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To cite this article: Jessica Gerrard & Glenn C. Savage (2021): The governing parent-citizen: dividing and valorising parent labour through school governance, Journal of Education Policy, DOI: [10.1080/02680939.2021.1877357](https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2021.1877357)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2021.1877357>



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Published online: 22 Jan 2021.



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# The governing parent-citizen: dividing and valorising parent labour through school governance

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## ABSTRACT

Internationally, major policy reforms seek to deepen parent and community engagement in schools. Whilst pervasive in policy documents, however, discourses surrounding ‘parent engagement’ are often elastic and imprecise, ultimately gaining meaning through the technologies of governance that shape policy enactments in schools. In this paper, we argue that contemporary schooling reforms are constructing a new ‘governing parent-citizen’ through which the parental labour of social reproduction is being extended, valorised and rearticulated. We examine how one major reform movement in Australia is articulating new roles for parents and community members in schools: the Independent Public Schools (IPS) initiative in Western Australia. Our analysis demonstrates the intensive policy intervention required to produce this new form of parental labour and the subsequent divisions of labour it is producing.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 6 July 2020  
Accepted 12 January 2021

## KEYWORDS

school governance; school autonomy; parent engagement; education policy; policy reform

## Introduction: governing schools, governing parents

In nations such as Australia, England and the USA, decentralised school governance, which grants schools new forms of financial and managerial independence from the state, has emerged as a defining feature of contemporary education policy (Arnot and Raab 2000; Lingard, Hayes, and Mills 2002; Keddie 2016; Lubienski 2003). In this paper, in the context of one such decentralising schooling reform, we examine how the policy aspiration for parental involvement in school governance, primarily via ‘school boards’, brings the labour of parenting *into* the labour of schooling governance. We will argue that this is reflective of broader post-Fordist transformations in the field of work, which in this context is blurring the boundaries between professional white-collar work, parenting and the governance of schools. We conceptualise the emergence of what we term the ‘governing parent-citizen’, denoting an important contemporary form of parental labour that is articulated through school boards. We suggest ‘school autonomy’ reforms in particular imbricate the core labour of social reproduction (in this case, *parenthood*) within the social relations of schooling in new and thus far unexamined ways. We also argue that the valorisation of parental labour,

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skills and capacities within the governance of schooling itself, rests upon divisions in parental labour and is governed by centralised forms of accountability and training.

It is important to note that despite emerging as a dominant policy trend, decentralised school governance is taken up in multiple guises within and across national policy contexts. The same holds for associated concepts such as ‘school autonomy’ or ‘school devolution’ which lack definitive forms (Keddie 2016). For example, Charter Schools in the USA, Academies and Free Schools in England, and various versions of ‘school autonomy’ in Australia, may all share a family likeness but differ in important ways (Keddie 2016; Windle 2015). This reflects Wilkins et al.’s (2019) framing of contemporary school governance arrangements as a ‘loose assembly’ that transmutes as it moves and settles in different contexts, becoming ‘grafted onto existing structures and practices’ (2).

Yet, whilst diverse, this reform trend is representative of wider ‘umbrella’ shifts in the nature of public services and citizenship. From granting school leaders greater control over staffing and resourcing through to allowing school stakeholders new capacities to tailor curriculum to local wants and needs, decentralised governance is often depicted as a panacea to the apparent limits of state-centric control, while at the same time being presented as a solution for improving student achievement and equity. Attempts to render schools more ‘autonomous’ and to ‘devolve governance’ cannot be abstracted from the emergence of New Public Management in the late 1980s and 1990s, which has seen public services subject to successive reforms premised on market rationalities and managerialism, bringing private practices into public services (Newman and Clarke 2009; Wilkins et al. 2019). These reforms also connect with what others more recently have described as New Public Governance, which acknowledges the growing importance of citizen participation in public service design and delivery through various governance mechanisms (Dickinson 2016). These changes have resulted in what Gobby (2016) describes as, ‘the political reconfiguration of the established authority, roles, activities and responsibilities of the state, public sector, markets and citizens’ (17).

In addition to claims for efficiencies and better outcomes, transformations in school governance are premised on the apparent need for new and different relationships between schools, parents and the community. Decentralised school governance is advocated for on the basis that it will better harness the capacities of local community members in the running of schools and, in particular, enhance parent engagement, especially in disadvantaged contexts (OECD 2007, 2011; Wößmann et al. 2007; Schütz, West, and Wößmann 2007). Yet a range of existing international research has indicated the multiple ways in which these policy aspirations surrounding parental and community engagement are falling short. For instance, English school governing bodies have been shown to under-represent the broader school community, involving particular parents (typically white, middle class and middle aged) and not others (Ranson et al 2004). Similarly, Ng and Yuen’s investigation of Hong Kong school management practices revealed that racialised assumptions contributed to some parents feeling dismissed and disrespected (Ng and Yuen 2015). Writing on the US Charter School experience, Hankins (2005) suggests governance practices create an individualised and private practice of parental citizenship, characterised by relative degrees of privilege.

