

Education Research Paper

The Vast Majority of Disadvantaged Schools are Public Schools

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Summary

Data drawn from the My School website show that school systems in Australia are highly segregated by socio-economic background both nationally and in each state, although the extent of the segregation varies between states.

Highly and medium disadvantaged schools are over-represented in public schools and under-represented in private schools. In contrast, highly and medium advantaged schools are under-represented in public schools and over-represented in private schools.

Public schools account for the overwhelming majority of all highly and medium disadvantaged schools in Australia and in every state. There are very few highly and medium disadvantaged Catholic and Independent schools. Across Australia, there are only 43 highly disadvantaged Catholic schools and 35 highly disadvantaged Independent schools compared to 761 highly disadvantaged public schools. There are only 251 Catholic schools and 98 Independent schools that are medium disadvantaged compared to 3049 public schools.

Public schools account for 91% of all highly disadvantaged schools and 90% of medium disadvantaged schools. The proportion of highly disadvantaged schools ranges from 77% in Western Australia to 96% in NSW and Tasmania and 98% in South Australia. In the case of medium disadvantaged schools, it ranges from 79% in the Northern Territory to 93% in Western Australia.

Catholic schools account for only 5% of all highly disadvantaged schools and 7% of medium disadvantaged schools. The proportion of highly disadvantaged schools ranges from zero in South Australia and the ACT to 13% in Western Australia. For medium disadvantaged schools it ranges from zero in the ACT to 13% in the Northern Territory.

Independent schools account for 4% of all highly disadvantaged schools and 3% of medium disadvantaged schools. The proportion of highly disadvantaged schools ranges from zero in Tasmania and the ACT to 10% in Western Australia. The medium disadvantaged proportion ranges from zero in the ACT to 8% in Tasmania and the Northern Territory.

Public schools account for about half or more of highly advantaged and medium advantaged schools, but the proportions are much less than for highly and medium disadvantaged schools. Public schools account for 49% of all highly advantaged schools and it ranges from zero in the Northern Territory and 39% in Queensland to 56% in Tasmania. Public schools also account for 53% of medium advantaged schools, with a range from 41% in Tasmania to 62% in the ACT.

On the other hand, Catholic and Independent schools account for much higher proportions of highly and medium advantaged schools than highly and medium disadvantaged schools. Catholic schools account for 24% of all highly advantaged schools, ranging from zero in Tasmania to 30% in Queensland. Independent schools account for 27% of highly advantaged schools with a range from zero in Northern Territory to 44% in Tasmania.

Catholic schools account for 31% of medium advantaged schools, ranging from 21% in the Northern Territory to 41% in Tasmania. Independent schools account for 15% of medium advantaged schools with a range from 7% in the ACT to 38% in the Northern Territory.

Highly or medium disadvantaged schools also comprise a much larger proportion of all public schools than Catholic and Independent sectors in all states. Over 60% of public schools are highly or medium disadvantaged compared to 18% of Catholic schools and just over 13% of Independent

schools. In contrast, 82% of Catholic schools and 88% of Independent schools are highly or medium advantaged schools compared to under 40% of public schools.

Twelve per cent of public schools are highly disadvantaged compared to only 3% of Catholic schools and 4% of Independent schools. The public school proportion ranges from just 1% in the ACT to a massive 71% in the Northern Territory with the next highest being 24% in Tasmania. The Catholic school proportion ranges from zero in the ACT to 38% in the Northern Territory while that for Independent schools ranges from zero in the ACT to 37% in the Northern Territory.

Just under 50% of public schools are medium disadvantaged compared to 15% of Catholic schools and 10% of Independent schools. Around 50% or more of public schools are medium disadvantaged in every state except Tasmania and the Northern Territory, with a range from 9% in the ACT to 58% in Tasmania. The proportion of Catholic schools that are medium disadvantaged ranges from zero in the ACT to 33% in Tasmania while that for Independent schools is from zero in the ACT to 36% in Tasmania.

Highly advantaged and medium advantaged schools comprise a much higher proportion of Catholic and Independent schools than of public schools in all states. Across Australia, less than 10% of public schools are highly advantaged compared to 18% of Catholic schools and 34% of Independent schools. The proportion for public schools ranges from zero in the Northern Territory and only 5% in Queensland to 34% in the ACT. The Catholic school proportion ranges from zero in the Northern Territory to 38% in the ACT and that for Independent schools from zero in the Northern Territory to 75% in the ACT.

Just under 30% of public schools are medium advantaged compared to 65% of Catholic schools and 53% of Independent schools. The proportion of public schools that are medium advantaged ranges from 7% in the Northern Territory to 51% in the ACT. The Catholic school proportion is over 60% in all states except the Northern Territory while that for Independent schools is 50% or more in all states except Tasmania, the ACT and the Northern Territory.

Introduction

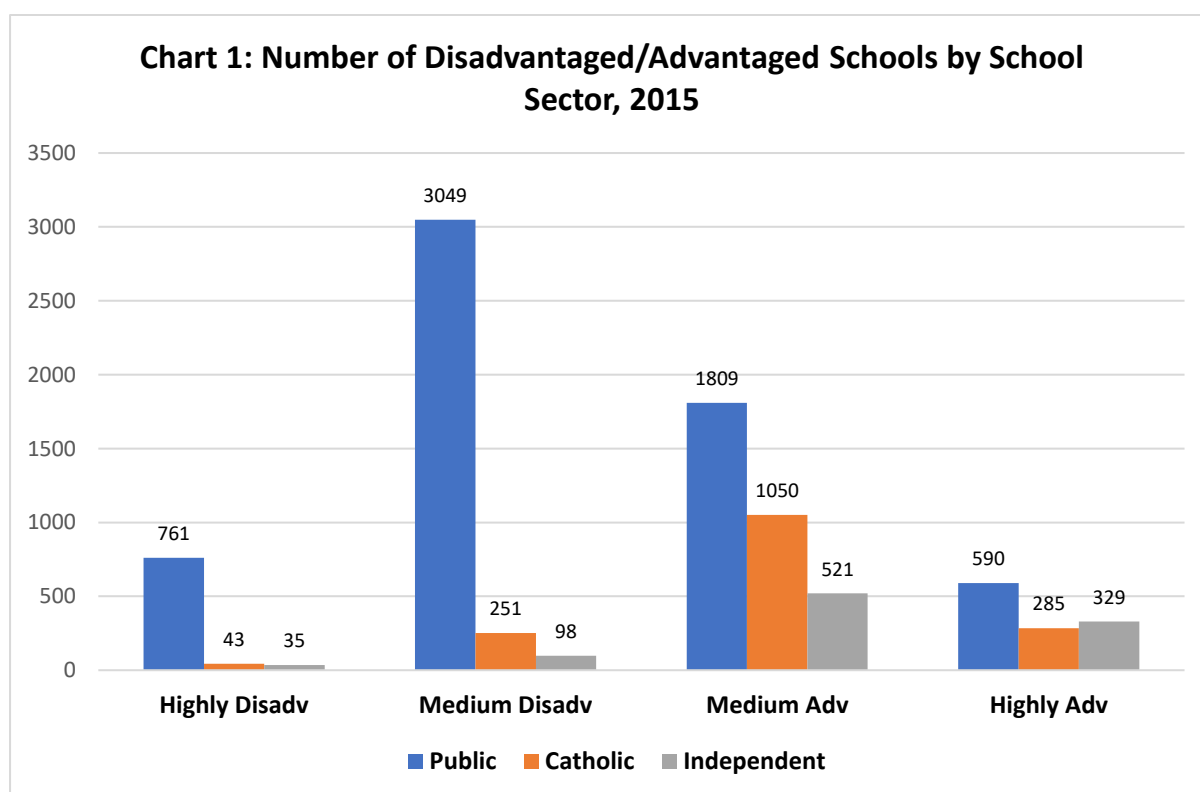
A study published recently in the [Australian Educational Researcher \(Thompson et.al. 2019\)](#) provides data to compare student background characteristics for public, Catholic and Independent schools. However, the study does not fully analyse differences in student characteristics as it largely focusses on funding differences between the sectors, in particular, private funding of schools.

The data is drawn from the My School website and was provided to the researchers by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. As such, it provides a rare opportunity to use official aggregated data from My School to analyse student composition in Australian schools. This paper presents the data for Australia and by disadvantage/advantage category across the states. Charts on the composition of schools in each state are in the Appendix.

The study categorises schools according to their rank on the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA). Schools are sorted into four categories: Low (ICSEA 900 and less), Medium–Low (ICSEA from 901 to 1000), Medium–High (ICSEA from 1001 to 1100) and High (ICSEA more than 1100). These are very broad categories that include large differences in school composition. The categories are referred here as highly disadvantaged, medium disadvantaged, medium advantaged and highly advantaged. Data on ICSEA were not available for 651 of the 9472 schools in Australia in 2015, including 465 special schools. Nearly 75% of special schools in 2015 were public schools.

Australian overview

The overwhelming majority of disadvantaged schools in Australia are public schools. Public schools account for 761 out of 839 highly disadvantaged schools and 3,049 out of 3,398 medium disadvantaged schools [Chart 1]. In comparison, there are only 43 highly disadvantaged Catholic schools and only 35 highly disadvantaged Independent schools. Furthermore, there are only 251 medium disadvantaged Catholic schools and 98 Independent schools.

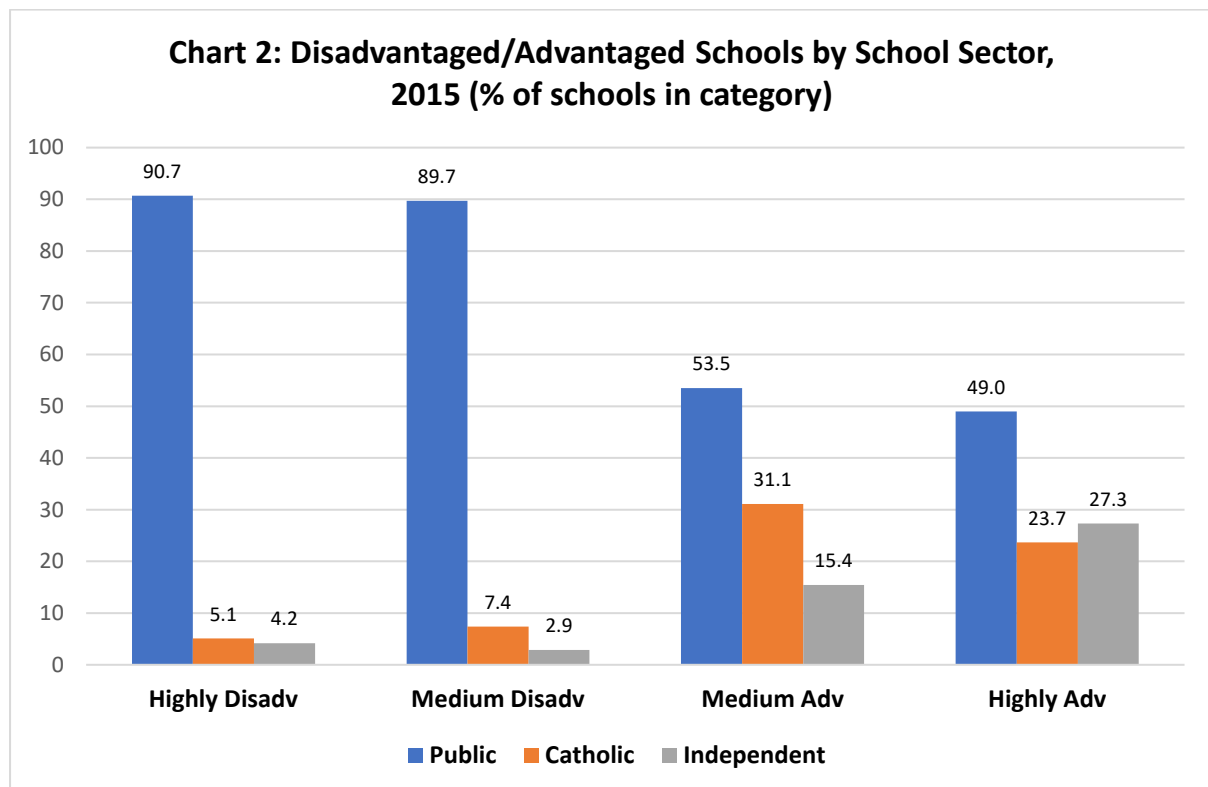


Source: Thompson et.al 2019.

Public schools also account for the majority of medium advantaged and highly advantaged schools, but there are many more disadvantaged than advantaged public schools. Some 3,810 public schools are highly or medium disadvantaged compared to 2,399 highly or medium advantaged schools.

In contrast, there are many more advantaged schools than disadvantaged schools in the Catholic and Independent sectors. There are 1,335 medium or highly advantaged Catholic schools compared to 294 highly or medium disadvantaged schools and 850 medium or highly advantaged Independent schools compared to 133 highly or medium disadvantaged schools.

Public schools account for 90.7% of all highly disadvantaged schools while Catholic schools account for only 5.1% and Independent schools 4.2% [Chart 2]. Public schools also account for 89.7% of medium disadvantaged schools compared to 7.4% in the Catholic sector and 2.9% in the Independent sector.

