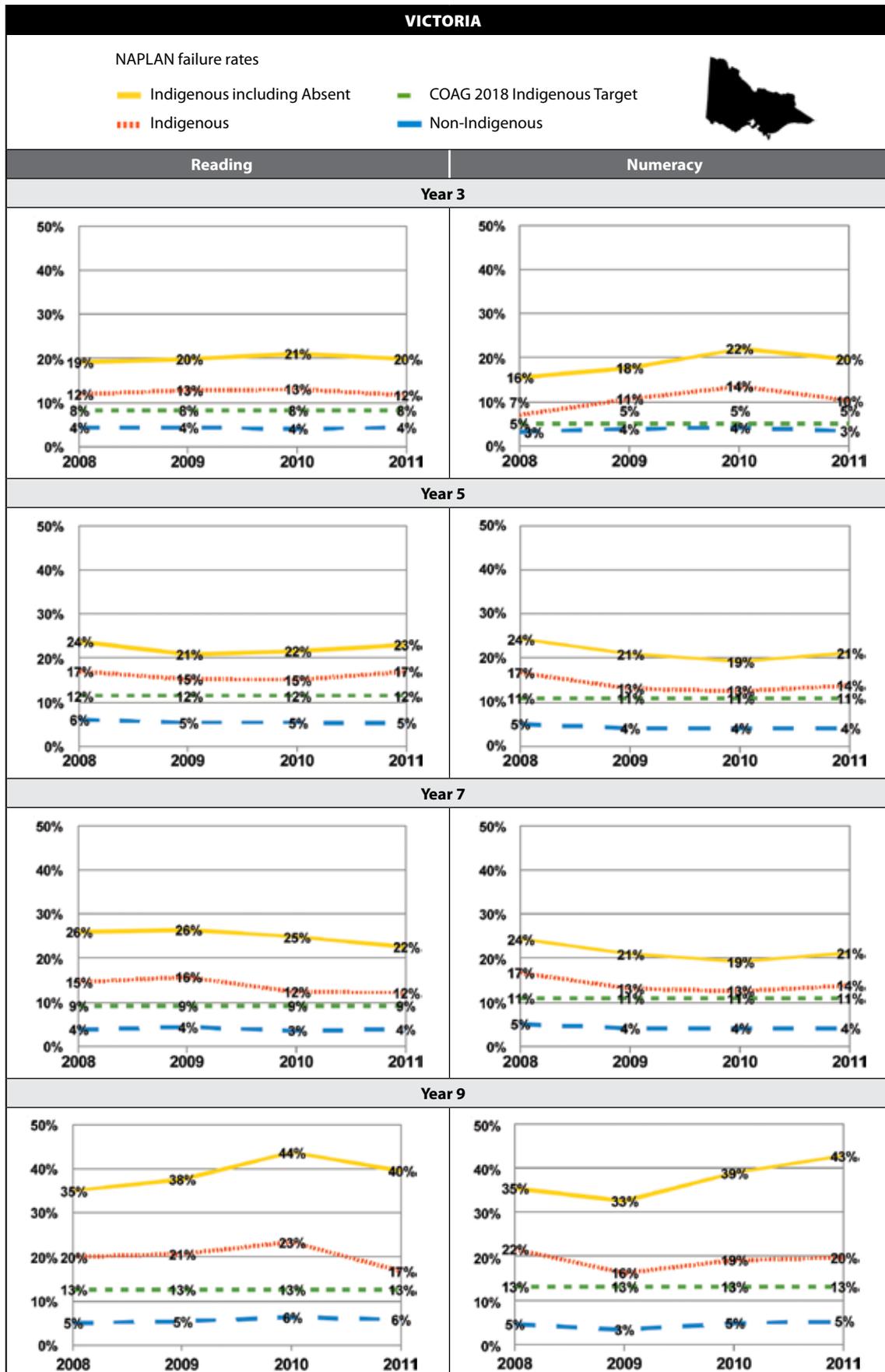


Chart A.3: NAPLAN failure rates, Queensland

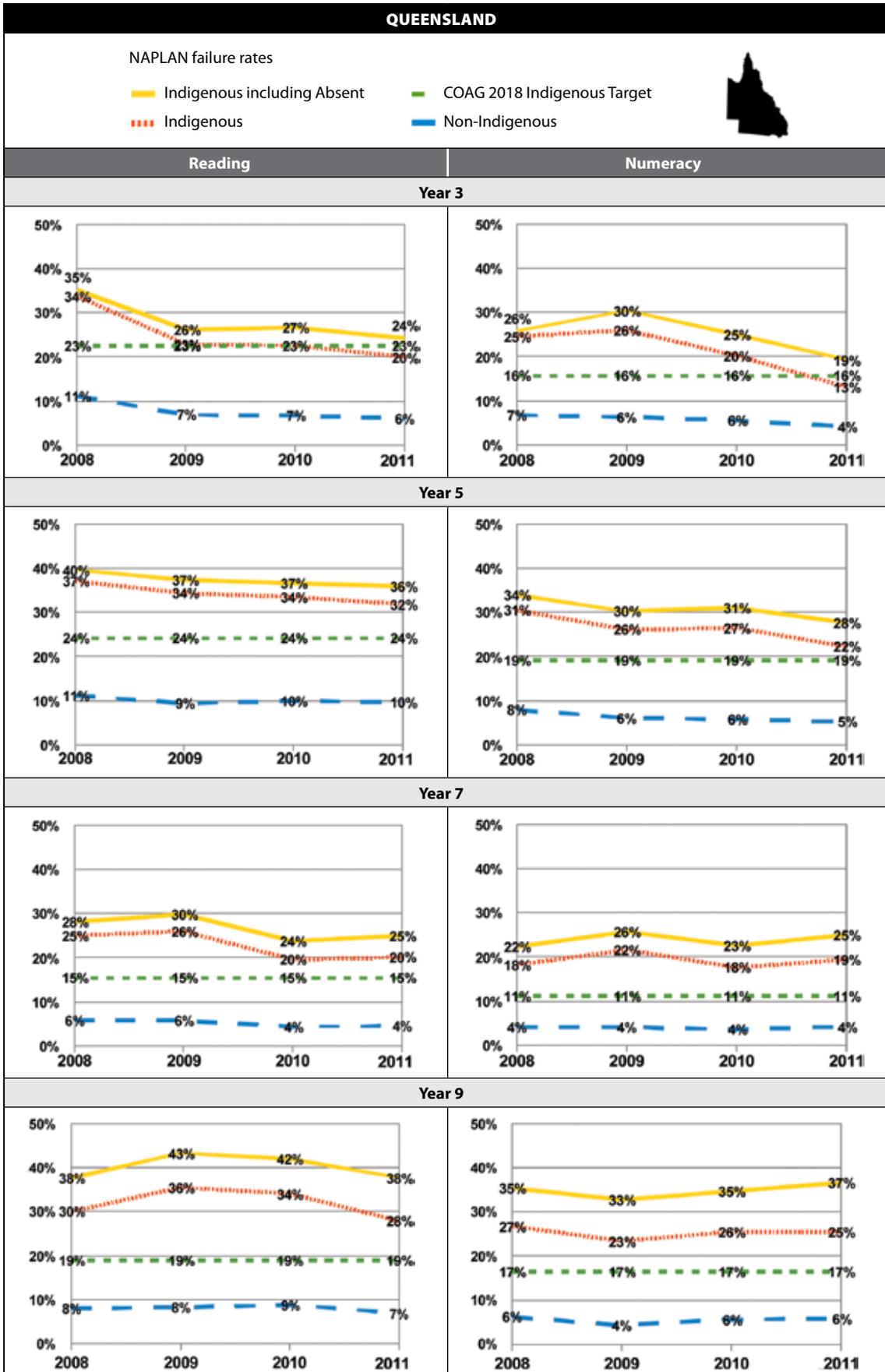


Chart A.4: NAPLAN failure rates, South Australia