Recent research in Australia and England also reveals how community and parental involvement in school governance is often understood in performative and compliance-based terms, undermining the capacity for democratic and substantive decision-making

(Gobby and Niesche 2019; Wilkins 2015; Young 2016). Reflecting on the English context, Olmedo and Wilkins (2017) suggest school governance policies and practices effectively produce ‘state volunteers’ (drawing on Deem, Brehony and Heath’s 1995 articulation): that is, parents whose role it is to, ‘perform managerial-bureaucratic duties which satisfy narrow utilitarian measures of accountability’ (580). Moreover, they note that devolved school governance practices can ‘divide’ parents between those who are ‘skilled’ and ‘unskilled’ in their capacity to contribute to school governance. This can be understood to be ‘professionalizing’ school governance (Wilkins 2015), in which business-based skills are valued as technical solutions for schooling management (Young 2016). Deem et al.’s (1995) seminal research on school governance and active citizenship is central here as it demonstrates the alignment between changing notions of ‘active’ and ‘responsible’ citizenship with the volunteer work of school governors (many of whom are parents of students).

In this paper, we build upon these contributions to demonstrate how school devolution policy creates and frames the conditions through which parents are *made governors* in ways that blur the boundaries of parental labour, professional labour, and school governing labour. We do this through an examination of how one prominent school autonomy reform – the Independent Public Schools (IPS) initiative in the Australian state of Western Australia (WA) – is articulating new relationships between schools and parents. We demonstrate how this reform produces new relationships between the parental labour of social reproduction and school governance through the governing technology of the school board. We begin by examining the interconnected practices of parenthood and citizenship, demonstrating the ways in which schools are principal sites within which the labour of being a ‘good parent’ and a ‘good citizen’ is exercised. Building on existing notions of the ‘parent-citizen’, we set out a conceptual understanding for the policy emergence of the ‘governing parent-citizen’. We then analyse the WA IPS reform, examining how the policy creates conditions that privilege the involvement of certain kinds of parents in school governance processes via the school board. After providing context for the reform’s emergence and outlining our analytic approach, we outline two core dimensions of the reform that we argue are framing new forms of (divided) parental labour: 1) the formation of a strategic ‘governing group’ of parent-citizens that rests upon a division of parental labour; and 2) training practices for school board members.

### **Schooling and the labour of the governing parent-citizen**

Parenthood is a foundational marker of modern citizenship. As Duff (2011) explores in his book *The Parent as Citizen*, the political foundations of modern democracies are routinely framed through the lens of parenthood: citizenship and parenthood are blurred practices. Duff (2011) argues, for instance, that the rhetorical phrase ‘as a parent’ is politically deployed to ‘summon a confidence in political virtues’ (3), as if adding ‘as a parent’ to an argument demonstrates legitimacy, authenticity, responsibility and care. Parenthood is central to the way in which ‘good’ and ‘worthy’ citizenship is understood and practiced. The basis for parenthood/citizenship in modern democracies is the nuclear family: it is the presence of children and family that gives power to parenthood as the frame for citizenship (Edelman 2004). Of course, the highly gendered culture surrounding childrearing has long positioned women as having a particular role in the construction of modern democracies and citizenship, quite literally being a physical,

'vehicle for the production of national culture' (Berlant 1994, 148; see also Stoltzfus 2004; Ladd-Taylor 1995). More broadly, parenthood is also used by both men and women in gendered (and classed and racialised) ways to position their contributions to public life (Duff 2011; Edelman 2004).

The centrality of parenthood and families in modern democracies positions schools as a primary institutional mediator between the state and parent-citizens. Schools invariably sit at the nexus (and actively craft the distinctions and relationships) between the labour of social reproduction in the home and in public institutions. As a range of existing research demonstrates, schools are invested in cultivating particular forms of parents. From family learning initiatives to school choice policies, or, in our focus here, school governance reforms, parents are encouraged (and at times expected or required) to engage in a range of practices that ostensibly contribute to the life of schools (e.g. Wainwright and Marandet 2017; Crozier and Reay 2005; Campbell, Proctor, and Sherington 2009; Helgøy and Homme 2017). Schooling policies frame the parent-citizen in gendered, racialised and classed ways by shaping what forms of engagement and participation are required and desirable (Vincent and Martin 2005; Vincent 2000; Vincent 2017; Proctor 2010; Lea et al. 2011). In the context of successive reforms in which citizenship is increasingly practiced as an individual contribution and responsibility, parenthood is arguably one of the most highly signified and individualised acts of 'good citizenship'. As Gilles (2005) argues, parents must individually and 'ethically self-manage' the 'moral parameters of normative definitions of 'successful parenting' determined by policies (77).