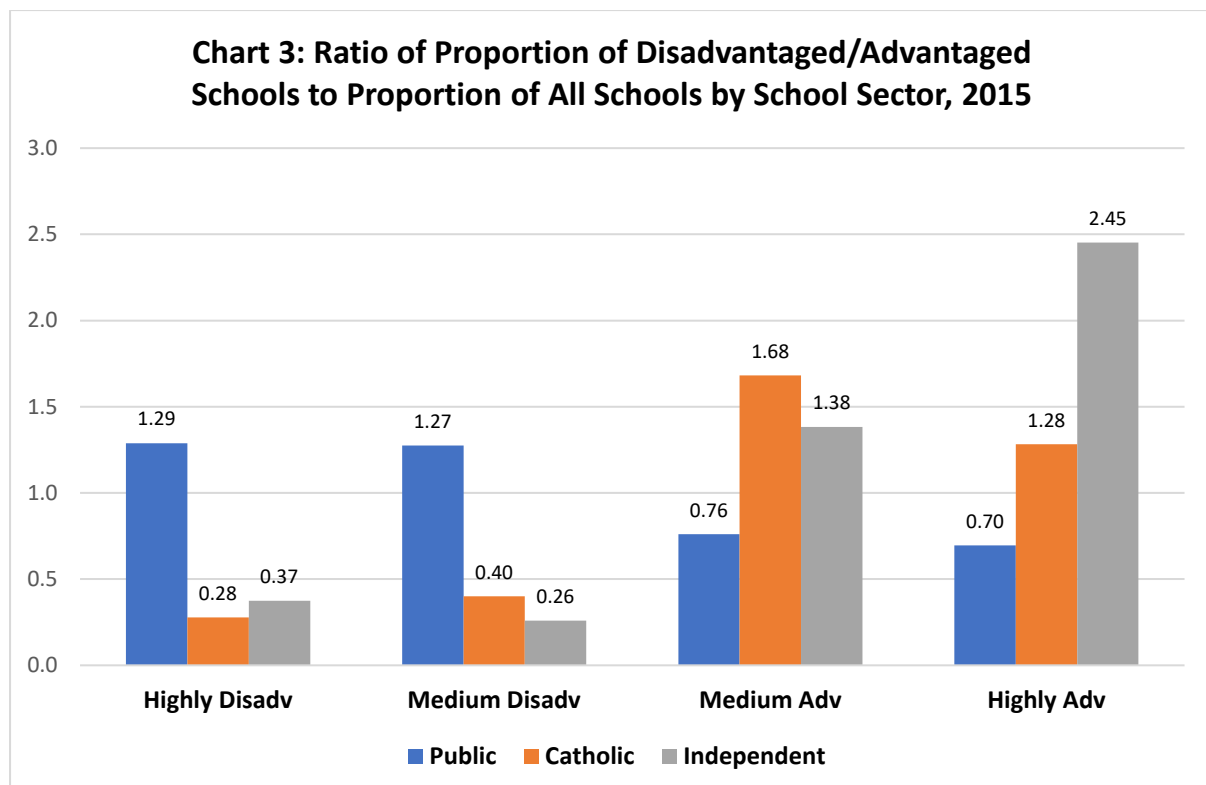


Source: Thompson et.al 2019.

Highly and medium disadvantaged schools are over-represented in public schools and under-represented in private schools. While public schools account for 90% of all highly and medium disadvantaged schools they only account for 70% of all schools. Catholic schools account for only 5% of all highly disadvantaged schools and 7% of all medium disadvantaged schools compared to 19% of all schools. Independent schools account for 4% of all highly disadvantaged and 3% of medium disadvantaged schools compared to 11% of all schools.

In contrast, highly and medium advantaged schools are under-represented in public schools and over-represented in private schools. Public schools account for 49% of all highly advantaged schools and 54% of medium advantaged schools compared to 70% of all schools. Catholic schools account for 24% of all highly advantaged schools and 31% of medium disadvantaged schools compared to 19% of all schools. Independent schools account for 27% of highly advantaged schools and 15% of medium advantaged schools compared to 11% of all schools.

These differences can be expressed in the ratios of the proportion disadvantaged/advantaged schools to the proportion of all schools in each sector. The proportion of highly and medium disadvantaged schools accounted for by public schools is 1.3 times the public school proportion of all schools while the Catholic and Independent school proportions are only 0.3-0.4 of their proportion of all schools [Chart 3]. On the other hand, the public school proportion of highly advantaged schools is only 0.7 of its proportion of all schools while that for Independent schools is 2.5 times its proportion of all its schools and the Catholic school proportion is 1.3 times its proportion of all its schools. The public school proportion of medium advantaged schools is 0.8 of its proportion of all schools while the Catholic and Independent school proportions are 1.7 and 1.4 times their proportion of all schools.

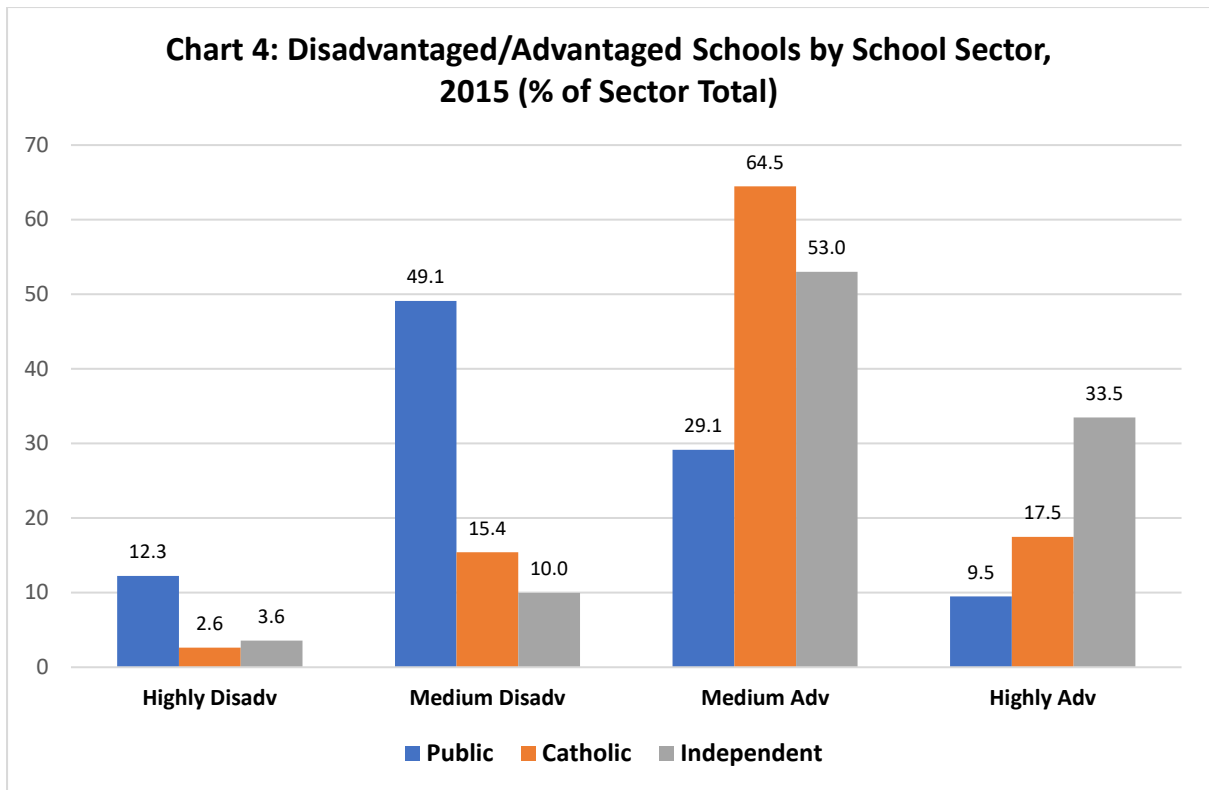


Highly and medium disadvantaged schools also comprise a much higher proportion of public schools than for private schools. Highly disadvantaged schools comprise 12.3% of public schools compared to only 2.6% of Catholic schools and 3.6% of Independent schools [Chart 4]. Nearly 50% of public schools are medium disadvantaged schools compared to only 15.4% of Catholic schools and 10% of Independent schools. Just over 60% of public schools are highly or medium disadvantaged schools compared to only 18% of Catholic schools and 13.6% of Independent schools.

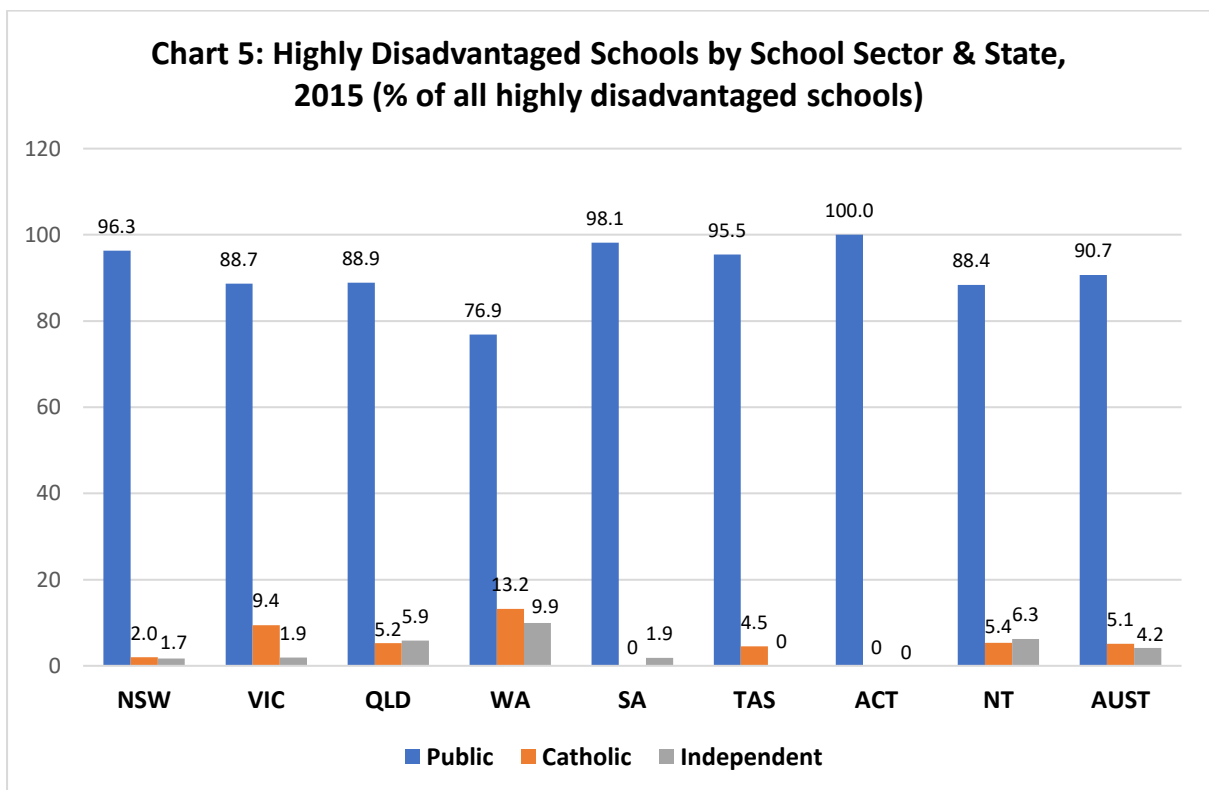
In contrast, the large majority of private schools are highly advantaged or medium advantaged - 82% of all Catholic schools and 88.5% of all Independent schools are classified as highly or medium advantaged. One-third of all Independent schools and 17.5% of Catholic schools are highly advantaged compared to only 9.5% of public schools.

Highly disadvantaged schools

Public schools account for around 90% or more of highly disadvantaged schools in every state except Western Australia where they account for 77% [Chart 5]. They account for 98% of highly disadvantaged schools in South Australia and 96% in NSW and Tasmania. There is only one highly disadvantaged school in the ACT and it is a public school.



Source: Thompson et.al 2019.



Source: Thompson et.al 2019.

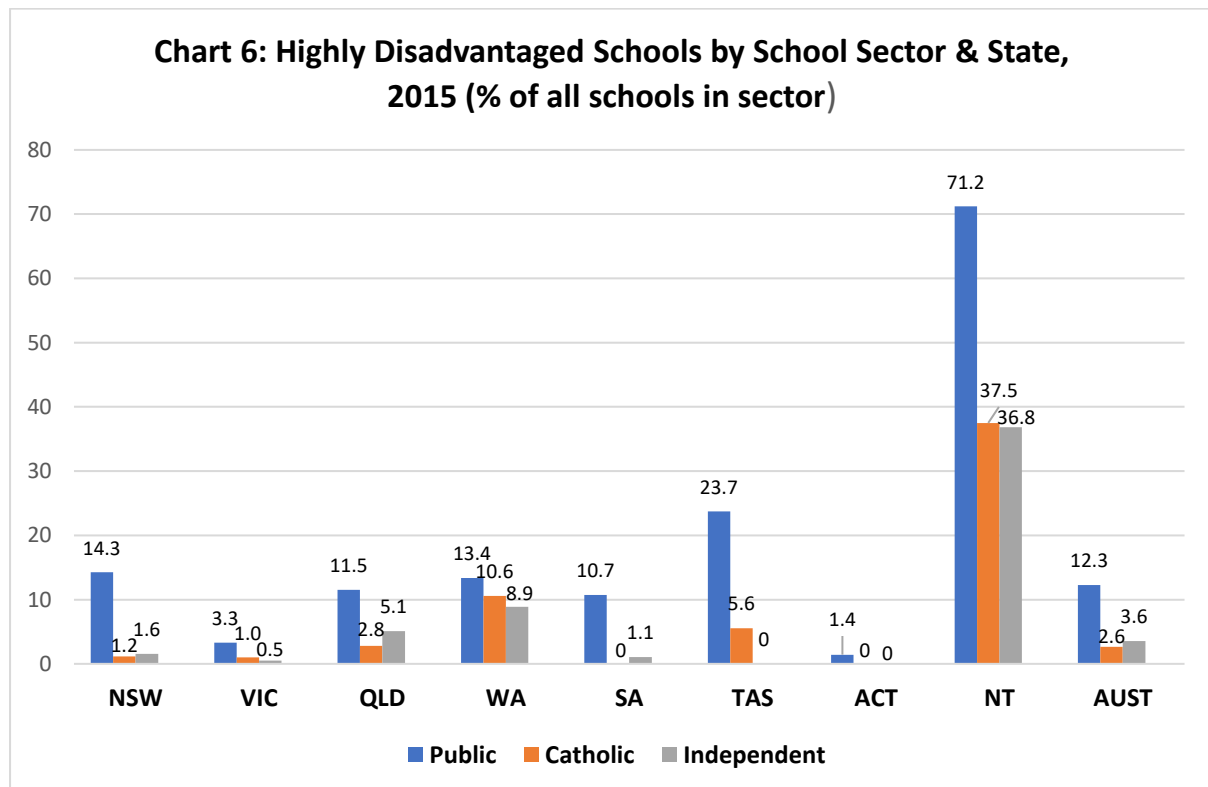
Catholic and Independents schools account for a very small proportion of highly disadvantaged schools in most states. Catholic schools account for only 5% or less of highly disadvantaged schools in every state except Victoria (9.4%) and Western Australia (13.3%). Independent schools account

for only 2% or less of highly disadvantaged schools in every state except Queensland (5.9%), Western Australia (9.9%) and the Northern Territory (6.3%).

