

ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations Inc.

SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE ADMINISTRATION AND REPORTING OF NAPLAN TESTING

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INTRODUCTION

The ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations Inc, is the peak body representing Parents' and Citizens' Associations (P&Cs) in government primary schools, high schools and secondary colleges in the ACT. It is a representative organisation whose objectives are to foster a quality public education system, to provide support services for affiliates and to make representations to the government on behalf of parents/carers in government schools

Council strongly supports the proposal for a Senate Inquiry into the reporting and administration of NAPLAN testing. We are in favour of introducing changes that will provide a fairer system of creating accountability for schools. It is hoped that this Inquiry will provide adequate resolution to the controversy that has surrounded the NAPLAN testing and the *My School* website this year. Council urges the Committee to find a resolution that is supported by teachers, parents and the government in order to avoid a repeat of this year's moratorium. Such a resolution will have to be devised in such a way that both enhances the educational experiences of Australia's children and provides parents with meaningful feedback on their child's and child's schools performance yet does not lead to any undue harm to individual schools or teachers.

Council would like to stress the degree of anxiety and level of concern parents have raised with Council in relation to NAPLAN testing and publication of results. Parents have indicated to Council that they see NAPLAN as a key issue and are aware that measures need to be taken to resolve the current situation. Council sought feedback from the 84 Government schools in the ACT area that it represents and received an unprecedented response from parents with over 52 replies to a survey that Council created in response to this Inquiry. The primary purpose of the testing and website is to provide parents with information regarding their child's education, yet parents seem to be excluded from important discussions about NAPLAN and the website or their views are misrepresented by other parties. Parent's views need to be considered in order to establish a well rounded discussion between teachers, parents and the government. The website has been built for parents, so listen to parents.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While Council is pleased that a standardised form of testing is being implemented nationwide, we have some concerns about how this testing has changed what is taught at schools as well as grave concerns about the current means by which these test results are being made publically available.

Council's policy supports standardised national assessment of student progress in literacy and numeracy and other key areas in selected years. It is thought that national assessment assists planning by teachers to improve student outcomes and provides an additional source of reporting to parents on student progress. Parents appreciate receiving all the information that is available about the progress of their child so they can work in partnership with teachers and make informed decisions about learning.¹

The *My School* website has resulted in increased transparency and accountability of schools. However, the public publication of NAPLAN results has also resulted in a number of negative outcomes that have been detrimental to the education of Australia's children.

Council feels it is pertinent that the Inquiry considers the position of parents concerning NAPLAN and the *My School* website. One of the main aims of NAPLAN testing is to provide parents with adequate feedback of their child's performance and to give parents *meaningful* information about the performance of their child's school. The Council of P&C Associations would like to warn the committee that parent's opinions have not always been adequately or fairly portrayed by other parties involved in the debate. Council is the representative body for Parents' and Citizens' Associations of ACT Government Schools and it is therefore hoped that the Inquiry will give weight to Council's position in representing the views of the parents it represents.

¹ ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations Inc 2009. *Policy Document*, 'Policy G4 standardised national student assessment and reporting', p. 62

Council is of the opinion that the public reporting of outcomes of individual schools and public comparisons of school outcomes should be managed in such a way that provides adequate and fair information about a school's performance and does not bias teaching priorities. It is considered that the current approach to NAPLAN testing and reporting has resulted in the following negative consequences for schools and students:

- providing misleading and inaccurate information to parents about school performance on the *My School* website;
- punishes, humiliates and demoralizes students, teachers and schools who have been singled out by the crude and at times inaccurate comparisons made between apparently "similar" schools as well as from the creation of simplistic league tables by the media and other organisations;
- is leading to greater inequities in schooling and social segregation of schools;
- narrows the curriculum, and
- promotes competition about school image and diverts efforts and resources from effective school improvement.

It is therefore with great urgency that Council asks the Senate Inquiry consider changes to the publication of schools results in such a way that will limit harm to schools. Given the controversy that surrounded the NAPLAN testing in 2010, adequate changes and measures need to be adopted to ensure that this situation does not occur again.