This normative framing invariably rests upon distinctions. In crafting the 'good parent-citizen' its converse (the bad/problematic parent) is ever-present. From the 'active consumerism' encouraged by school choice policy agendas (Gewirtz 2001) to school-based parent engagement strategies, existing research highlights how education policy and practice expectations are underpinned by such distinctions. Some parenting practices are supported, understood and celebrated while others are viewed as problematic and excluded, often along racialised and classed lines (e.g. Ranson, Martin, and Vincent 2004; Allen and White-Smith 2018; Fretwell et al. 2018; Vincent 1998). Parent engagement policies can also exacerbate rather than redress inequalities, with classed, gendered and racialised understandings of what it means to be a 'good' and 'participating' parent (Vincent 2017; Ranson, Martin, and Vincent 2004; Butler 2015). In other words, drawing on Foucault (1982), the construction of the 'parent-citizen' can be understood as a dividing practice in which particular versions of citizenship are normalised in distinction from others.

In school autonomy reforms, 'good parent-citizens' are normatively constituted as governing parents who have stipulated roles in overseeing and contributing to the management of schools via boards, councils, or similar governance bodies (see Deem, Brehony, and Heath 1995). This form of engagement is concerned with the practices of governance and, with this, accountability, efficiency and professional regulation (Olmedo and Wilkins 2017). Whilst some researchers question the degree to which parental involvement in schooling governance goes beyond 'rubber stamping' in practice (e.g. Young 2017), we suggest that the explicit embedding of parents in governance bodies should be understood as articulating new conditions of possibility (and new normative distinctions) for parental citizenship *and* labour in the life of contemporary schools. Through connecting school governance to the labour of

parenting, school autonomy reforms seek to extract new forms of value from parents, extending the value of the labour of parenting into the governing of schools. As governing parent-citizens, parents are valued as labouring subjects in the production of schooling itself (i.e. investors in the life and success of the school). Whereas previously a parent's value to their child's education might have been conceived as primarily lying in the labour of supporting student learning or volunteering to support existing school agendas, parents are now valuable in-and-of-themselves as managerial agents within schooling governance structures, forming part of a collection of individuals who collectively contribute to the formation of a school's strategic direction.

To understand these contemporary conditions and dividing practices of parent 'participation', 'engagement', and 'partnership', it is therefore necessary to analyse how school autonomy policies actively shape the conduct and labour of modern parent-citizens through the institution of schooling. To date, scholarship has not tended to conceptualise the ways in which devolved school management policies are connected to the governance of parent-citizens through transforming the intersections of the labour of parenting and the labour of schooling. To address these shifts in the labour of social reproduction, we suggest devolved school governance reforms, and more specifically, the kinds of labour it requires of parents, need to be understood within the broader context of transformations in the contemporary practices of labour. As Adkins (2012) notes in her articulation of post-Fordist labour relations, there is a blurring in the traditional boundaries between formal employment and work in the home, including the (highly gendered) labour of social reproduction (child rearing). She suggests there is a need to attend to the, 'dispersal of productive and value-creating activities away from the bounded workplace across the entire social body – that is, the process of the folding of economy into society ...' (467). In other words, caring and domestic labour are valorised, politicised and economised in new ways through the valorisation of these forms of labour into the economy, alongside other significant shifts such as women's entry into the workforce and the commercialisation of social reproductive work (e.g. aged-care and child-care).

In this context, we suggest that the valorisation of (unpaid) parenting labour into the practice of governance explicitly extends the labour of the good parent citizen to the production of schooling itself. Schools, as quasi-marketised and financially accountable institutions (and in some policy contexts, such as the USA, able to operate as profit-making), draw on the unpaid governing labour of parents, thus blurring the so-called boundaries between productive/unproductive work. This is, as Adkins suggests, the dispersal of productive and value-creating activities, which in this case involves parental labour being made valuable through its use in and translation to school governance, thereby transforming the relational divisions between the private and public labours of social reproduction. In what follows, we demonstrate the ways in which parental labour is rendered valuable in school autonomy policies through technologies of governance that create the conditions for its use and value predominantly through the school board governance structure. Using the WA context as our point of analysis, we show how the valorisation of parental labour in school autonomy reforms rests upon divisions in labour constructed by the practice of the school board, producing the good and ideal 'governing parent-citizen'.