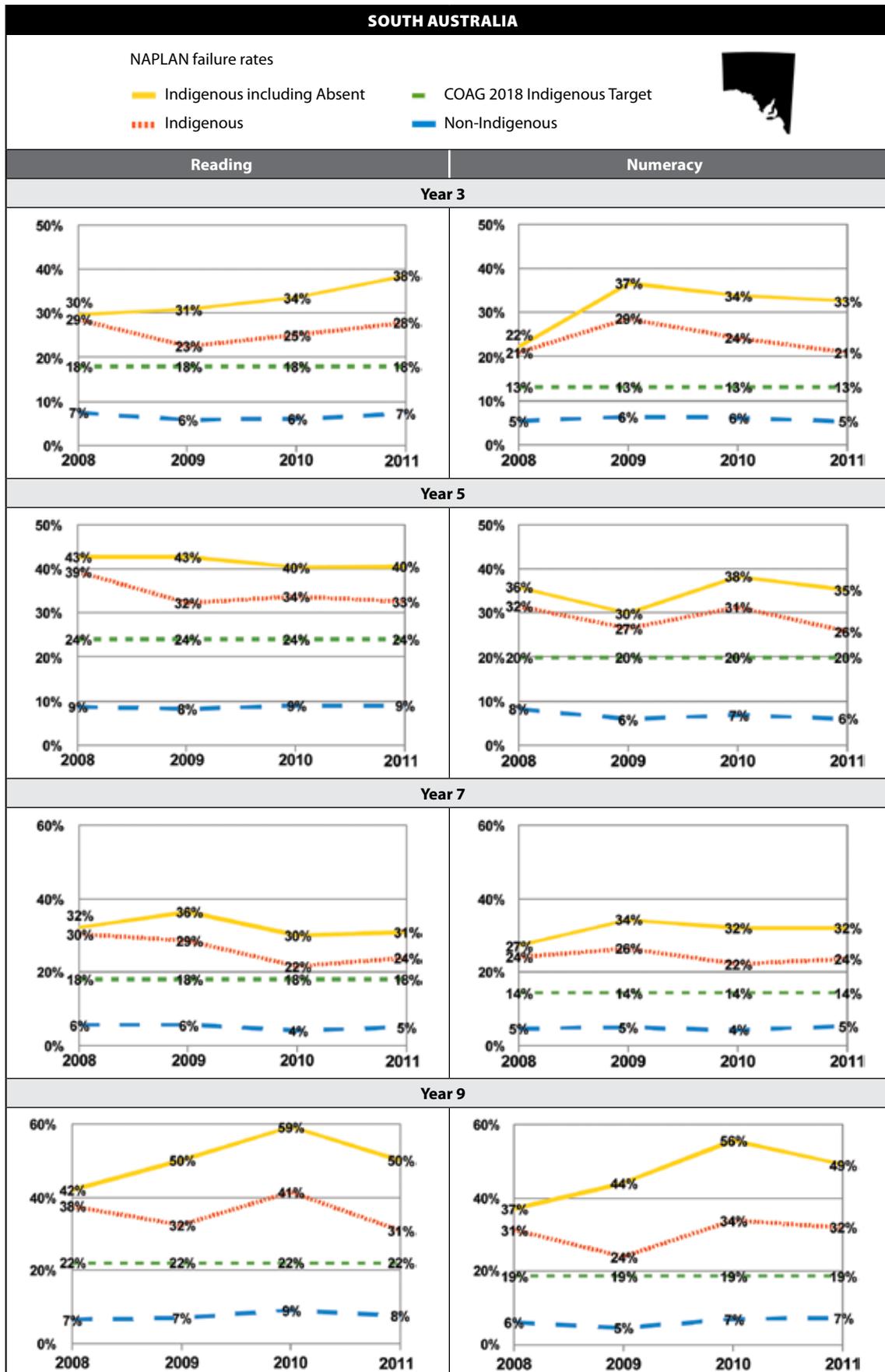


Chart A.5: NAPLAN failure rates, Western Australia

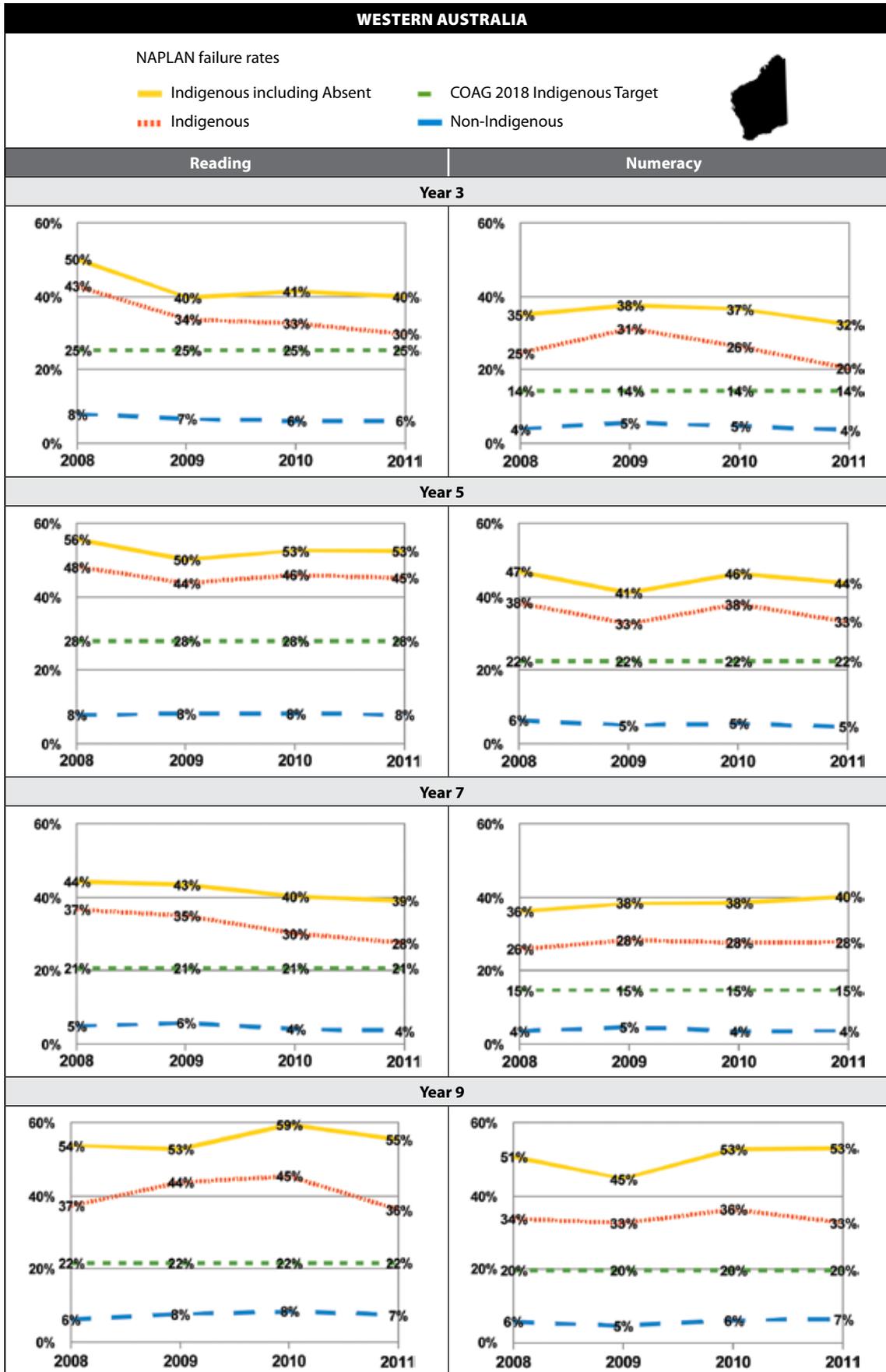