Any publication of school results should be done in a way that leads to better quality schools. Standardised national assessment data can help identify schools that are in need of additional assistance to improve their student outcomes. These positive uses of national assessment data do not require the public reporting of school test results. In saying this, Council recognises that parent's appreciate having access to information that highlights overall school performance. However, based on research conducted by Council in May, we challenge some of the claims made by Members of Parliament in relation to the *My School* website, in particular its

usefulness for parents and most importantly, how it is perceived by parents.² The site has been built for parents, so Council urges the Inquiry to properly consider the views of parents. The site has merit in its ability to provide transparency and accountability, but major changes need to be made to increase its validity, fairness and value for parents.

To respond effectively to the Inquiry, Council prepared a survey that was emailed and forwarded to parent contacts who have a child at an ACT government school. Council received 51 completed surveys within a two week period during May, 2010. A research report on the results of the survey has been attached as *Appendix One*. It is recommended that this submission be read in conjunction with this report. The results from the survey have guided Council in writing our submission.

This submission has been separated into four sections. Part A looks at the role of NAPLAN testing itself for parents and how it has affected student's education. Part B considers the *My School* website and the misuse of NAPLAN results. Part C focuses on experiences from overseas and Part D looks at the importance of adequately representing the views of parents in decisions made in regards to NAPLAN and the *My School* website

² Gillard, J 'My school website for parents live dailytelegraph.com.au blog with Julia Gillard', *The Daily Telegraph*, January 27, 2010. Available from: <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/opinion/my-school-website-for-parents-live-dailytelegraphcomau-blog-with-julia-gillard/story-e6frezz0-1225823697826>

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Council has a number of key recommendations to improve the quality of information provided to parents, the testing procedure as well as the publication of school results. These include:

Key Recommendations

1. Continue to provide a breakdown of the NAPLAN test questions and results of students in their individual NAPLAN reports provided to parents.
2. Major changes to the *My School* website including improving the reliability of the ICSEA value in determining “similar” schools, incorporation of greater qualitative information and detail on individual schools and explicitly noting the limitations with the site.
3. Safety protocols introduced that protect the information on *My School* from being used in creating simplistic league tables.
4. The removal of raw school averages against the national average and statistically similar schools on the *My School* website. Any comparison between schools is done on student cohort improvement where a student’s result is only compared to how they scored previously, determining the “value-added” to that child.
5. Allow greater involvement of parents in decision making around NAPLAN and the *My School* website by appointing a parent representative on the ACARA Board and the relevant working parties and subcommittees.

PART A

NAPLAN TESTING

The Benefits of NAPLAN

NAPLAN provides a useful tool for parents to assess their child's academic performance. It both promotes and assists in developing communication between schools, teachers and parents that is beneficial in improving the educational outcomes of children. In Council's survey about half of parents (51 percent) thought that NAPLAN had been beneficial to their child's education, with 31 percent saying it had not been beneficial and 18 percent of parents were undecided.³ Parents generally felt that a National test alerted them to their child's areas of weakness by providing objective feedback. Parents also found it useful to see how their child performed compared to the school and national average. However, some parents felt that teachers teaching to the test and the negative stigmatising of schools overshadowed the benefits derived from NAPLAN testing.

The test provides an opportunity to encourage communication between schools and parents. However, this is only the case if parents are first encouraged to talk to their school and not a website. Council believes that strengthening collaboration between schools and parents should be a key objective of NAPLAN testing and reporting of results.

Council strongly supports national NAPLAN testing which provides parents with an additional resource on the progress of their child's education and has the opportunity to strengthen partnerships in learning between parents, teachers and schools. The concerns of parents are not from the NAPLAN tests themselves but how results are published, the impact it has had on schools and how it has influenced teaching.