## Constructing the 'governing parent-citizen' through policy: school autonomy in Western Australia

In 2009, the conservative Liberal Coalition government of WA introduced the IPS initiative. The IPS was presented as a bold policy change designed to progressively shift public schools away from a more centralised to a more devolved system of school governance. The WA Department of Education (herein WA Department) describes an IPS as, 'a public school that has demonstrated its capacity to use its increased flexibilities and responsibilities to make local decisions across a range of school operations to enhance education outcomes for students' (WA Department, nd[b]). The IPS was established as a system within a system, as not all schools automatically shifted to IPS but had to apply to become part of the initiative.<sup>1</sup> The reform created pathways, with funding attached, for schools to move towards the new model. In just over a decade, 575 WA public schools have become IPSs and more than 80% of all students in the state are now attending an IPS (WA Department, nd[b]). Schools governed in accordance with the previously more centralised system that preceded the IPS are increasingly rare and residualised.<sup>2</sup>

While the word 'Independent' in the IPS might suggest significant new levels of autonomy or even a radically different system of schools, the reality is that the autonomy of schools to act outside centralised policy directives remains highly circumscribed and all schools still operate within the state system. This accords with broader trends in school devolution reforms, which are often characterised by *both* decentralisation and centralisation (Blackmore et al. 1996; see also Finnigan 2007). Indeed, at the same time that school devolution rhetorically announces freedom from the state via decentralised governance, there has emerged a range of technologies of state control that allow for new forms of 'steering from a distance' (e.g. Ball 1997; Eacott 2011). For instance, IPSs must still comply with all relevant legislation, industrial agreements and the full range of other policies and initiatives concerning core areas of schooling policy, such as the Western Australian Curriculum, national teaching standards, national standardised testing, and more. In addition, there are complex relationships between the decentralised reforms of the WA IPS and the broader state system (within which IPS sits). For instance, since the introduction of the IPS, one of its signature policy items, 'one-line budgets', which grant principals the power to locally determine budget decisions, have since been rolled out to all public schools in WA. This demonstrates the fluidity of the boundaries and relationships between the decentralised (IPS) and centralised (non-IPS) schooling systems.

A large part of the significance of the WA IPS reform is its symbolic importance in calling forth 'school autonomy' in the Australian context. Reflecting this, and inspired directly by the WA reform, the federal Liberal Coalition government made 'school autonomy' a major pillar of its schooling reform agenda and in 2013 invested 70 AUDmillion to encourage school autonomy across other states and territories (Australian Government 2013). This funding sought to expand the autonomy agenda across the federation, cementing devolved school governance as a federally driven policy direction (Gobby 2016; Keddie 2016). While this federal IPS initiative might appear to have heralded a national shift towards school autonomy, it in fact supplements decades of diverse subnational policy movement in this direction (Smyth 2011). The state of Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory, for example, have had forms of school

autonomy since the 1990s (see e.g. Blackmore 2004). In WA, the IPS was preceded by decades of policy initiatives that attempted to devolve school governance (e.g. WA Ministry of Education 1987; O'Donoghue and Dimmock 1994). In other states, such as NSW and Queensland, there have been recent attempts to roll back aspects of school autonomy after having originally embraced elements of devolved governance promoted via the recent federal reform agenda (Baker 2020; Caldwell 2018). These dynamics indicate the ever-changing nature of autonomy as a policy technology and the difficulties that emerge when seeking to enact it.

In what follows, we examine the WA IPS reform to consider how the policy documentation cultivates the conditions of possibility for parental labour in school governance decision-making, producing what we term the 'governing parent-citizen'. We focus in particular on the way in which the policy articulation of the school board values, and creates space for, particular forms of parental labour and citizenship in schools. School boards, we argue, are central mechanisms in devolved school management reforms and are powerful determining factors in how policy texts imagine the integration of parental labour into school governance and decision-making. We thus conceptualise the school board as a key technology of governance for producing new kinds of governing parent-citizens in policy.

In doing so, we borrow from Foucault's (1991, 2007) articulation of governance as a set of processes emerging from complex interactions between rationalities of government ('political rationalities') and technologies of government ('political technologies'). This couplet, 'emphasises the recursive relationship between the manner of knowing and representing a problematic social domain (rationalities), and the corresponding means of acting upon it to effect meaningful reform and improvement (technologies)' (Lewis, Savage, and Holloway 2020, 7). In other words, 'if political rationalities render reality into the domain of thought, "technologies of government" seek to translate thought into the domain of reality' (Miller and Rose 1990, 8). Rationality can thus be understood as 'an epistemological realm and is concerned with forms of governmental reason', whereas technology refers to the 'technical realm' and the specific 'techniques, mechanisms, instruments and processes through which governance "gets done"' (Savage 2013, 86). Thus, in what follows we examine the technologies governments use to encourage the development of such parents through the policy enactments of school boards, and in doing so explicate the modes of policy reason (rationalities) at play in determining how 'good' governing parent-citizens (and their labour) are normatively constituted.