There is considerable variation between the states in the proportion of public schools that are highly disadvantaged [Chart 6]. Highly disadvantaged schools account for 71.2% of public schools in the Northern Territory and 23.7% of public schools in Tasmania. In contrast, only 1.4% of public schools in the ACT and 3.3% of public schools in Victoria are highly disadvantaged. Highly disadvantaged schools account for 37% of Catholic and Independent schools in the Northern Territory compared to none in the ACT and very small proportions in Victoria and South Australia.

The differences in the proportion of highly disadvantaged schools between school sectors are less in Western Australia than in other states. They account for 13.4% of public schools compared to 10.6% of Catholic schools and 8.9% of Independent schools.

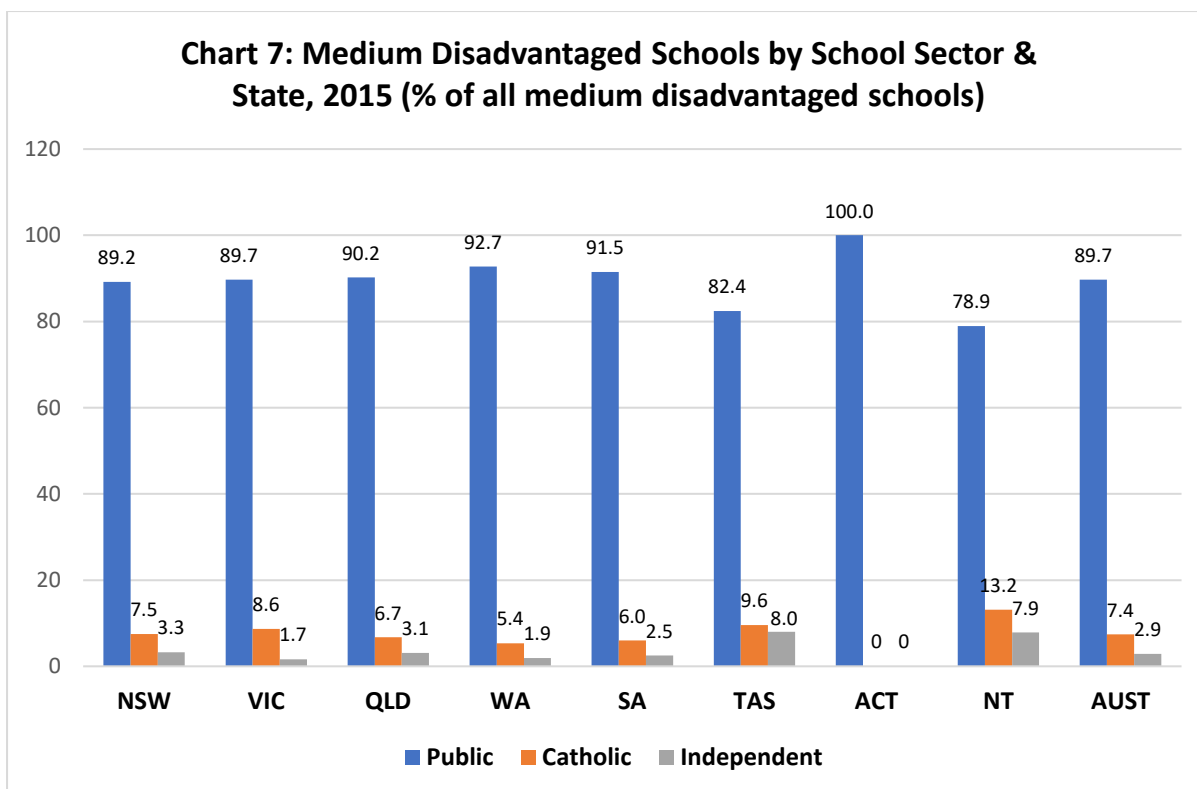
Highly disadvantaged schools comprise a higher proportion of public schools than Catholic and Independent schools in all states. The differences are very large in NSW, South Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory. For example, 14.3% of public schools in NSW are highly disadvantaged compared to only 1.2% of Catholic schools and 1.6% of Independent schools. In South Australia, 10.7% of public schools are highly disadvantaged compared to no Catholic schools and only 1.1% of Independent schools. In the Northern Territory, 71.2% of all public schools are highly disadvantaged compared to under 40% of Catholic and Independent schools.



Source: Thompson et.al 2019.

Medium disadvantaged schools

Public schools also account for about 90% of medium disadvantaged schools in most states, with the ACT (100%) and Western Australia (93%) having the highest proportions [Chart 7]. Tasmania and the Northern Territory have the lowest proportions at 82% and 79% respectively.



Source: Thompson et.al 2019.

Catholic and Independents schools account for a small proportion of medium disadvantaged schools in most states. Catholic schools account for less than 10% of medium disadvantaged schools in every state except the Northern Territory (13.2%). Apart from the Northern Territory the proportions range from zero in the ACT to 9.6% in Tasmania. Independent schools account for 3% or less of medium disadvantaged schools except in Tasmania (8%) and the Northern Territory (7.9%).

There is considerable variation between the states in the proportion of public schools that are medium disadvantaged. In Tasmania, 58.2% of public schools are medium disadvantaged while 57% are medium disadvantaged in Queensland compared to only 8.6% in the ACT [Chart 8]. The proportions in NSW, Victoria and South Australia are similar to the average of 49.1% for Australia.

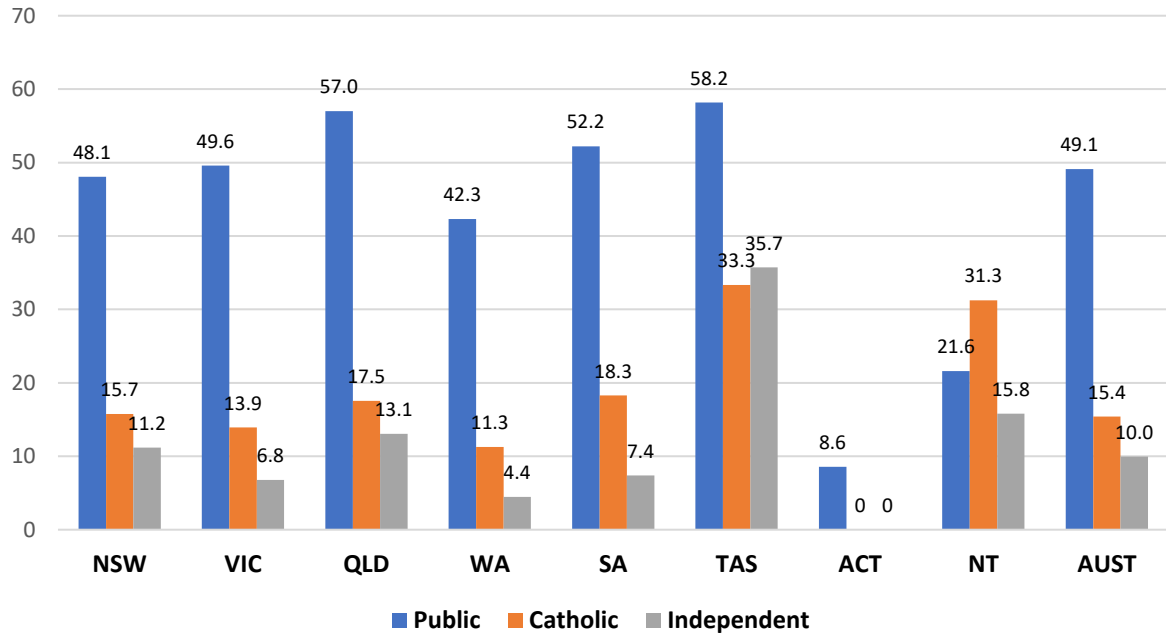
The proportion of Catholic schools that are medium disadvantaged is similar to the Australian average of 15.4% in NSW, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia. About one-third of Catholic schools in Tasmania and the Northern Territory are medium disadvantaged compared to none in the ACT.

There is also significant variation in the proportion of Independent schools that are medium disadvantaged. Over one-third of Independent schools in Tasmania are medium disadvantaged compared to none in the ACT and only 4.4% in Western Australia. The proportions in Queensland (13.1%) and the Northern Territory (15.8%) are significantly higher than the Australian average of 10% while those in those in Victoria (6.8%) and South Australia (7.4%) are significantly lower.

Medium advantaged schools

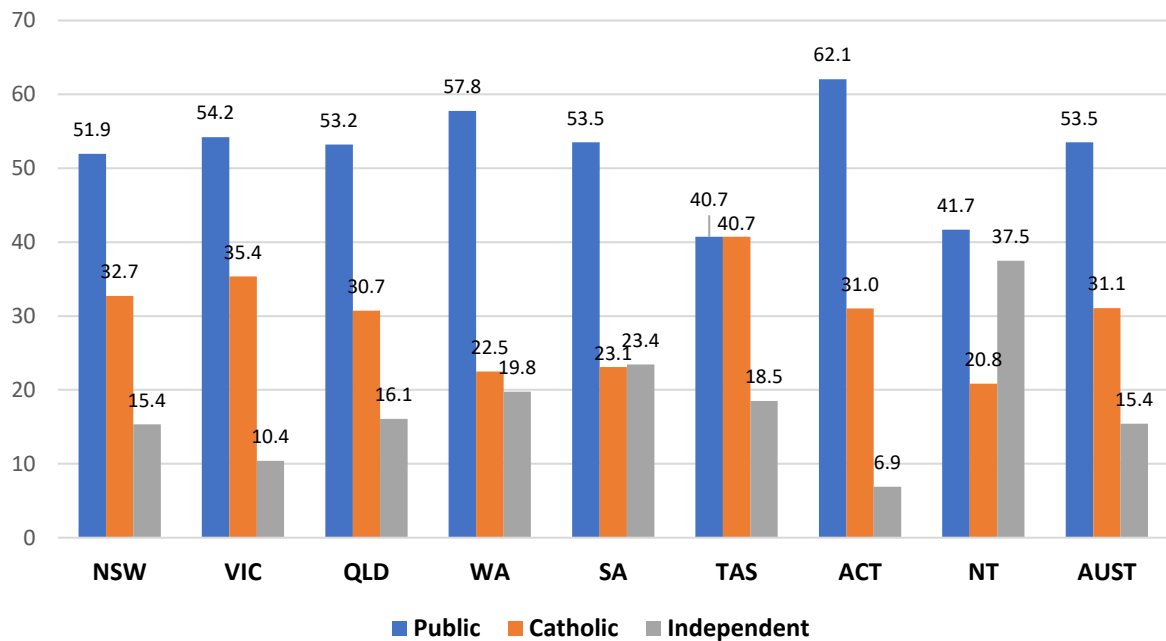
Public schools account for over half of all medium advantaged schools in every state except Tasmania and the Northern Territory where the proportions are 40.7% and 41.7% respectively. The proportions in the other states are similar to the Australian average of 53.5% except for the ACT where public schools account for 62.1% of medium advantaged schools [Chart 9].

Chart 8: Medium Disadvantaged Schools by School Sector & State, 2015 (% of all schools in sector)



Source: Thompson et.al 2019.

Chart 9: Medium Advantaged Schools by School Sector & State, 2015 (% of all medium advantaged schools)



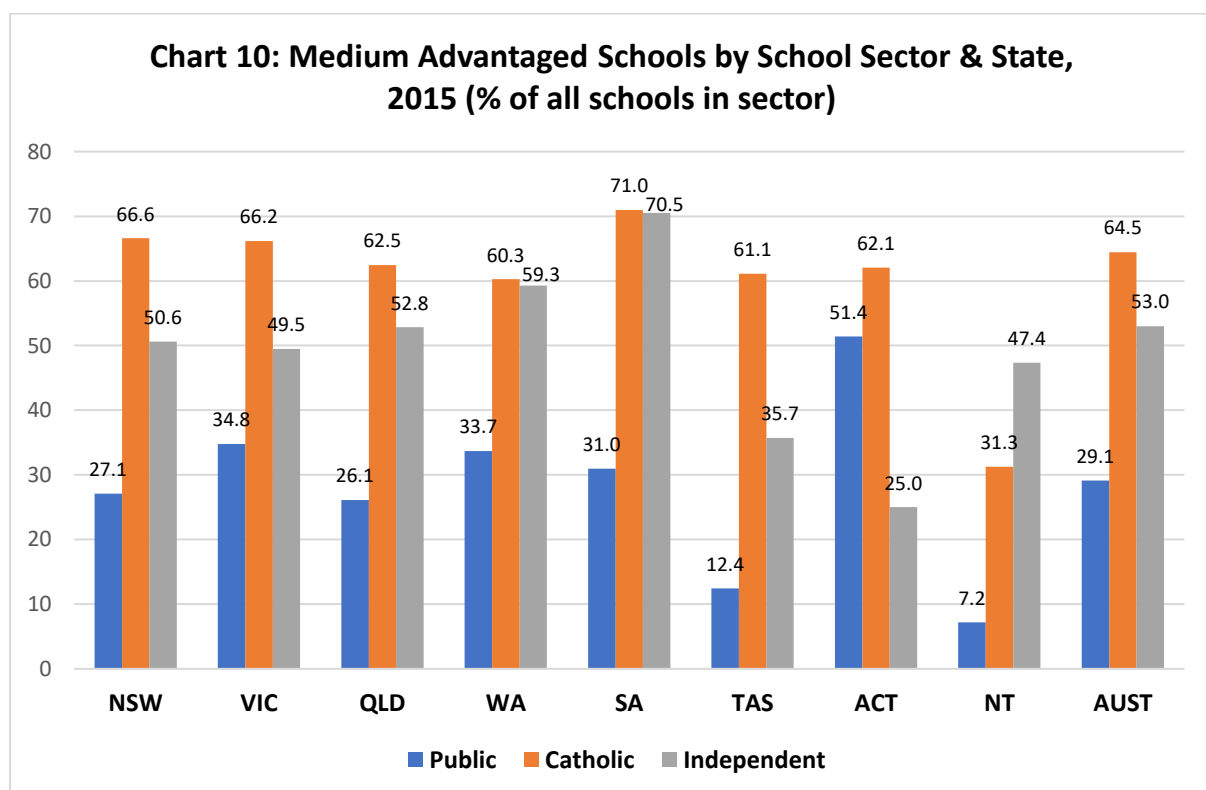
Source: Thompson et.al 2019.

There is significant variation among the states in the proportion of medium advantaged schools in the Catholic sector. Catholic schools in NSW, Victoria, Queensland and the ACT account for about one-third of these schools compared to less than one-quarter in Western Australia and South Australia and one-fifth in the Northern Territory. In contrast, Catholic schools in Tasmania account for just over two-fifths of medium advantaged schools in the state.