Recommendations

1. Maintain NAPLAN testing for years 3, 5, 7 and 9.

³ ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations Inc 2010. *Parents and NAPLAN*, p. 8

The value of information provided to parents

The tests should be designed to provide diagnostic information to teachers, parents and students. Council's survey showed a high level of support for the information and format of individual student NAPLAN reports provided to parents. 86% of parents found the individual reports very helpful or somewhat helpful, with only 4% saying they did not find the report helpful in anyway.⁴ In addition, only 4% of respondents said that there were parts of the student's report that they did not understand.⁵

Council is supportive of the current means by which a child's performance is reported to parents. However to improve and increase the level of feedback received by parents and further strengthen the learning partnership between the family and schools, Council recommends the following:

Recommendations

1. Provide a breakdown of the test with detail on areas covered and student's performance in each area.
2. Provide a State/Territory average in the student' report provided to parents.
3. Present easy to understand information about the statistical reliability of the results prominently in the student's report.
4. Note that some children underperform in a testing environment,
5. Endeavour to get the reports to parents as soon as possible after testing.

⁴ ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations Inc, 2010. *Parents and NAPLAN: A research report*, Canberra, ACT, p. 3.

⁵ Ibid, p. 5.

The effect of NAPLAN on the teaching of Australia's school children

Council policy states that standardised assessments should be conducted by valid and reliable instruments which reflect the breadth and depth of the relevant curriculum frameworks and do not create incentives to a narrowing of classroom learning experiences and knowledge.⁶

Data gathered from Council's survey showed that the majority of parents (65 percent) thought that NAPLAN had changed how their child was taught at school. Parents tended to be divided about the effect that NAPLAN has had on teaching. Many parents were encouraged to see that, since NAPLAN, they had seen a shift in subject focus with greater emphasis on numeracy and literacy. On the other hand, some parents were acutely aware of the increase in class time that was spent in preparing children to sit the tests. Other parents feel that teachers were preparing their child to sit tests and not improving the overall performance of their child or enhancing their educational experience through other elements. Some parents also thought that teachers focusing on the areas covered in NAPLAN did not support the natural progression of student understanding throughout the year.

Parents want a greater focus on numeracy and literacy at school and can see positive changes in schools as a result of NAPLAN as well as providing parents with a greater understanding of how their child's school is performing. However, this is achievable without the public publication of school results in such a way that unfairly compares 'like' schools and allows for the publication of simplistic league tables by the government, media and/or other organisations.

The increased scrutiny of schools that has occurred as a result of the *My School* website and the ability for the media to create simplistic league tables has had both a positive and negative effect on classroom teaching. However, Council feels that test results should be used to promote strengthening of communication between parents, teacher and schools rather than

⁶ ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations Inc 2009. *Policy Document*, 'Policy G4 standardised national student assessment and reporting', p. 63

vilifying teachers and schools and encouraging parents to cast judgment of their child's school based on simplistic league tables or a website.

Council urges the Committee to consider solutions that encourages teachers to continually improve the numeracy and literacy of students but does not lead to students being taught to perform well in a test (after all what good is that in determining the level of student ability). Council recommends that the following measures be introduced to reduce the likelihood of teachers teaching to the test and strengthen working partnerships between schools and parents:

Recommendations

1. Introduce safeguards on the public publication of NAPLAN results.
2. Place test results within the context as only representing one aspect of student education; this can be achieved by providing parents with more information about what makes an effective school. See Appendix Two. It can also be achieved by placing more qualitative information on the *My School* website.

Measures to Reduce Cheating and Increase Fairness

Council is aware of the reporting of incidents in the media of cheating by teachers and schools by assisting students in their tests, leaving posters such as multiplication tables on classroom walls, changing student's responses or by encouraging low performing students to be absent on the day of testing.⁷ The incidence of cheating in schools seriously compromises the legitimacy of testing results, the feedback provided to parents and the ability for NAPLAN to improve the

⁷ For example, see, Topsfield, J. 'Schools cheating on national tests', May 12, 2010, *The Age*. Available from: <http://www.theage.com.au/national/schools-cheating-on-national-tests-20100511-uuy.html>

educational outcomes of students. It also gravely questions the validity of any comparison between schools by skewing results.