Our analysis is based on thematic document analysis of WA government materials relating to the IPS. This includes key policies, legislation and public-facing materials on the WA Department of Education website. Adopting an 'interpretive' approach to policy analysis (e.g. Yanow 1996), we pay specific attention to how policy documents associated with the IPS and school boards construct new meanings and rationalities concerning parent and community engagement in schools. We start by briefly outlining the centrality of school boards in the context of school autonomy reforms. We then outline two core dynamics that underpin school boards as technologies of governance and create the conditions of possibility for parental labour through the articulation of the governing parent-citizen. First, we demonstrate how the policies concerning school boards suggest the need to actively arrange a strategic group of governing parent-citizens by valuing particular skills and knowledge required for the task of governing, and therefore

privileging particular kinds of parental labour and parent-citizens. In other words, ‘the ideal’ school board rests upon a vision of the ‘ideal’ parent-citizen, a strategic class who are to become governing parent-citizens. Linked to this are divisions of parental labour in the instantiation of the governing parent, especially between the school board and other parent-based school groups, most notably the Parents and Citizens Association. Second, we draw attention to government training programs that have been created to address a perceived lack of skills of school board members. Somewhat paradoxically, we argue that the knowledge, skills and behaviours of board members now need to be actively centrally shaped to make the government’s decentralisation agenda work.

### **School boards: the governance technology of and for ‘governing parent-citizens’**

A strong emphasis of WA’s IPS initiative is on the need for and worth of parent and community involvement in school decision-making (e.g. WA Department of Education and Training 2009). The primary mechanism for increased parental involvement in IPS is through the function of school boards. As described by then Education Minister, Dr Elizabeth Constable (2011), ‘through school boards, parents are empowered to have a greater say in how their children are educated.’ All IPSs must have a school board and underpinning legislation mandates both parent engagement and broader community membership on the board (WA Department of Education 2020). Moreover, parents and members of the community must make up the majority of a Board’s membership (WA Department of Education nd[a]). The board is described by the WA Department as central to establishing ‘a vision for the school that reflects the aspirations and needs of the community’ and as being, ‘an important influence on the direction of the school, with members bringing ideas and lending their expertise to strategic planning and community partnerships’ (WA Department of Education nd[b]).

The board is an evolution of the pre-IPS school councils. School councils have been a required body within WA public schools, as enshrined in the *School Education Act 1999*, and non-IPS schools continue to have councils rather than boards. The IPS reform worked within the existing structure of school councils to more formally embed the IPS school boards into governance practices. Central here is the function of school boards in developing and reviewing school business plans, budgets and school performance. The IPS reform made the board a signatory (via its chair) to a Delivery and Performance Agreement that all IPSs must establish with the Director General of the WA Department. This Agreement sets out the performance and accountability expectations, and the resources and support provided centrally to the school (WA Department of Education nd[b]). It creates a direct line relationship between the school and the central bureaucracy, thereby significantly reducing the roles and responsibilities previously played by regional offices (i.e. the middle layer of bureaucracy) by devolving these to the school level.

Whilst school boards do not denote a radical shift away from school councils, they do require new roles of parents and are rhetorically positioned in IPS policy as holding the power and possibility for better engagement with school communities. As such, they have emerged as a principal governing technology that expresses the policy aspirations for how parental labour should be exercised in relation to school governance. The

technology of the Agreement, in particular, explicitly links parents and community members (via the school board) to aspects of the strategic governance of schools. This has repercussions not just for the practices of governance in schools, but also for the kinds of parental labour now required, which we suggest constructs new conditions of possibility for parental citizenship. In our analysis of the WA context, we suggest there are two primary and related components of the board technology: first, the policy preference for a particular and strategic type of parent capable of carrying out the governing labour; and second, the creation of training in order to produce the ‘right kinds’ of governing labour.

### **1. The strategic labour of the governing parent-citizen**

As mentioned above, not all schools can become IPSs. Public schools wishing to become IPS must apply to the Department to demonstrate their ‘capacity’ to move to the IPS model. As the Department (nd[b]) outlines:

Applying to become an Independent Public School is a decision made by each school, in consultation with the school council and local community. The school community must consider its capacity to take on the additional accountabilities of being an Independent Public School, the local community’s support for change and the school’s operational performance.

The Department adds that, ‘It takes committed and proactive school communities to become Independent Public Schools’ (ibid.). Here, the policy discourse positions particular kinds of proactive communities, with a particular kind of community willingness, as capable of rising to the IPS challenge. To borrow from Rose (1999), the IPS model rests upon and seeks to produce ‘responsibilised’ school communities that choose to take the opportunity to exercise apparent new freedoms and forms of autonomy by harnessing community resources and potentials. As technologies of governance, therefore, the IPS reform seeks to *govern through community* (ibid.), in ways that rely upon the community itself to respond to the invitation to be governed in new ways. Yet as the above quotes demonstrate, not all communities are judged as having such capacities. Communities wishing to gain the benefits of the IPS must demonstrate and become the kind of communities required for this new type of school. This said, there remains an elusiveness about what exactly ‘community’ is, even though it is imbued with much symbolic power. What does and does not count as ‘the community’, and what a community must do (or have) to demonstrate its capacity to support the IPS reform is unclear.