There is also considerable variation between the states in the proportion of medium advantaged schools accounted for by Independent schools. Independent schools account for 6.9% of all medium advantaged schools in the ACT and 10.4% in Victoria compared to 23.4% in South Australia and 37.5% in the Northern Territory. The proportion in NSW (15.4%) and Queensland (16.1%) is similar to the Australian average of 15.4%.

About one-quarter to one-third of public schools in most states are medium-advantaged schools [Chart 10]. For example, 27.1% of public schools in NSW and 26.1% in Queensland are medium advantaged compared with 34.8% in Victoria, 33.7% in Western Australia and 31% in South Australia. Over 50% of public schools in the ACT are medium advantaged compared with only 7.2% in the Northern Territory and 12.4% in Tasmania.

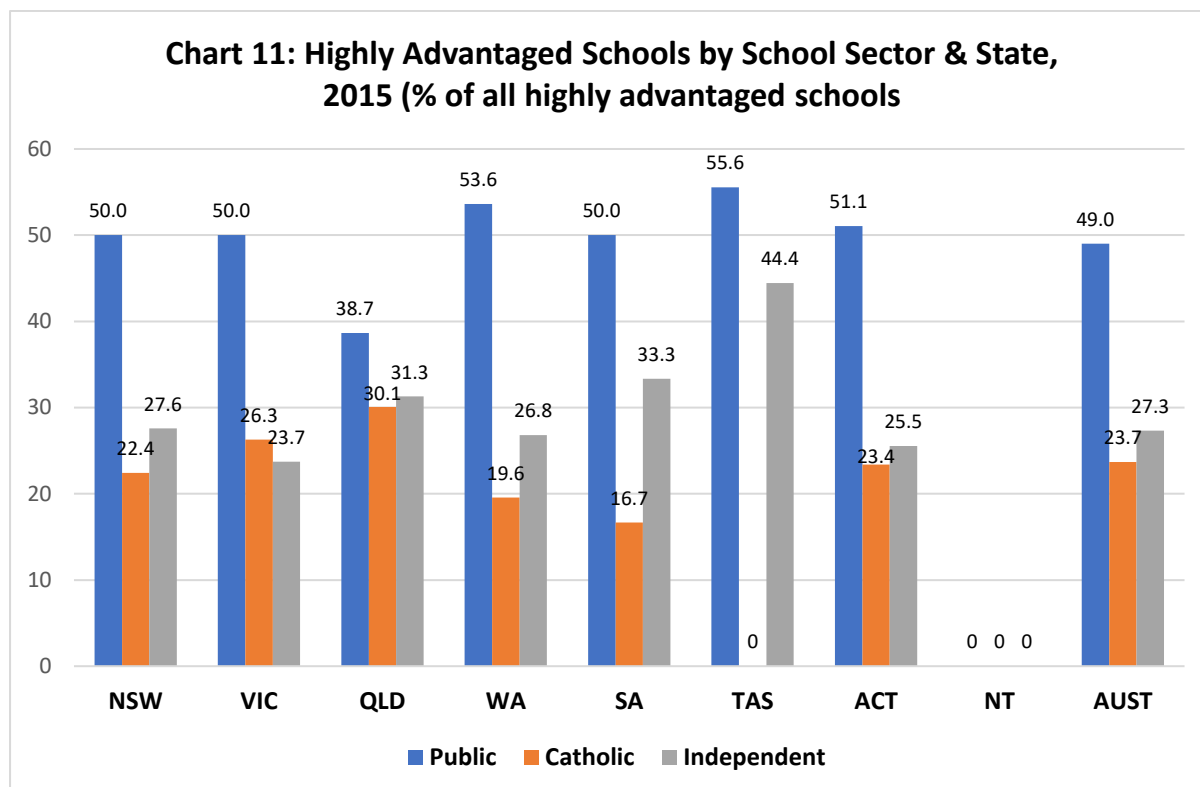
Much higher proportions of Catholic and Independent schools are medium advantaged schools. Sixty to 71% of Catholic schools in all states except the Northern Territory (31.3%) are medium advantaged. About 50% or more of Independent schools in NSW, Victoria, Queensland and the Northern Territory are medium advantaged, but there is considerable variation between the other states. For example, 70.5% of Independent schools in South Australia are medium advantaged compared to 35.7% in Tasmania and 25% in the ACT.



Source: Thompson et.al 2019.

Highly advantaged schools

Public schools account for about half of all highly advantaged schools in every state except Queensland where the proportion is 38.7%. The highest proportions are 53.6% in Western Australia and 55.6% in Tasmania [Chart 11].



Source: Thompson et.al 2019.

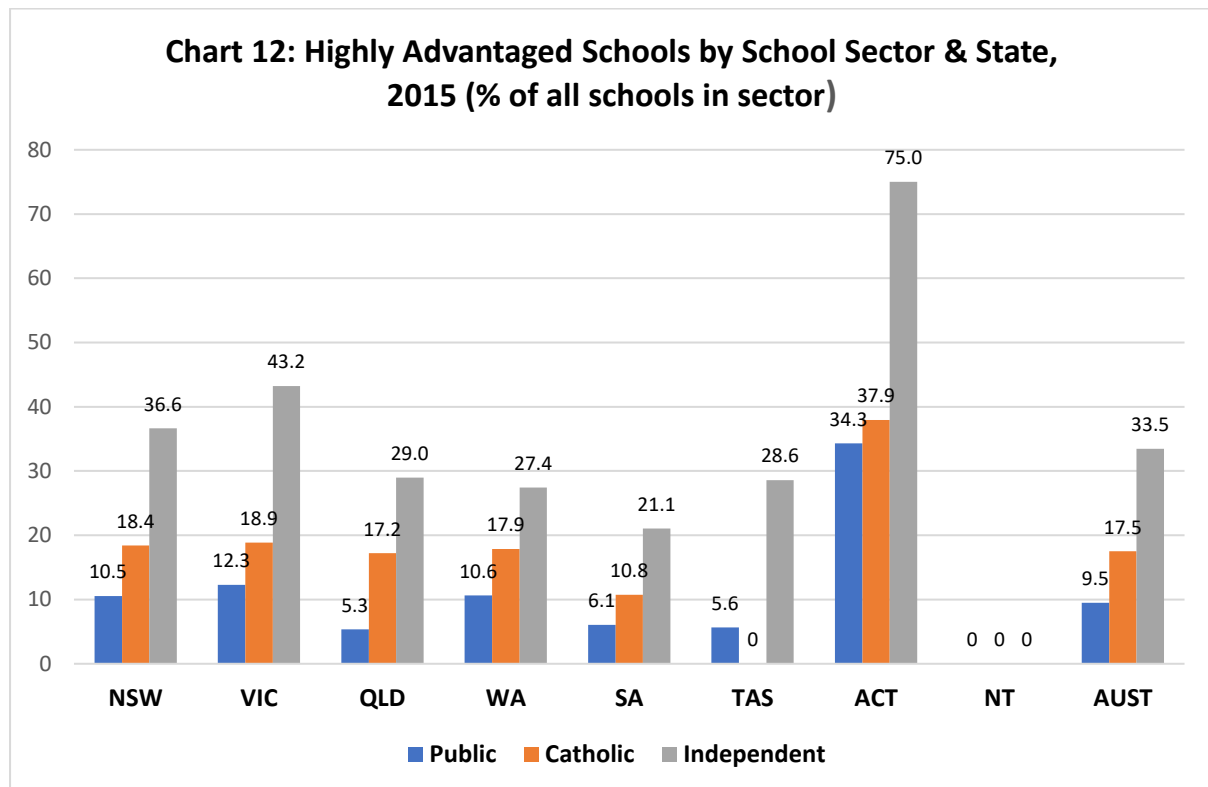
There is significant variation in the proportion of highly advantaged Catholic schools. Catholic schools account for about 20-25% of all highly advantaged schools in most states. However, they account for 30% in Queensland compared to none in Tasmania and 16.7% in South Australia.

In Tasmania, 44.4% of highly advantaged schools are Independent schools as are about one-third of highly advantaged schools in Queensland and South Australia. There are no highly advantaged schools in any sector in the Northern Territory and no highly advantaged Catholic schools in Tasmania.

Highly advantaged schools comprise a much smaller proportion of public schools than Catholic or Independent schools in all states, except the Northern Territory and for Catholic schools in Tasmania [Chart 12]. For example, only 10.5% of public schools in NSW are highly advantaged compared to 18.4% of Catholic schools and 36.6% of Independent schools. In Victoria, 12.3% of public schools are highly advantaged compared to 18.9% of Catholic schools and 43.2% of Independent schools. In Queensland, only 5.3% of public schools are highly advantaged compared to 17.2% of Catholic schools and 29% of Independent schools.

There are significant differences between the states in the proportion of schools that are highly advantaged. All school sectors in the ACT have much higher proportions of highly advantaged schools than in other states. About one-third of public schools, over one-third of Catholic schools and three-quarters of all Independent schools are highly advantaged. In contrast, in South Australia only

6.1% of public schools, 10.8% of Catholic schools and 21.1% of Independent schools are highly advantaged.



Source: Thompson et.al 2019.

Conclusions

The new data show conclusively that school systems in Australia are highly segregated by socio-economic background both nationally and in each state although the extent of the segregation varies between states.

Disadvantaged schools are highly concentrated in the public sector. They form a much larger proportion of all public schools than Catholic and Independent schools while advantaged schools comprise a much larger proportion of Catholic and Independent schools than of public schools.

Highly and medium disadvantaged schools are over-represented in public schools and under-represented in private schools. Public schools account for a much larger proportion of disadvantaged schools than they do for all schools. Catholic and Independent schools account for a much smaller proportion of disadvantaged schools than they do for all schools.

In contrast, highly and medium advantaged schools are under-represented in public schools and over-represented in private schools. Public schools account for a much smaller proportion of advantaged schools than they do for all schools. Catholic and Independent schools account for a much larger proportion of advantaged schools than they do for all schools.

While we still hear claims from Catholic education authorities that Catholic schools are similar to public schools in terms of the families they serve, the data show how wrong this is. It is clear that Catholic schools are much more like Independent schools than public schools in terms of student background.

Appendix: Disadvantaged/Advantaged Schools by State and Sector

NSW

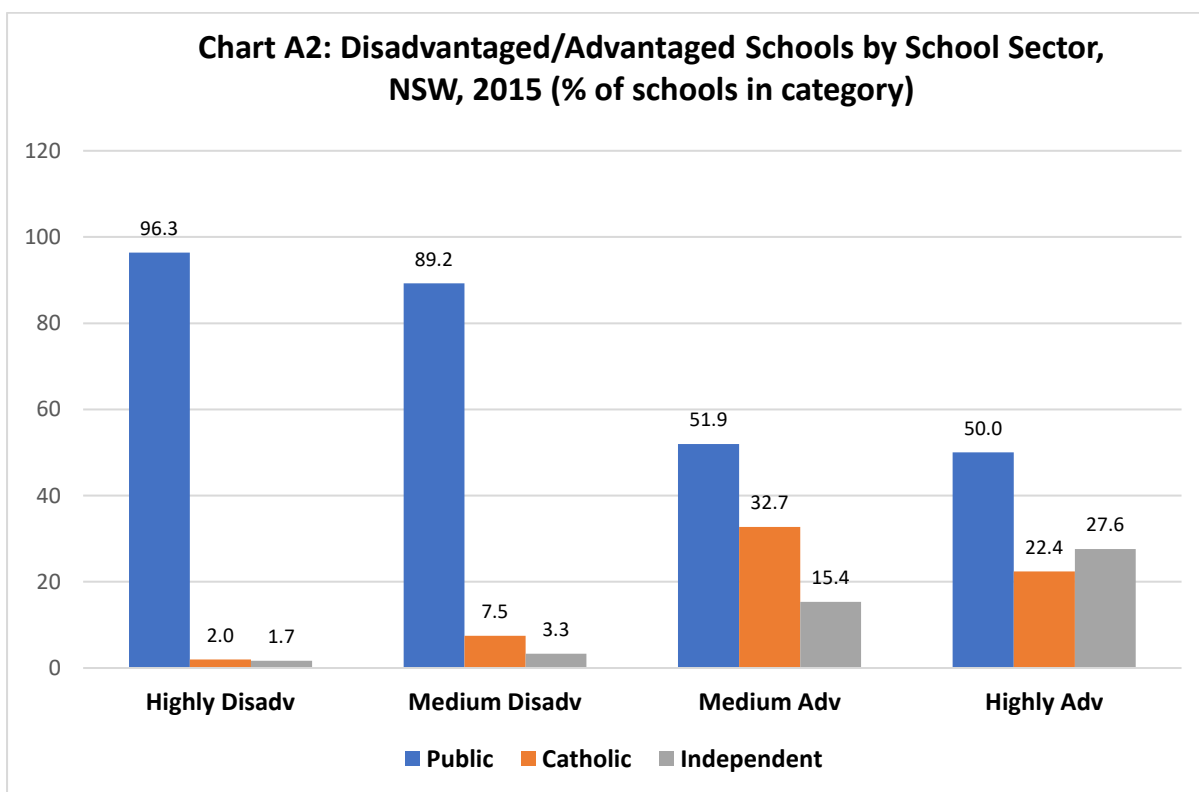
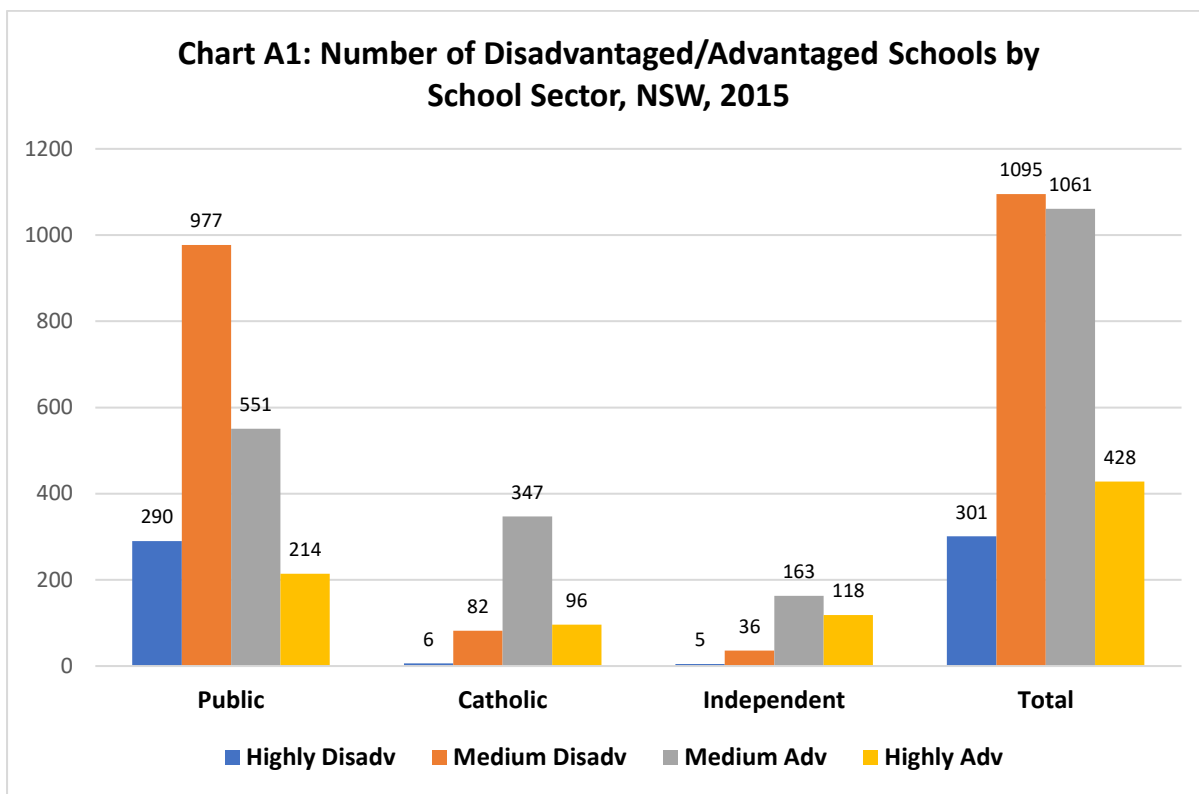
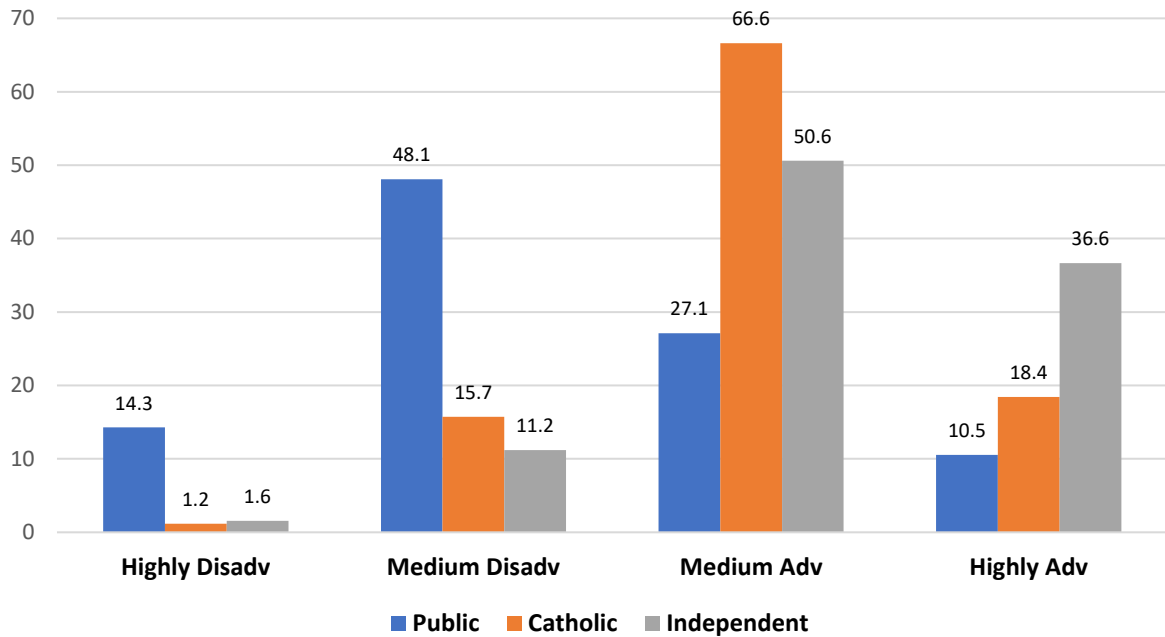