In addition to reports of cheating, there is also evidence that schools are recruiting high performing students or are focusing their class time on higher achieving students as a means to improve their results.⁸ This can lead to social segregation in schools and increase the education achievement gap between students. The only way to minimise the incidence of student selection is to decrease the public accountability that has resulted from the way in which NAPLAN results are published. Public accountability has intensified with the ability of the media to create simplistic league tables through the selective use of data on the *My School* website and allowing parents to compare schools.

It is suggested that measures be implemented that reduce the incidence of cheating and reprimand teachers and schools that are proven to have interfered in the testing procedure in some way. Council recommends the government implements the following measures to reduce the incidence of cheating:

Recommendations

1. Review of the *Test Administration Handbook* that outlines how the tests should be conducted so that it ensures fairness and discourages cheating.
2. In a bid to reduce teacher interference, appoint independent overseers that can do random spot checking of classrooms on NAPLAN testing day.
3. Schools with an inconsistent number of students absent on the day of testing compared to school averages should be questioned and ask to explain.
4. If found guilty of wrongdoing the school's results should not be made public.

<http://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/school-principals-told-to-boost-naplan-test-results-as-students-with-greater-needs-were-ignored/story-e6freoof-1225878157003>

Testing for All students

There is a concerning element of discrimination to the NAPLAN testing as a proportion of students are not eligible to sit the exams. NAPLAN does not serve 100 percent of students. Students with an intellectual or functional disability as well as ESL students in Australia for less than 12 months are exempted from taking the NAPLAN tests. A number of parents are concerned that their child seems to be disregarded by the current testing procedure and that they are therefore also excluded from accessing valuable information about their child's education.

Council believes students should be provided the opportunity to be included in a system-wide basis of assessment. They should not be exempt from NAPLAN testing but rather students and parents should be provided with the option to sit an assessment that evaluates their development in line with an Individual Learning Plan that specifies educational outcomes, including key performance indicators, strategies and interventions for the student.

This will provide all parents with valuable information and understanding of the educational development of their child and will offer additional data for where resources or efforts should be focused or the level of support maintained for these students. Without adequate reporting to parents whose child has an intellectual or functional disability or ESL students, these parents cannot make adequate evaluations of their child's performance and of the performance of their child's school.

Recommendations

1. Parents of students with a disability and ESL students in Australia for less than one-year be provided with the option to sit a NAPLAN equivalent assessment that is developed jointly between the teacher and the parent and evaluates their improvement according to an Individual Learning Plan.

PART B PUBLIC PUBLICATION OF NAPLAN RESULTS

Providing Adequate Information to Parents to Make Informed Decisions

While the *My School* website provides important information about school performance, it does not place this information within the context of the school as a whole. The site has the potential to inhibit communication between schools and parents with parents forming the basis of their opinions of schools on the information provided on the website.

There are a number of elements that make an effective school, many of which are not displayed on the *My School* website. *Appendix B* details Council's advice to parents on what makes a good school. There are many additional areas that could be reported on the website to provide greater transparency and accountability. These areas include:

- Student's well being
- Ability for the school to deal with negative behaviour (such as bullying),
- The school's philosophy and attitude to teaching and learning
- The school's participation in the physical development of students
- The school's role in the emotional development of students
- Other subject areas provided by the school, not just literacy and numeracy
- Some rating of the quality of the core and optional programs offered by the school
- ICT program and use of technology
- Resources
- Parent's survey results*
- Feedback from teachers and the principle*
- The professional qualifications of teachers
- Background of the student cohort, ie. Gender, ESL, student mobility between schools, school size, student selection and level of private tutoring.

* Council understands that there has been discussion by the Education Minister to include these, but we are still yet to see these changes to the website.

Incorporating these elements (as well as others) will help to present a holistic picture of what schools do to support and develop the academic, social and emotional growth of children. These additional measures will help inform and reassure parents of their choice of schooling for their child.

Data from Council's survey showed that 24 percent of parents would like to see the *My School* website completely removed. The majority of parents, however, did appreciate having readily accessible data about their school's performance but were well aware that the site was deeply flawed and vulnerable to abuse. Most parents called for additional information on schools or were unconvinced of the fairness of the ICSEA value in comparing 'like' schools.⁹

At present, the *My School* website undermines a collaborative approach to school improvement by replacing partnerships in learning with competition between schools. The site should be developed in a way that provides parents with detailed information about individual schools that then allows parents to make their own comparison between schools to decide the best school for their child as well as creating opportunity for parents to communicate with schools and be involved in their child's learning.