Chart A.7: NAPLAN failure rates, Northern Territory

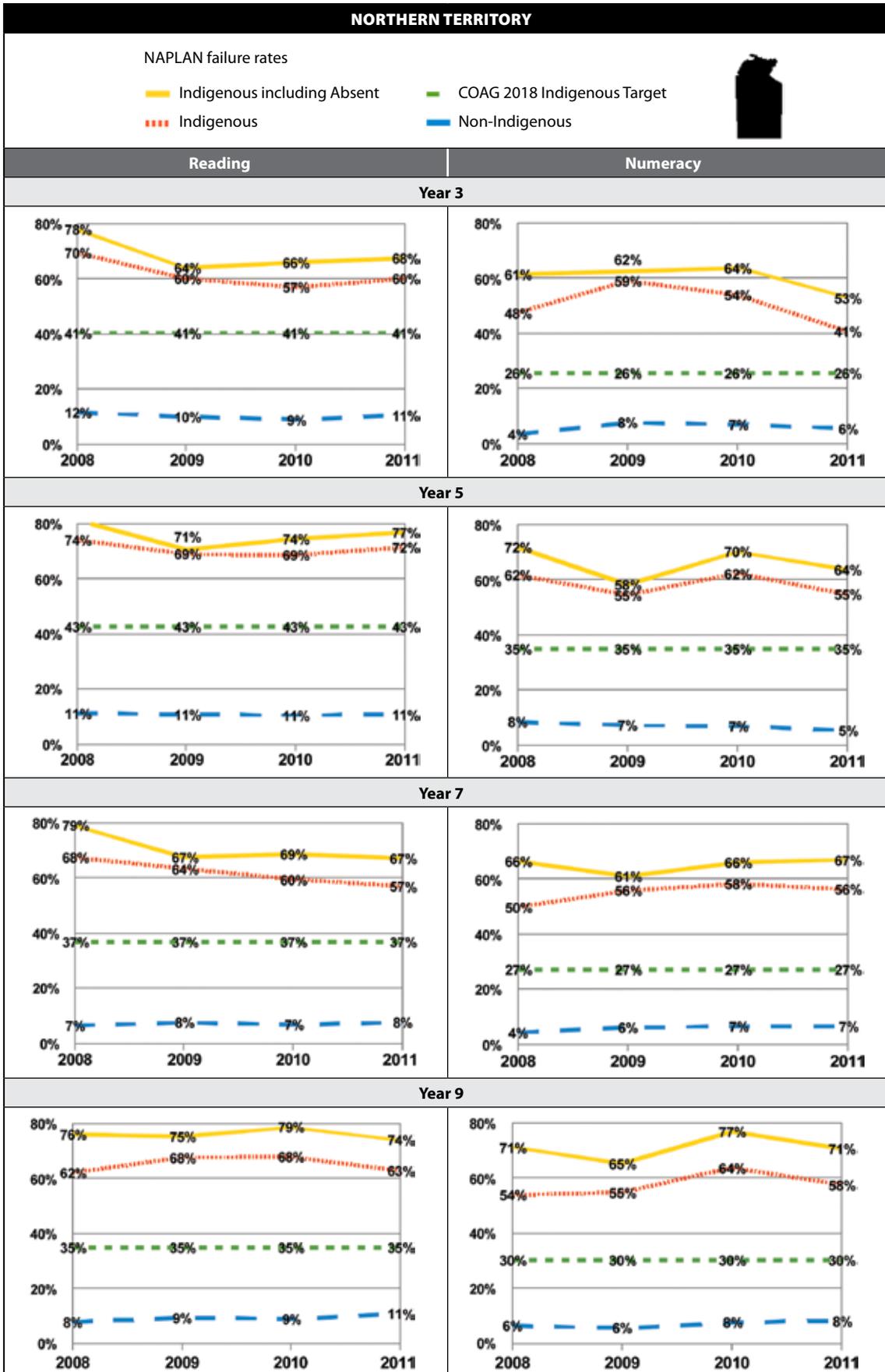


Chart A.8: NAPLAN failure rates, Australian Capital Territory

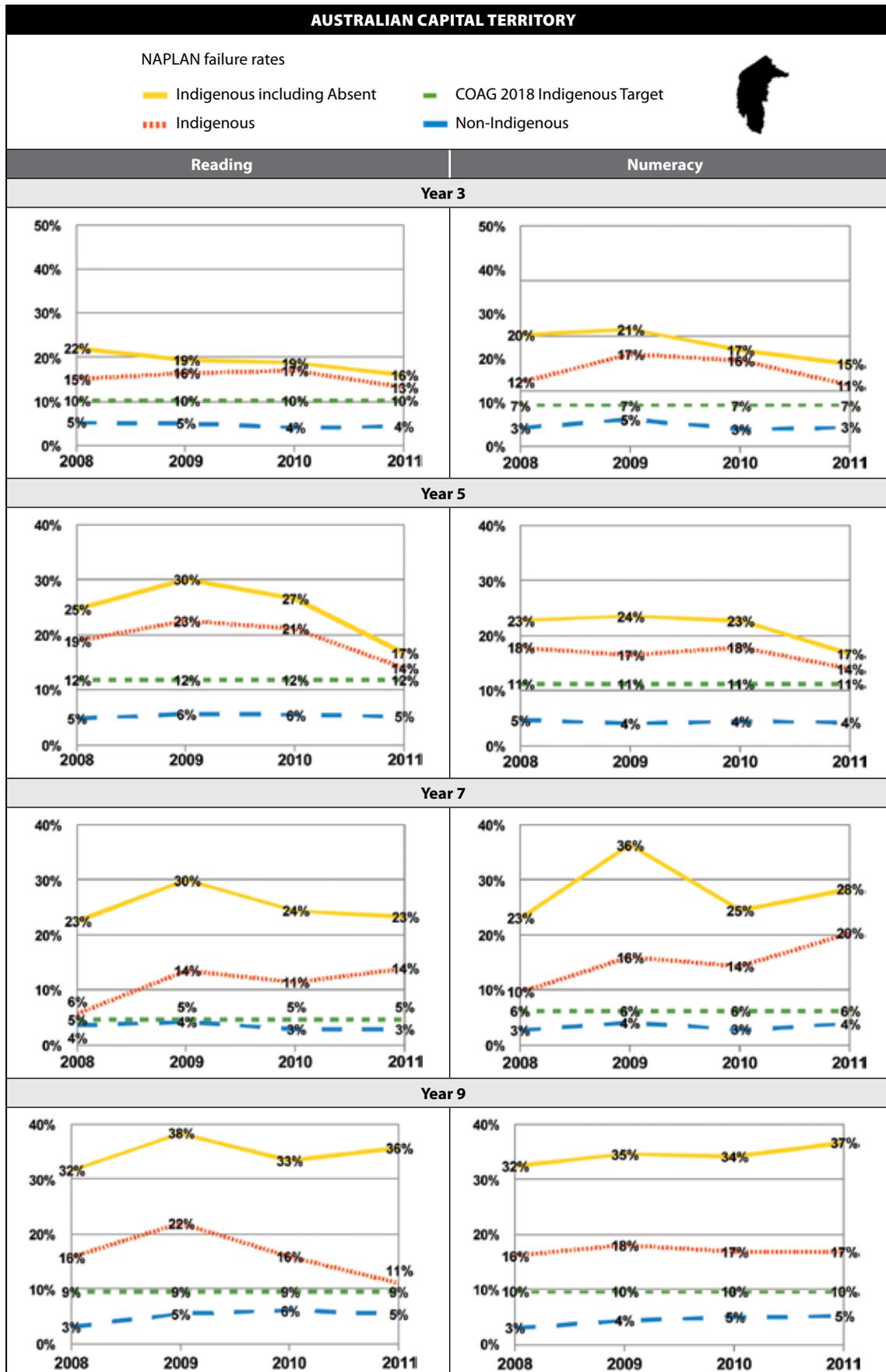