Chart A3: Disadvantaged/Advantaged Schools by School Sector, NSW, 2015 (% of schools in sector)



Victoria

Chart A4: Number of Disadvantaged/Advantaged Schools by School Sector, Victoria, 2015

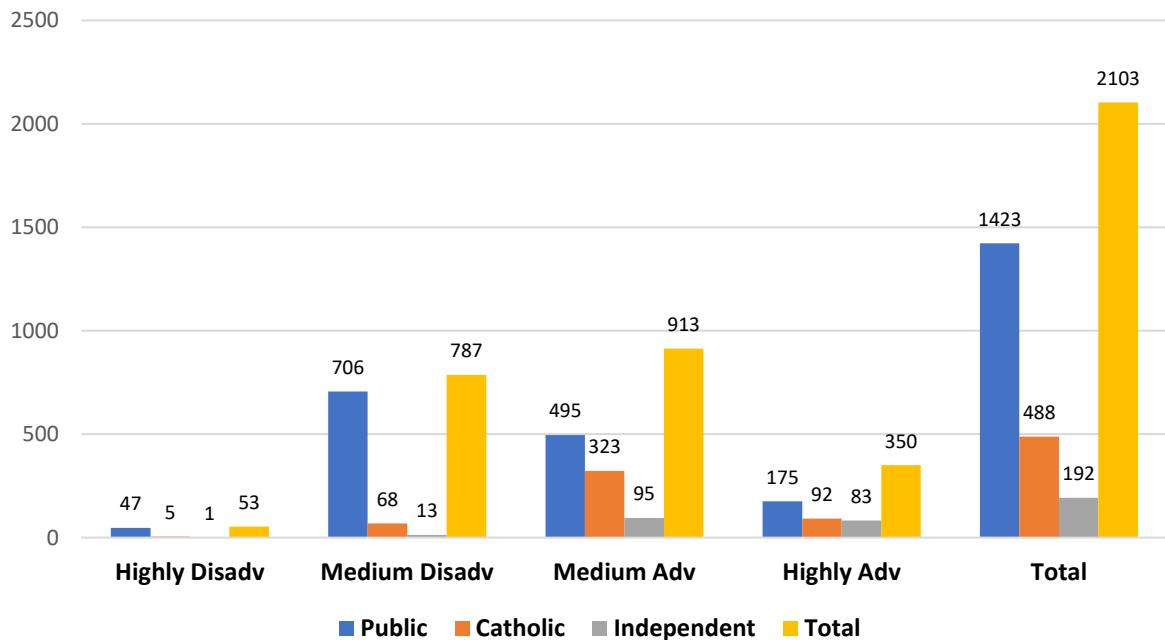


Chart A5: Disadvantaged/Advantaged Schools by School Sector, Victoria, 2015 (% of schools in category)

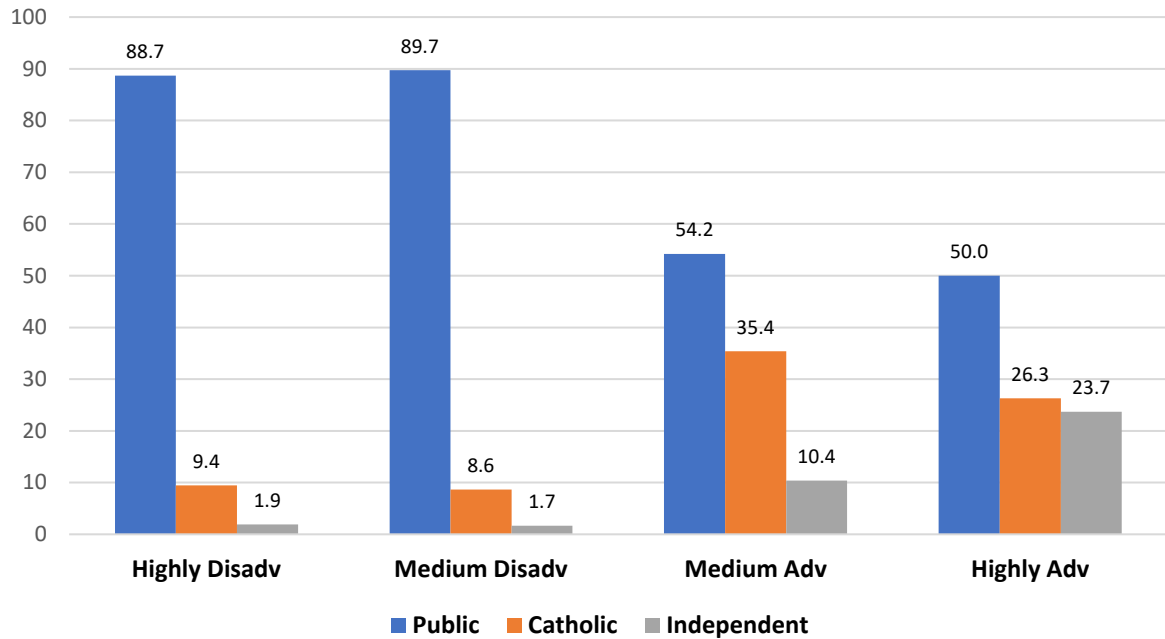
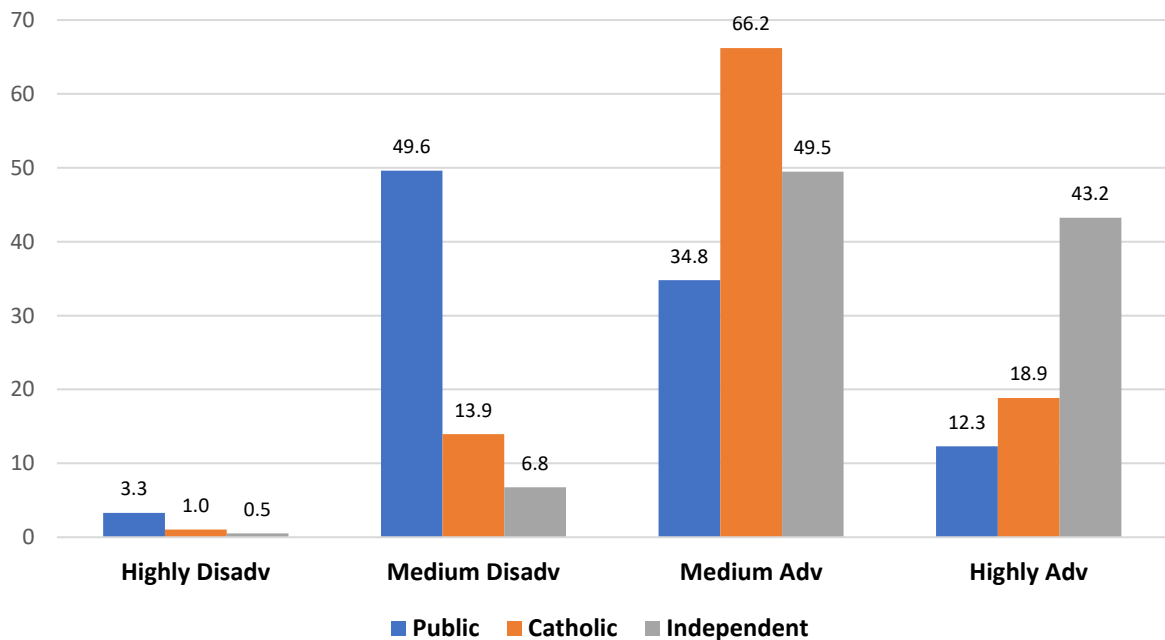


Chart A6: Disadvantaged/Advantaged Schools by School Sector, Victoria, 2015 (% of schools in sector)