Public Reporting of School Results

Council opposes the public reporting of test results of individual schools and public comparisons of these results. Where governments make information on the performance of individual schools publicly available, then they should then put in place legislative protections to ensure that this information cannot be used in a way that could do harm to individual students or school communities. Protections would cover, for example, use of the information by the media, companies or schools themselves to create league tables or 'rank and rate' websites for media sensationalism or for commercial gain.¹⁰

⁹ ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations Inc, 2010. *Parents and NAPLAN: A research report*, Canberra, ACT, p. 13

¹⁰ ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations Inc 2009. *Policy Document*, 'Policy G4 standardised national student assessment and reporting', p. 63

Council has recognised a significant shift in parent’s opinion of the *My School* website between February and May this year. Since February, more parents have started to question the validity and value in having the website and are calling for the government to remove the site completely. Data gathered from Council’s survey in May showed that 76 percent of respondents had accessed the *My School* website in the past, 26 percent of whom used the site regularly. Interestingly, 62 percent of respondents wanted to see changes to the site with only 26 percent happy with the site at the moment.¹¹

It is thought that this shift in parent’s perceptions of the website, to one of greater disapproval, has come as a result of the standoff between the AEU and the Government over NAPLAN testing that occurred in April this year. This dispute seems to have made parents more aware of the inadequacies of the website. Reports of teachers cheating and measures schools were taking to improve their results could also be contributing factors. It is Council’s view that more should be done to vastly improve the site rather than spend time arguing over its merits. The site has been built for parents, so listen to parents. The site has merit in its ability to provide transparency and accountability, but major changes need to be made.

Changes to the *My School* website

Without changes to the website, the threat of further industrial action by the AEU is imminent. The confusion and unease caused by the dispute between the AEU and the Government had a negative effect on student’s educational outcomes. NAPLAN testing is already a stressful time for students and the uncertainty over whether the tests would go ahead made this time even more stressful.

Despite what some members of the Government have suggested, the majority of parents want to see changes to the website and challenge its ability to fairly and accurately compare

¹¹ ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations Inc, 2010. *Parents and NAPLAN: A research report*, p. 13

schools.¹² The Government should take note of the opinions of teachers and parents about *My School* in order to avoid a similar occurrence next year.

Limitations with the Site

The claim that *My School* will allow parents to evaluate their child's teacher is not appropriate considering other factors that affect student performance, such as parental involvement, socio-economic background and students with English as a second language without comparison across a single cohort, the effect that an individual teacher on a group of students cannot be determined.

The only accurate means in which to assess marginal year on year improvement is to look at the same cohort of students as they progress from year to year, to assess 'value-added' learning. With this year being the first year that comparative data can be generated within a cohort of students, Council strongly encourages the government to consider amending the *My School* website to feature student cohort improvement, rather than cross-school comparison.

It is advised that this value-added achievement in academic learning for students at each school who have sat the test twice be the most prominent data on the *My School* website and located on the 'School Profile' page. Only students who were enrolled at the school and sat both exams should be used for the comparative data and measures of improvement are compared to the mean value of such measures for schools in the same geographic area for the same year group as well as the State or Territory and National average.

Comparisons of school results also lead to inaccurate assessments of school quality because the tests are narrowly based. They do not assess the full range of schooling objectives. They ignore the development of the "whole" student, including their personal and social development

¹² ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations Inc, 2010. *Parents and NAPLAN: A research report*, p. 13.

which cannot be determined from a raw score in a numeracy or literacy test. Even in academic terms, the subject range and the year cohorts assessed is limited.