What is clear, however, is the necessity to assemble particular kinds of parents as collaborators and participants in school governance via the school board. Parents and community members must make up at least 50% of board membership and it is via these members that boards ostensibly demonstrate their authenticity as structures reflective of (or at least connected to) the ‘school community’. Yet, at the same time, IPS policy makes clear that board members are most fundamentally about their potential contribution to the management of the school. The ideal board member is one with the knowledge, skills and capacities to be strategically harnessed by schools to serve effectively in a board structure. As the Department (2016a , 2) states:

We ask a lot of school board members. We ask them to bring their expertise, skills and experiences to steer the strategic directions of their schools. We ask them to endorse school's plans, budgets and reports. We ask them to monitor the performance of their schools.

Here, board members are explicitly called upon to bring a set of existing skills and knowledge as a means to enact their governing labour. Similar to Young's (2016) research in English schools, 'skills' are quite clearly linked to business practices. We see this as explicitly valorising parent's professional labour into the production of schooling. After all, these requisite knowledge and skills would clearly be more likely to be possessed by middle-class parents in white-collar professions – particularly those with government, legal, policy or other professional experiences with exposure to organisational governance processes. In this way, the enactment of a 'good' governing parent-citizen blurs parental responsibilities, professional expertise and the management of schooling itself.

While at face value, this need for managerial skills might appear logical and necessary, we see it as potentially creating tension with the Department's simultaneous commitment to ensuring boards are 'representative of the school community' (WA Department of Education 2016b, 7). The Department (nd[c]) argues, for example, that

Ensuring diversity on councils/boards contributes to effective school governance, and leads to better informed decision-making, new ideas, opinions, solutions and stronger connections with the school community.

This commitment to diversity and representation is arguably at risk, however, of being overridden by the privileging and normalisation of managerial skills, knowledge and culture. This, in turn, raises questions about whether boards have the potential to reinforce existing social inequalities rather than harness social diversity. Indeed, it appears that the WA IPS policies reflect the broader international tendency discussed above (e.g. Vincent 2017; Ranson, Martin, and Vincent 2004; Butler 2015; Hankins 2005; Ng and Yuen 2015; Gobby and Niesche 2019) to reproduce, rather than disrupt, prevailing norms in parent engagement patterned by class, race, and gender. By foregrounding the importance of managerial expertise amongst parents, divisions in parental labour are created (see also Wilkins 2017; Young 2016). Some parental skills are seen as right and necessary for boards, whereas other forms are absent and implicitly devalued.

The school board also reinforces divisions in parent-citizen labour by clearly differentiating the school board from other structures through which parents have traditionally contributed to school activities and directions. In particular, it delineates between the work of the school board and that of the Parents and Citizens Association (P&C). The role and work of both the board and the P&C is covered by relevant legislation, which (along with supporting policy advice from the Department) articulates clear differences in how the two contribute to schools and involve parents and members of the community (see nd[c]). Distinct from the strategic governance focus of school boards, the P&C is described as a mechanism to, 'promote the interests of the school', through fostering 'cooperation between parents, teachers, students and members of the general community' (ibid.). Here, descriptions of the P&C suggest broader stakeholder involvement and emphasise the 'voluntary' involvements of parents in particular – especially relating to 'assisting in the provision of resources, facilities and amenities for the school'. In line with this, the Department goes on to emphasise the role of the P&C in 'the organisation of fundraising' in schools. While the government states that the Board and P&C might

sometimes ‘work together to achieve common goals’, it is emphasised that they ‘have separate functions which are legislated’ and that there is ‘no ex officio position for a P&C member on the council/board’ (ibid.).

While it could be argued that the distinction between the board and P&C offers multiple ways for parents/citizens with different capacities and inclinations to engage in school-based decision-making and activities, we nevertheless see the distinction creating a division of parent-citizen labour that renders some as governing parent-citizens (i.e. in a strategic managerial sense) and others as participating parent-citizens (i.e. in a more traditional altruistic sense). Indeed, a report into the IPS reform suggests that because school principals are required to consult with school boards, they may no longer be prioritising engagement with P&Cs (Education and Health Standing Committee, 2016). Whilst this led to an amendment in government advice whereby members of P&Cs could be ‘considered for the parent or general community category’ of school board membership (WA Department of Education 2020, 6), the division in roles and forms of labour and citizenship remains intact.