Queensland

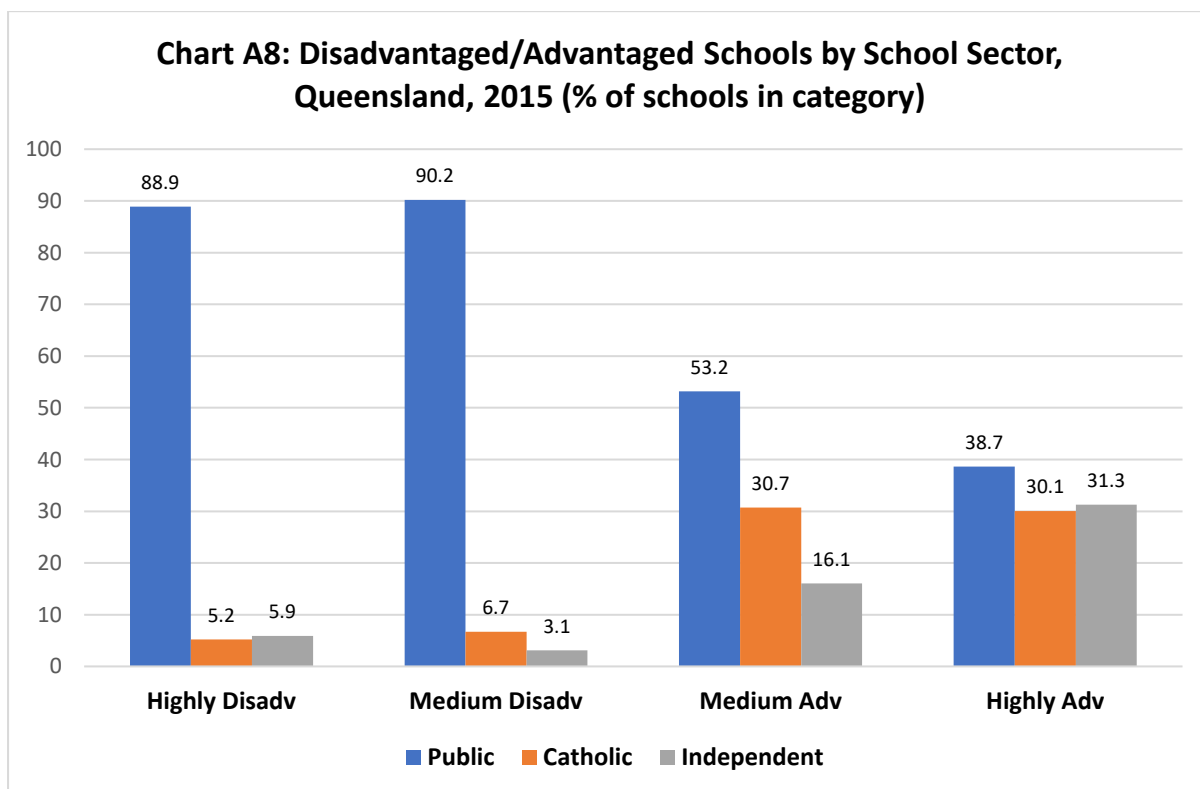
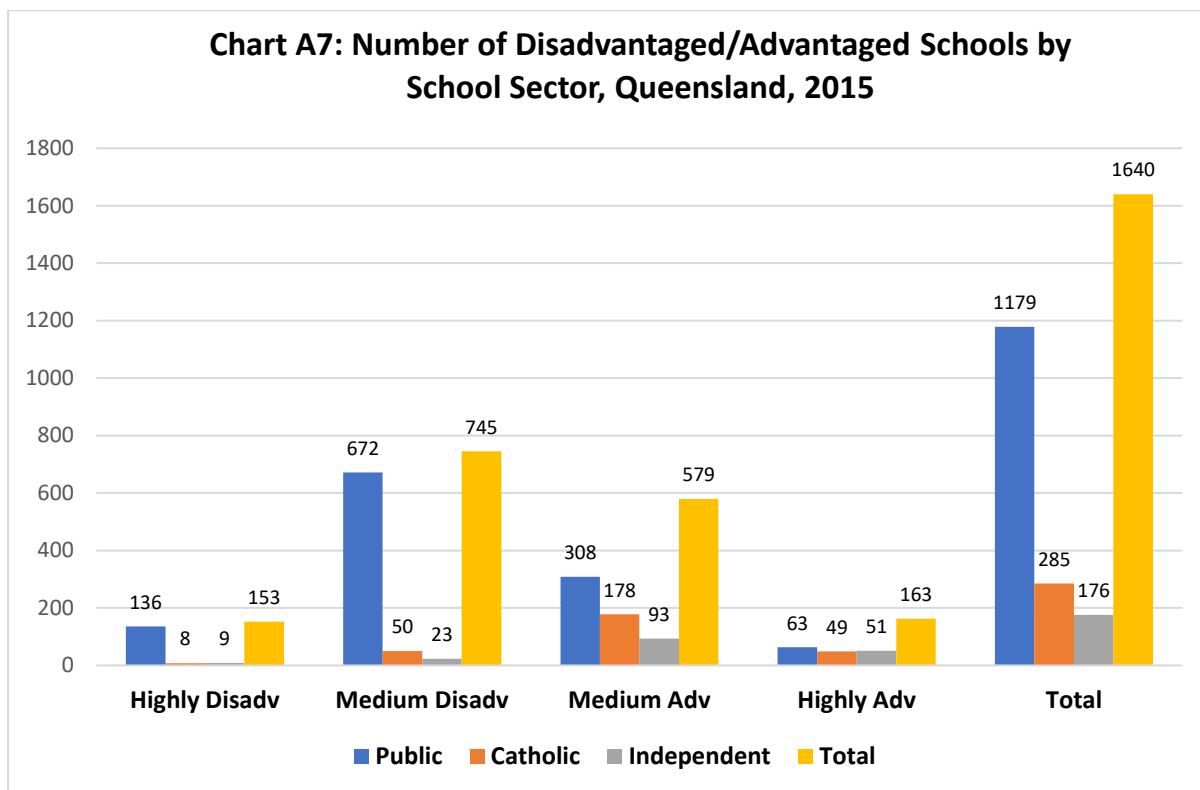
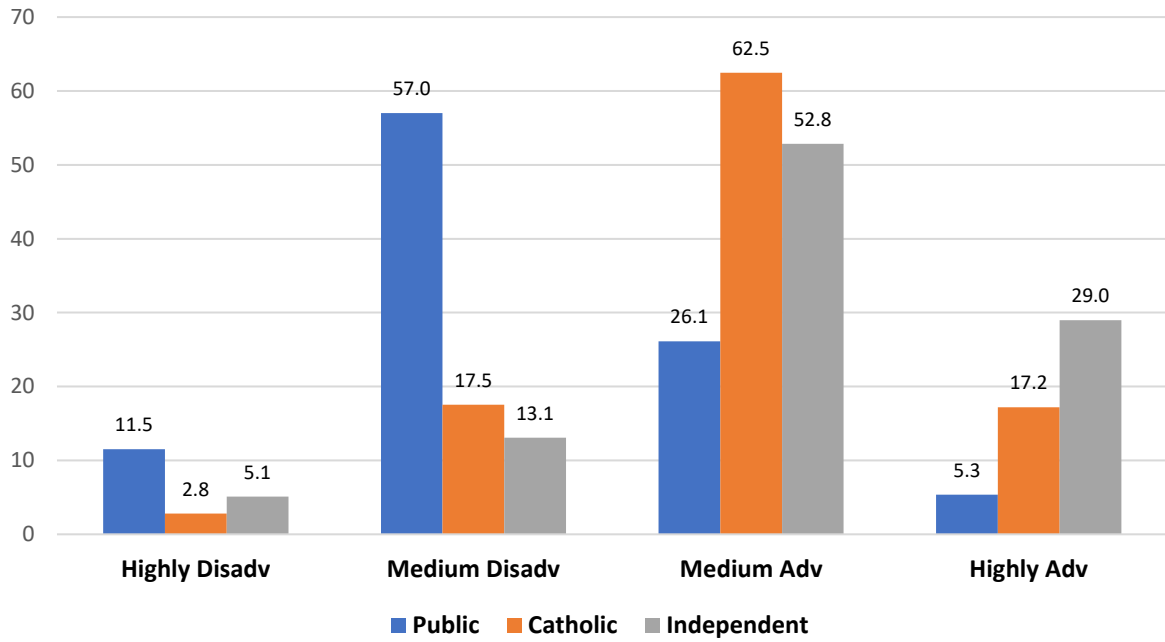


Chart A9: Disadvantaged/Advantaged Schools by School Sector, Queensland, 2015 (% of schools in sector)



Western Australia

Chart A10: Number of Disadvantaged/Advantaged Schools by School Sector, Western Australia, 2015

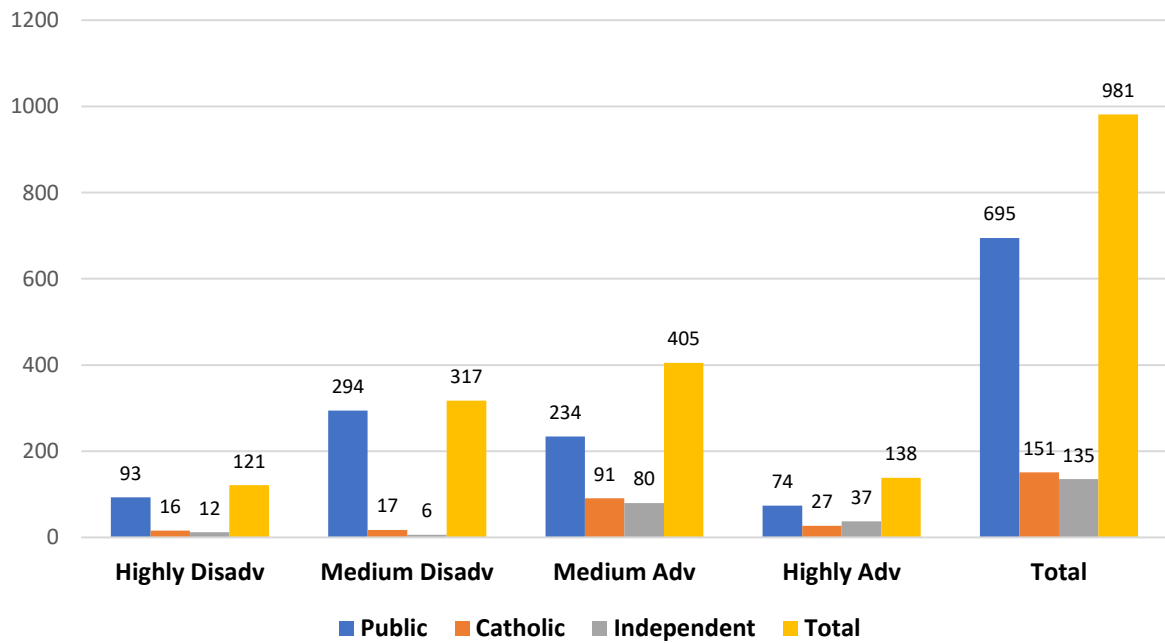


Chart A11: Disadvantaged/Advantaged Schools by School Sector, Western Australia, 2015 (% of schools in category)

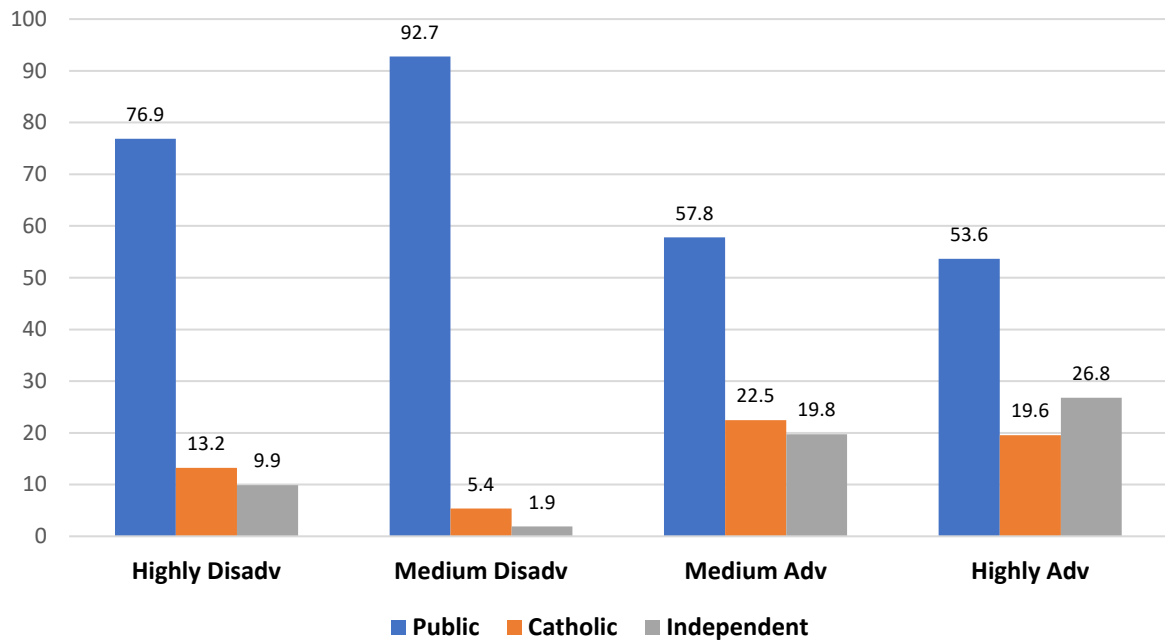
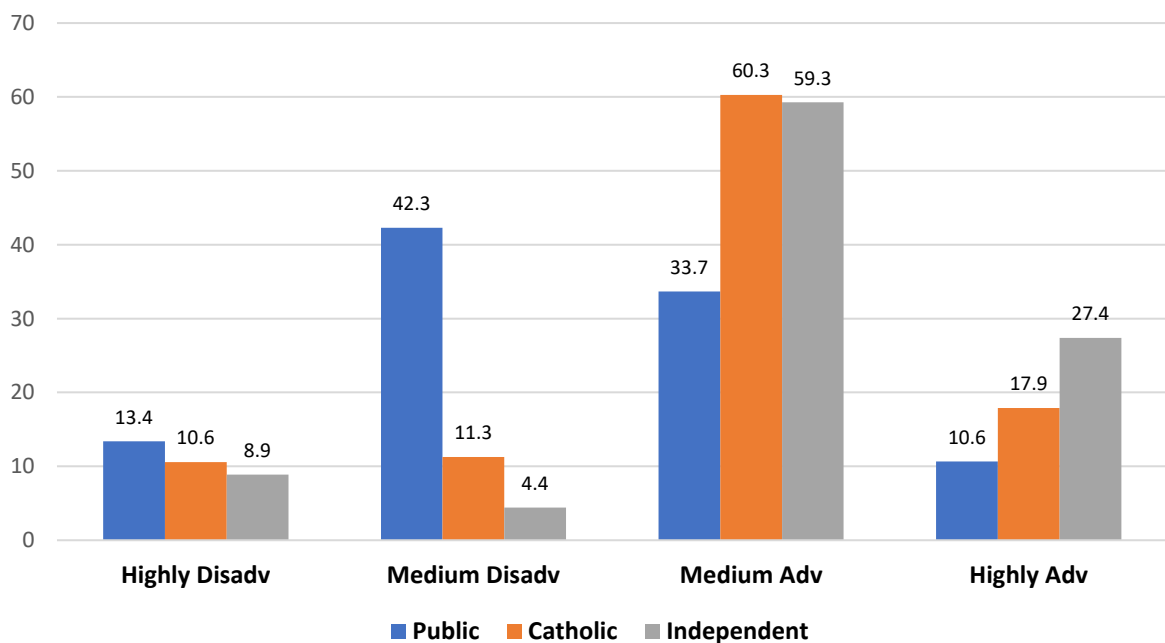


Chart A12: Disadvantaged/Advantaged Schools by School Sector, Western Australia, 2015 (% of schools in sector)