Council feels that the current 'Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage' (ICSEA) is unfair. The website claims that the ICSEA "is a special measure that enables meaningful and fair comparisons to be made across schools" which is not true as the score is based on census-area averages rather than actual school characteristics.¹³ In addition, this value is out of date as it is calculated from the 2006 Census. The ICSEA value unfairly discriminates public schools and underestimates the average socio-economic status of private schools, Baker and Adhikari investigating the correlation between the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) and the status of smaller groups within those areas found that there was:

A large amount of heterogeneity in the socio-economic status of individuals and families within small areas. These findings indicate that there is a high risk of the ecological fallacy¹⁴ when SEIFA is used as a proxy for the socio-economic status of smaller groups within an area and there is considerable potential for misclassification error.¹⁵

The risk of error is high when using ICSEA as a proxy for the socio-economic status of schools making its use inappropriate and tragically inaccurate. ICSEA does not provide for parents accurate measurement of "value-added" as reported by Julia Gillard.¹⁶

¹³ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2010. About ICSEA *My School* Fact Sheet.

Available at:

<http://www.myschool.edu.au/Resources/pdf/My%20School%20FACT%20SHEET%20ABOUT%20ICSEA%20100120.pdf>.

¹⁴ Ecological fallacy refers to indexes as proxy measures the socio-economic status of individuals or groups within an area and the potential for people to be wrongly classified (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008. An Introduction to Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA). Information Paper. Available at:

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/PrimaryMainFeatures/2039.0?OpenDocument>

¹⁵ Baker, J & Adhikari, P 2007. Socio-Economic Indexes for Individuals and Families. Research Paper, Analytic Services Branch, Australian Bureau of Statistics, June. Available at:

<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abc@.nsf/ProductsbyCatalogue/4F209039E8F94F0CCA25733F001382B?OpenDocument>

¹⁶ Tomazin, F. "Gillard to Push for Parents to Get Details on School Performance," The Age (Melbourne), April 12, 2008. <http://www.theage.com.au/text/articles/2008/04/11/1207856836846.html>

What is even more appalling is the lack of sufficient explanation to explain ICSEA. The website suggests that ICSEA should be “interpreted with the assistance of the *About ICSEA Fact Sheet*, *ICSEA Technical Paper* and relevant *FAQs*”; however, no direct links are provided to access this information on the school profile page.¹⁷ In addition, the *About ICSEA Fact Sheet* does not provide any worthwhile information for parents who wish to obtain a general understanding of how the value is calculated. Rather, the fact sheet simply promotes the use of the value without making it explicit that the value *does not* directly reflect the student cohort at the school.¹⁸

It appears that the *My School* website attempts to ignore any potential bias or inaccurate representations of the testing data or the use of ICSEA. The limitations of statistical data must be made clear on the website. Parents should be provided with all the information required to make meaningful conclusions about school performance. Council has developed a number of recommendations for how the site should be changed in order to improve parent understanding of the website’s material and awareness of bias as well as provide greater accuracy and fairness in the publication of school results.

¹⁷ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2010. *My School* Statistically Similar Schools. Available at: <http://myschool.edu.au/Main.aspx?PageId=2&SDRSchoolId=WA%20C0000001008&DEEWRId=232&CalendarYear=2009>.

¹⁸ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2010. *About ICSEA My School* Fact Sheet. Available at: <http://www.myschool.edu.au/Resources/pdf/My%20School%20FACT%20SHEET%20ABOUT%20ICSEA%20100120.pdf>.

Recommendations

1. Provide more qualitative data on individual schools on the *My School* website that will paint a greater overall picture of each school by providing more information than just raw test results.
2. With information now available that can track cohorts; the website should be focused on the progression of student cohorts through years 3, 5, 7 and 9. That is, making comparisons based on the same group of students.
3. Council suggests that ICSEA be re-evaluated and only be used if a fairer measure of comparison between schools can be used and that any comparison between schools should be based on longitudinal data of a cohort's improvement rather than period data comparison.*
4. If a comparison of 'like' schools is still to be made, then an explanation of the value should be made available and presented clearly on the 'School Profile' and the 'Statistically Similar Schools' page. The *ICSEA Technical Paper* and *ICSEA Fact Sheet* should be rewritten to state possible flaws in its calculation.
5. Comparisons of schools in different states and territories is not appropriate given the different curriculum and school starting ages between states and territories.
6. It is misleading to compare public schools with private fee paying schools, particularly when public schools take all students who apply regardless of background.