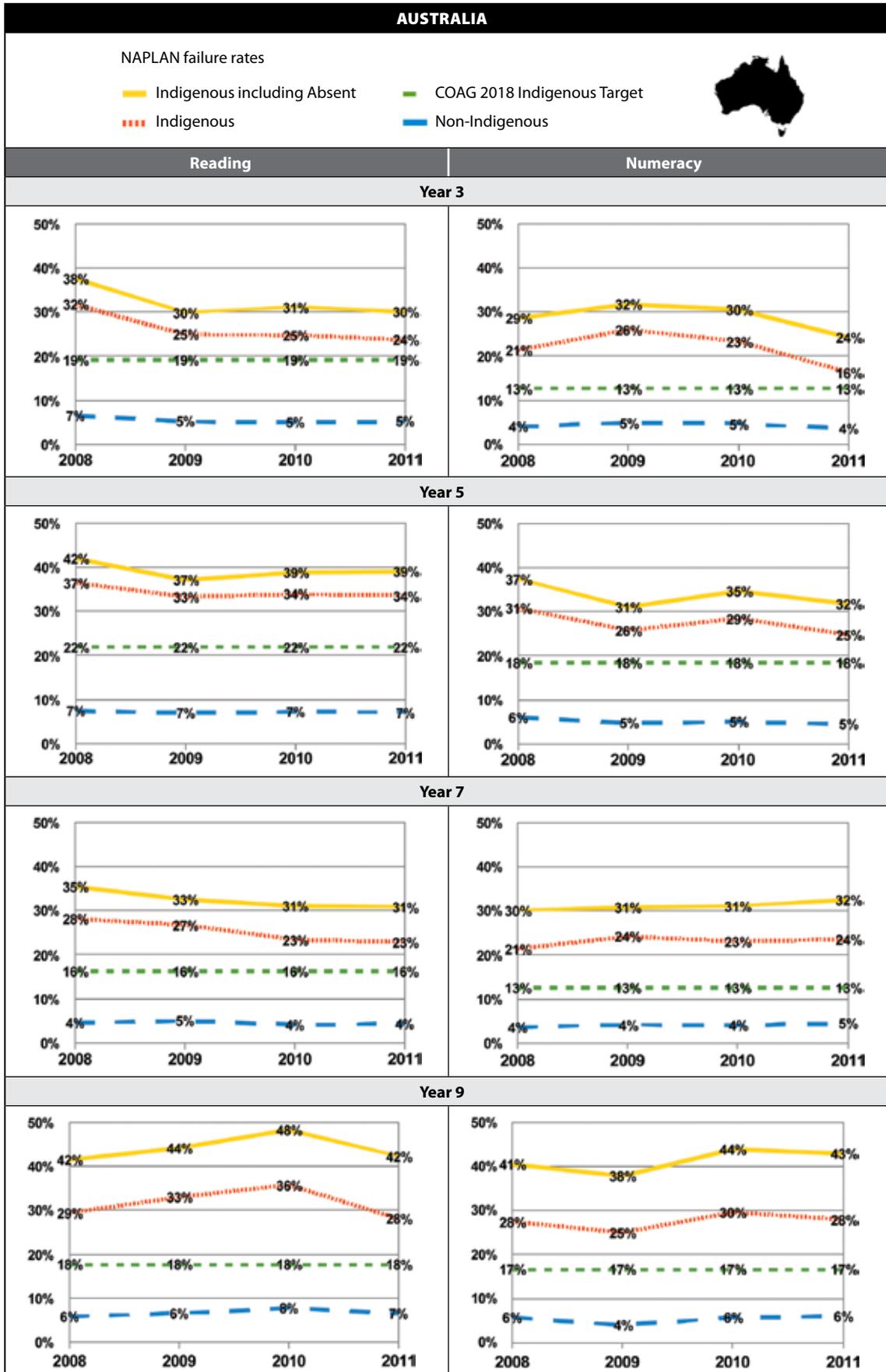


Chart A.9: NAPLAN failure rates, Australia



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Emeritus Professor Helen Hughes has worked in the economics of development for many years, including a period of senior management at the World Bank followed by membership of the United Nations Committee for Development Planning. She returned to Australia to a chair in economics at the Australian National University, where she was also the executive director of the National Centre of Development Studies. She was the Distinguished Fellow of the Economics Society of Australia in 2004.

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