South Australia

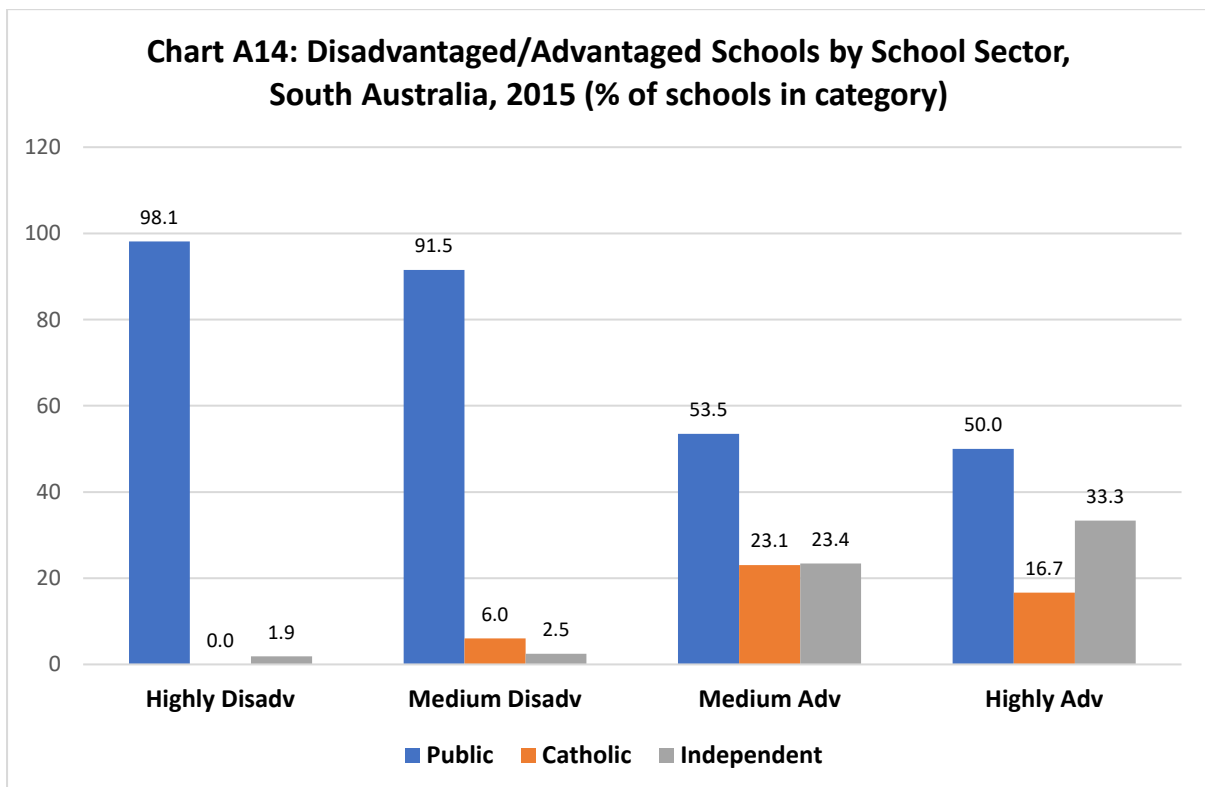
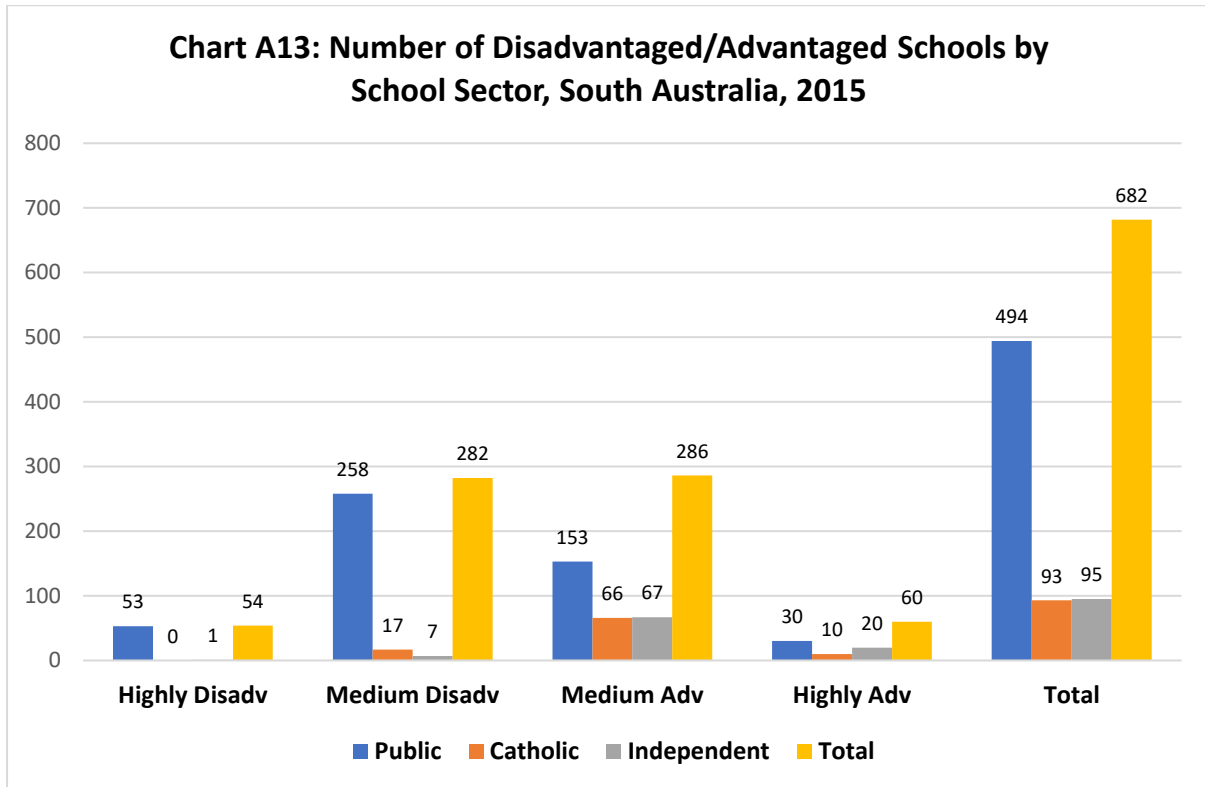
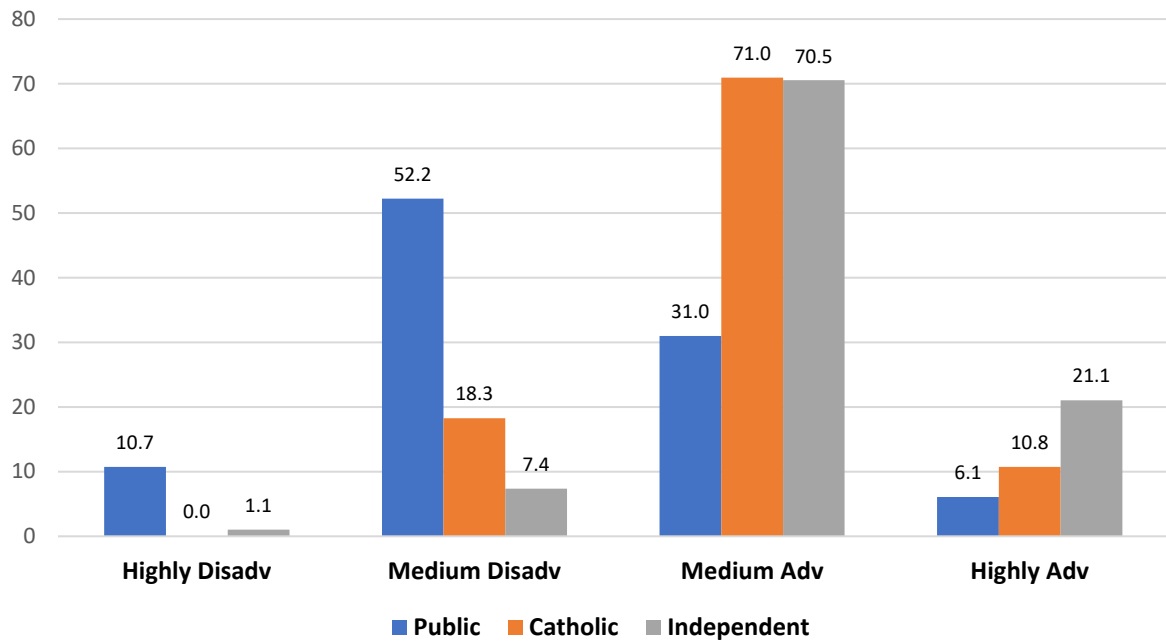


Chart A15: Disadvantaged/Advantaged Schools by School Sector, South Australia, 2015 (% of schools in sector)



Tasmania

Chart A16: Number of Disadvantaged/Advantaged Schools by School Sector, Tasmania, 2015

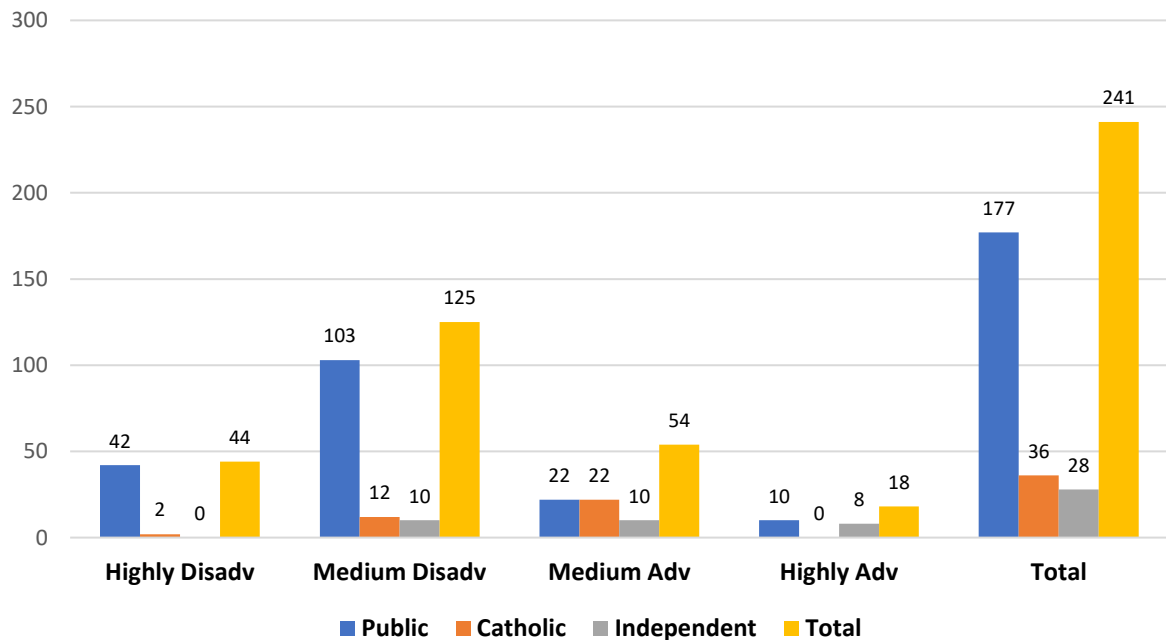


Chart A17: Disadvantaged/Advantaged Schools by School Sector, Tasmania, 2015 (% of schools in category)

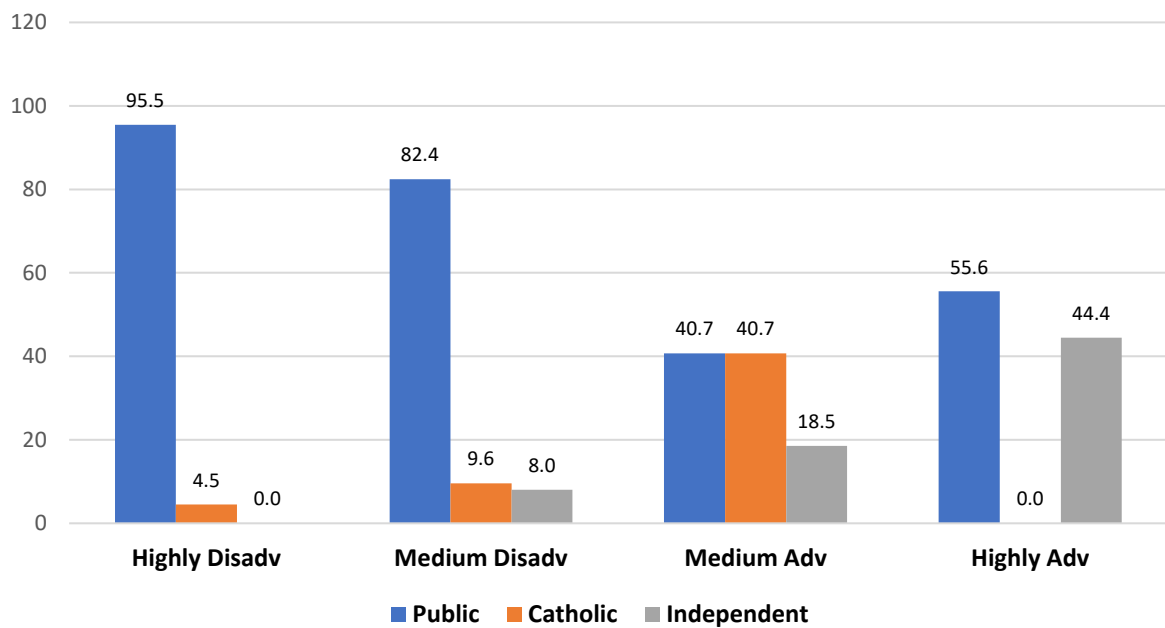
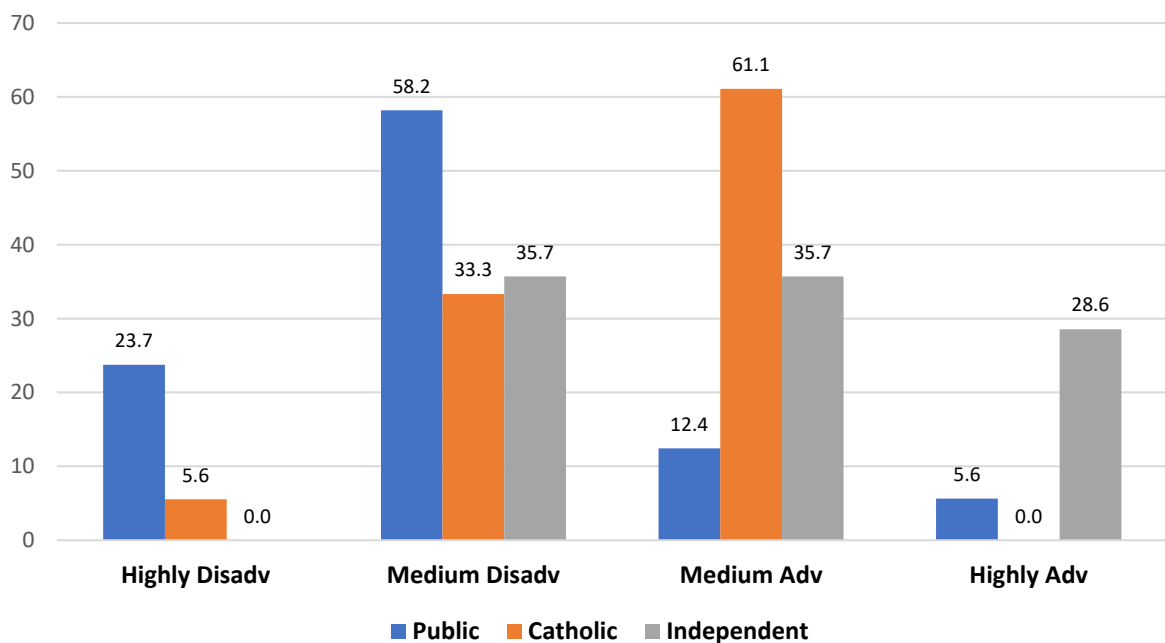