Ultimately, while policy documentation expresses a commitment to boards that represent the diversity of school communities, the governance technology appears to preference parents whose strategic knowledge and skills can be harnessed and made valuable in the production of schooling, thereby excluding others (see Gobby and Niesche 2019). What we have, therefore, is not only the policy construction of a new type of governing parent-citizen but also within this a new preferred version of what the ‘good’ governing parent-citizen looks like. The construction of this preferred individual is, we argue, highly circumscribed and strongly classed by preferencing individuals with professional capabilities and attributes more likely to be possessed by white-collar middle-class parents whose professional labour can be valorised for strategic governance processes. In this way, the IPS reform blurs the boundaries between parental, professional and school management labour producing new governing subjects whose (unpaid) labour is made valuable in the governance of schooling. As a new technology of governance, therefore, WA school boards rely upon a strategic class of parents whose skills, knowledge, capabilities allow them to contribute to the labour on governance decision-making, while at the same time resting upon new exclusions and divisions.

## ***2. Training the governing parent-citizen***

Even though the school board is a key policy technology intended to devolve decision-making to the local level, the design and governance of boards is far from being a process devolved to schools to manage autonomously. Indeed, since the IPS initiative was introduced, WA has developed a significant amount of centralised department-led policy advice and training to ensure school boards are managed in particular ways, and school principals and board members are strategically equipped with the capabilities and skills seen to be necessary. This is supported by recent school-based research which has demonstrated that board members are often perceived as lacking the requisite skills and capacities for the managerial and governing responsibilities of their role (Gray, Campbell-Evans, and Leggett 2013). The State School Teachers’ Union of WA has also argued that the IPS has introduced new and increased administrative demands that

schools are struggling to handle, while also significantly reducing central and regional office support (State School Teachers' Union 2016). In addition, a 2016 study conducted by Curtin University was commissioned by the WA government to outline improvements to the IPS initiative, especially, 'to the functioning, influence and effectiveness of boards in meeting the demands of their role within the scope of existing statutory and policy settings' (WA Department of Education 2016a, 3).

Building on arguments in the previous section, therefore, not only does the IPS reform create conditions for boards to attract parents with particular knowledge/skill sets, but many of these board members are also understood to require training in order to develop the 'right' skills to carry out the labour of governing. For instance, one of the Department's primary responses to the Curtin University report was the development of a School Board Development Program, established in 2016 using federal government IPS funding. The primary aim of the program was, 'to provide school board members with further development, training and support' and, 'build their capacity to implement exemplary leadership and governance practices' (WA Department of Education 2016a, 2). According to then WA Director General for Education, Sharyn O'Neill, the program would provide board members, 'with tools, learning and resources to build their capacity across a range of areas, particularly in relation to influencing the directions of their schools' (ibid., 2). Training focussed on multiple areas of school governance, such as the pragmatics of business planning, reporting and managing risk, building strategic thinking and building an effective culture of relationships with stakeholders. The program offered training for three board members (the principal, a staff representative and the board chair), 'to build their skills and gain knowledge that they can use immediately in their role on school boards'. This, in turn, would, 'strengthen the operations, influence and effectiveness of their school boards' (ibid., 4).

Whilst many parents and community members who are board chairs would have direct experience of this training, its significance is broader. In our view, this training powerfully reflects the forms of labour and types of knowledges and skills now understood to be necessary for governing through school boards. Training, in other words, reflects particular norms in the practice of school governance that aim to sculpt the 'ideal governor' capable of producing value for the school. It also demonstrates the ways in which decentralisation through school autonomy, and the labour of the school board in particular, remains strongly coordinated by the central department. This centralised training and support was justified on the basis that IPS schools, 'have a different relationship with their communities because of the roles they are required to undertake', which involves, 'participation and collaboration in unique strategic areas of governance', including: 'developing business plans which set the strategic direction of schools'; 'the process to review school performance against business plans'; 'endorsing Delivery and Performance Agreements with the Director General'; and 'being involved in the independent review of schools' (WA Department of Education 2016a, 3). Given, 'this level of responsibility', 'it is imperative that school board members are empowered and trained to engage meaningfully in planning, budgeting, monitoring school performance and reporting' (ibid.). Even though federal funding no longer exists for the Development Program, the WA Department continues to offer similar training opportunities and resources, including a range of introductory and on-demand face-to-face and online training opportunities.<sup>3</sup>

Whilst board training can be seen as a logical and necessary to support boards to perform the new responsibilities that IPS status grants, the need for training also reinforces a shift in

both the optics and strategy of school governance, and a re-positioning of a school's community members. For example, distinct from the early years of the program, where policies imagined that schools would form boards and draw upon the resources of the local community, the training reflects a more recent governmental presumption that board members lack the skills necessary to perform the governing labour. As such, a model of the new kind of governing-citizen needed to be imagined, incentivised and shaped by a central training program in the hope of turning board members into effective governing citizens. Thus, while the IPS was established as an apparent move away from centralised planning to promote what the Department termed, 'a more grassroots and deeply embedded culture of decision making in our schools' (WA Department of Education 2016a, 3), ultimately the state still creates central mechanisms by which to shape school governance, the production of governing citizens and the exercise of their labour. Somewhat paradoxically, the knowledge, skills and behaviours of individuals need to be actively and centrally shaped to make the government's decentralisation agenda work. Not only, therefore, do we see a new strategic class of governing parents-citizens being assembled, but we also see this select group being trained by the apparatus of government to effectively perform what government now requires of them.