Chart A18: Disadvantaged/Advantaged Schools by School Sector, Tasmania, 2015 (% of schools in sector)



ACT

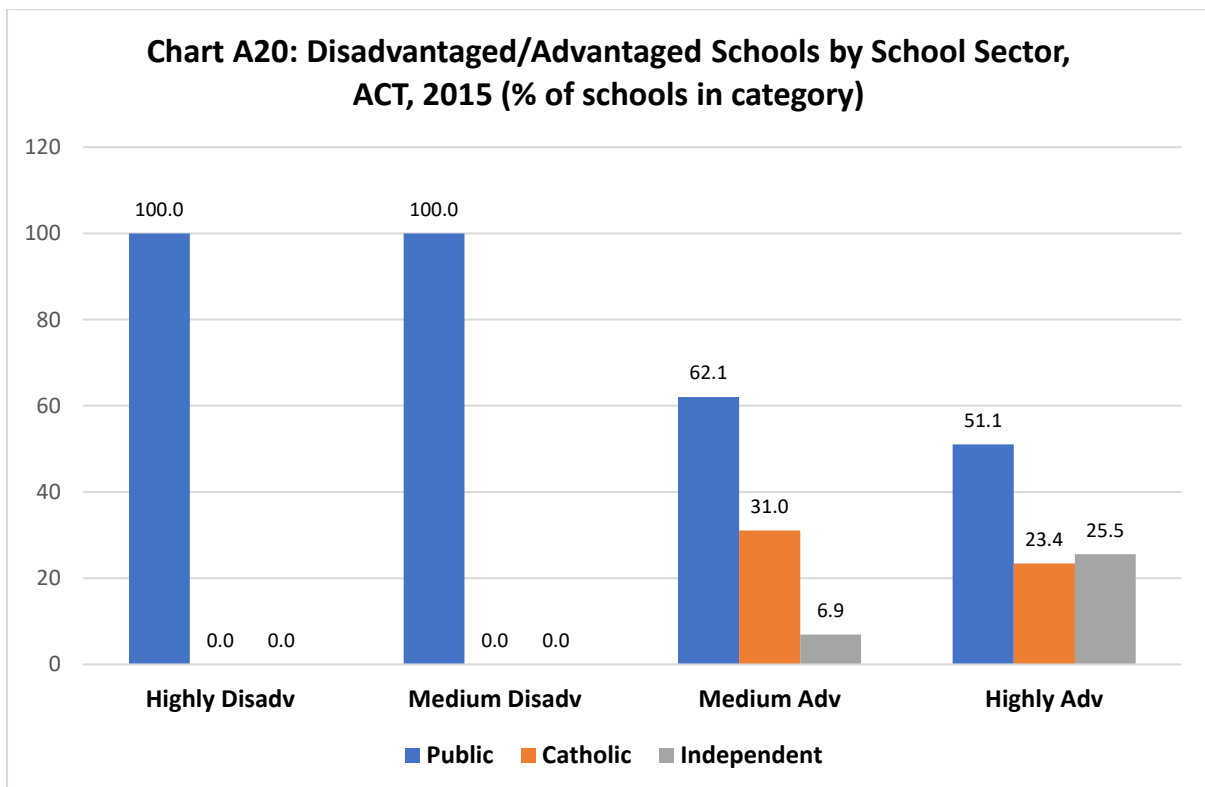
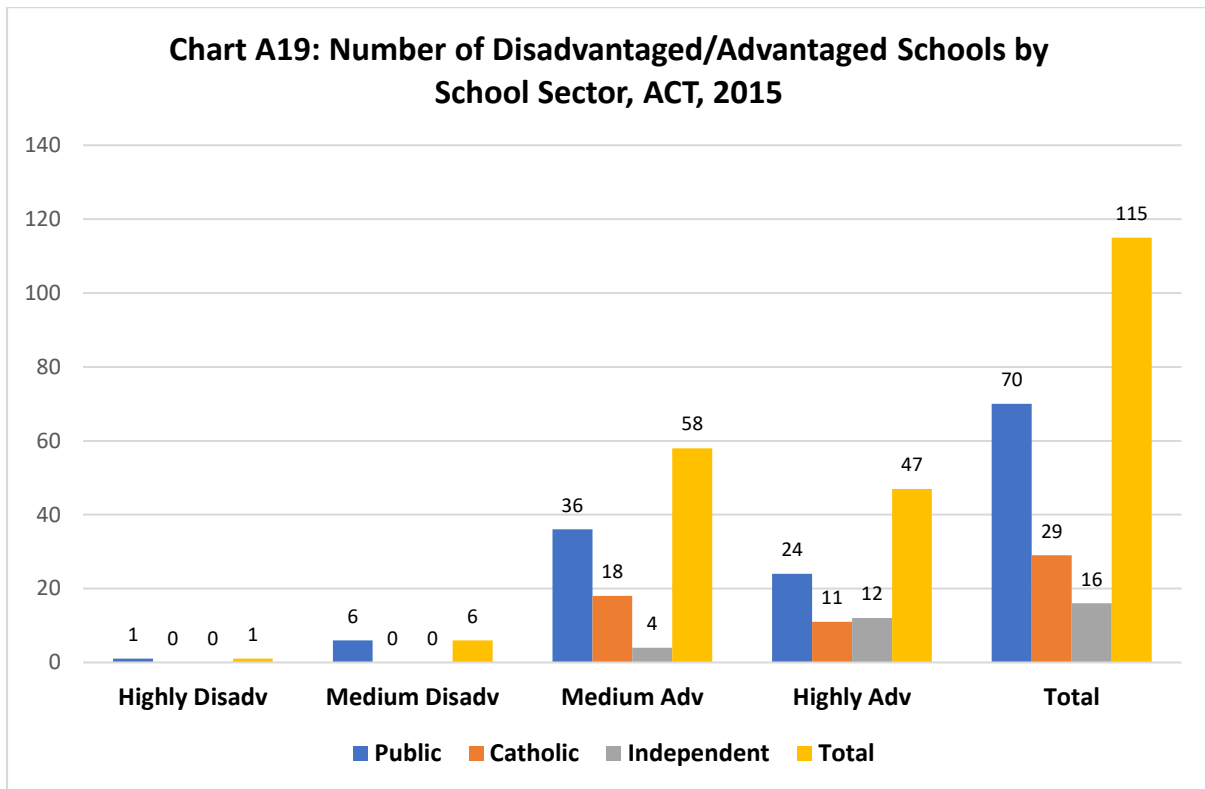
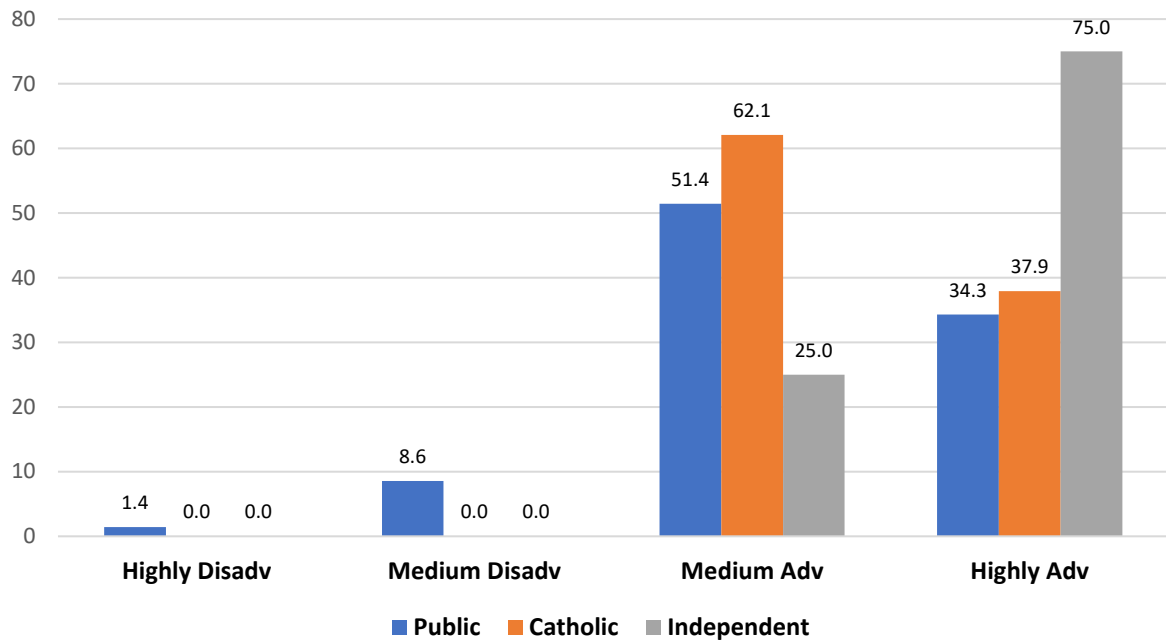


Chart A21: Disadvantaged/Advantaged Schools by School Sector, ACT, 2015 (% of schools in sector)



Northern Territory

Chart A22: Number of Disadvantaged/Advantaged Schools by School Sector, Northern Territory, 2015

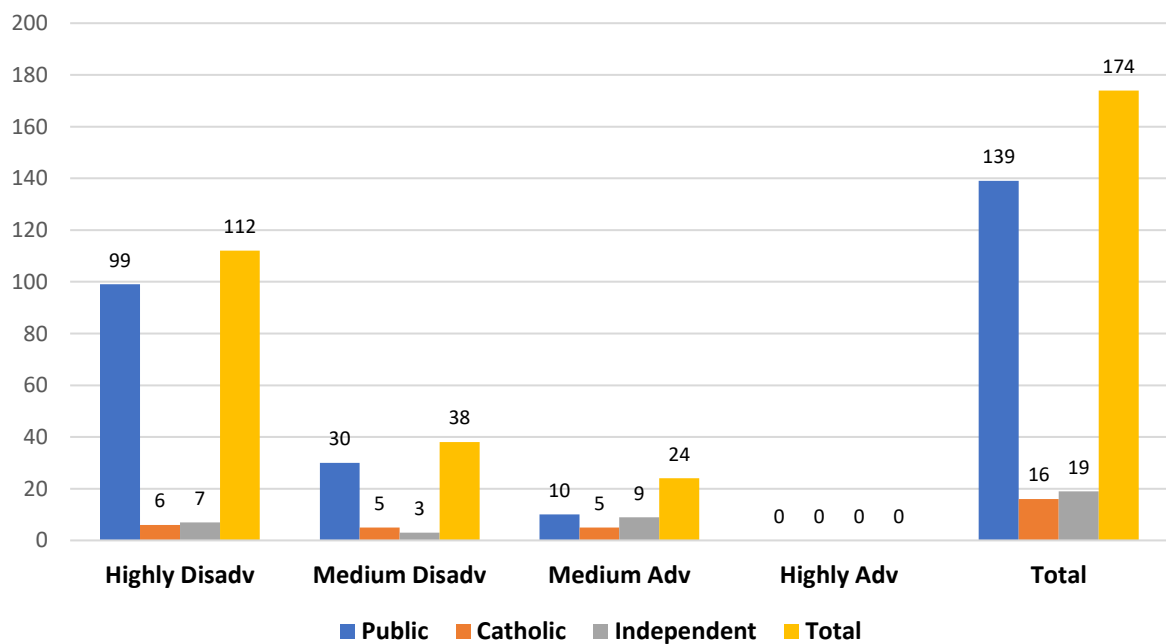


Chart A23: Disadvantaged/Advantaged Schools by School Sector, Northern Territory, 2015 (% of schools in category)

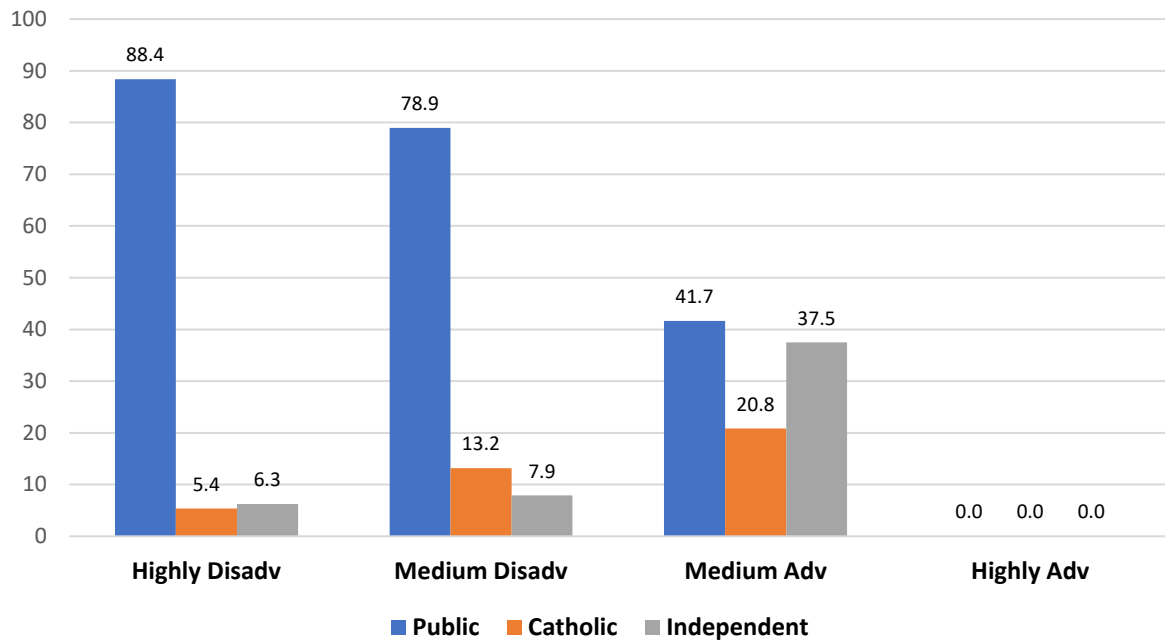


Chart A24: Disadvantaged/Advantaged Schools by School Sector, Northern Territory, 2015 (% of schools in sector)