### **Conclusion: governance, parental labour and investment**

In this paper, we argue that a new kind of governing parent-citizen is being cultivated through contemporary school autonomy reforms. We suggest that there is a reconstitution of the labour of schooling whereby parental labour, professional labour and the labour of school governance conjoin through the work of school boards. A core conceptual contribution of this paper is an understanding of the policy emergence of the governing parent-citizen as reframing the intersections of the labours of parenting and schooling, constituted by the valorisation of parental labour and parents' professional expertise. The envelopment of school boards into devolved managerial structures is a central technology of governance that aims to produce new kinds of governing parent-citizens. Of course, internationally, various policy formations of school boards or similar technologies have long been contested spaces of localised politics and control. For instance, significant historical literature on nineteenth-century English schooling points to the ways in which school boards have been important sites of engagement for parents; especially for women and working-class parents (e.g. Duffy 1998; Martin 1993). In our analysis, however, we suggest that the contemporary policy articulation of the school board – focusing in particular on the example of the Australian WA IPS case – draws parental labour into school governance in new and highly constrained ways.

With reference to with governmentality literature, we suggest the political rationalities and technologies of school autonomy policies interpellate the labour of parenting into the labour of school governance itself. Specifically, the policy rationalities surrounding the technology of the school board rests on a reconfigured imagination of what the 'good' governing parent-citizen looks like: one that is highly circumscribed and strongly 'classed', preferencing individuals with professional capabilities and attributes more likely to be possessed by white-collar parents who can contribute to strategic governance processes. Moreover, this governing parent-citizen is enabled and constructed via the labour of school boards *and* actively shaped through centralised training as a means to address perceived lack

of skills and capacities. The apparatus of government therefore mobilises the policy technology of training to train citizens to effectively perform what is required of them. Rather, therefore, than simply harnessing the resources of local communities through ‘granting’ autonomy from the state, that very autonomy needs to be centrally cultivated by the state.

In putting forward our analysis, we see policy articulations of the school board calling forth and seeking to generate a new kind of ‘investing parent’ (and parental labour) in government school contexts. Ultimately, this policy documentation represents the governing parent-citizen as one whose labour is characterised by strategic investment in the life/success/market-position of the school. This is fundamentally different from the dominant ways in which parental involvement in public schools has previously been represented in policy (i.e. as relating to participation in children’s learning or in schooling life). The inclusion of parental labour as a form of investment in the function and governance of schools via school autonomy thus creates different conditions of possibilities for the parent/schooling nexus. Yet, these opportunities privilege particular kinds of parents (a strategic class of parents) whose skills and experiences are deemed valuable forms of investment in the life of the school. Such divisions are invariably shaped by class, gender and race. School boards allow some parents to become governing parent-citizens, who enact a form of labour that blurs their professional expertise and parental responsibilities in the management of schooling, while others can serve as participating parent-citizens, who enact a form of labour that more closely resembles the ‘caring’ roles of parents to contribute to schooling life through different mechanisms, such as the P&C.

We suggest these trends have implications not only for individual parents but for the social relations of public schooling. Schools are characterised by the physical and symbolic ‘coming together’ of parents, students, teachers – and in the case of government-funded schooling – the state (see Gerrard 2016). The policy constitution of a strategic class of parents through the school board therefore fundamentally reshapes the wider culture and community relations of schooling (and parenting) itself. It is the space that bridges the labour required for both parenting and schooling, within which the governing parent-citizen is expressed and cultivated. The valorisation of particular forms of parental labour impacts the ways in which citizenship is shaped via the practice of schooling. Thus, school governance reforms not only have an impact upon parenthood as an individual act, but create the conditions within which the public expression of parent-citizenship is carried out in schools as a form of labour.

## Notes

1. There is not space in this article to explain the various bureaucratic processes involved in the application. In short, schools must demonstrate an ability to govern in line with the requirements of the reform, which includes the capacity to assemble a school board (see next section). Further information can be found here: <https://www.education.wa.edu.au/independent-public-schools>
2. This raises an interesting question about how ‘exceptional’ IPSs are now the reform is the norm in the majority of schools. After all, if the bulk of schools are now IPSs, then it can be argued that IPS is no longer a system within a system, but is rather the dominant model for school governance in the state (see Fitzgerald et al. 2017).
3. <https://www.education.wa.edu.au/training-for-school-councils-boards>

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Funding

This work was supported by the Australian Research Council [DP190101867].

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