* Council is aware that in June the Federal Education Minister agreed to re-evaluate ICSEA. Council approves of this decision and advises that this change is acted on as soon as possible.

Recommendations continued

7. Make explicit the limitation of using NAPLAN test results in evaluating school performance, in that it is only based on one set of test results, from one particular day and only on select areas of student learning.
8. Highlight the level of funding each school receives from the Government and other sources, details on scholarships offered at each school as well as data on the number of children receiving private tuition in each cohort.
9. Provide more detail on the breakdown of student cohorts so as not just to represent the percentage of Indigenous students but also the number of culturally and linguistically diverse students and students with a disability.
10. Clearly note the number of students in each class and for this information to be made available next to each school in the list of statistically similar schools.
11. Increase the number of students that must take the test to 15 in a class or a minimum of 10% of the students population whichever is higher before results can be compared against other results.
12. Place definitions for colour coding above tables (not at the bottom of the web page).
13. Change the colour coding. Red is alarmist and should be changed.

Recommendations continued

14. Schools that have been proven to have assisted students or influenced student test results should be removed from the site.

15. Provide a link on the homepage of the *My School* website to VICSSO 'Choosing a good school' <http://www.edu.org.au/content/checklist> which considers more determinants of what makes a good school than just performance in a numeracy and literacy test.

Harm Already Caused by the *My School* Website

The development of the *My School* website has facilitated the ease at which third parties can create simplistic league tables. Unfortunately, these league tables do not provide any meaningful information to parents nor do they increase the public accountability of schools. The league tables that have been created as a result of the website have given misleading and provided inaccurate information about the quality of education at some schools as they do not measure the true 'value added' nor consider other factors that can effect performance such as family background and resources.

The consequence of allowing the public reporting of school results is the ability for the media and other sources to create simplistic league table. School league tables provide misleading information to parents through their limited focus. The tables do not consider the extra challenges that some schools face in educating children from a disadvantaged background to succeed. They ignore other important elements of schools such as discipline, attendance, parental satisfaction and the contribution that schools make to children's wider development.

It appears that the main controversy associated with NAPLAN testing and the *My School* website is the ease at which the media can use this information to create simplistic league tables. Council supports any action that will ensure greater protection of the information on the *My School* website that prevents third parties from creating simplistic league tables.

Example One

The *My School* website has already caused undue harm to some schools. Unfortunately, newspapers have used publicly available NAPLAN results to rank schools in 'league tables'. For example, when the 2009 NAPLAN results were released, Tasmania's *Mercury* published a list of all Tasmanian high schools with their attendance rates and literacy and numeracy scores, arranged by the average of the scores.¹⁹ No attempt was made to explain the difference

¹⁹ 'Tassie high school rankings', *The Mercury*, 6 May 2009, http://www.themercury.com.au/article/2009/05/06/71261_tasmania-news.html.

between the ‘best’ and ‘worst’ schools. As it happens, the ‘worst’ schools were predominantly in rural regions and socio-economically disadvantaged urban settings. Without contextualising school results, for all we know the schools’ scores may have been as much a product of the socio-economic advantage or disadvantage of the cohort entering them as of the quality of education provided. In fact, these schools may be doing an exceptional job with a disadvantaged or disinterested cohort.

Nonetheless, schools were judged solely on four numbers, with no way of discerning how much of a school’s success (or lack thereof) was attributable to the school itself. Providing information on the number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the funding that schools received or the number of non-native English speakers might have painted a very different picture. This is partly what the *My School* website has attempted to redress with its ‘Like school’ comparisons, but the comparisons are extremely flawed, and they have not prevented newspapers from taking information out of context to rank all schools in a jurisdiction regardless of ICSEA score.²⁰

School league tables are pernicious in that they damn a school in the public eye without good cause. Stigmatising schools in this way will tend to warn parents off ‘bad’ schools that may in fact be providing high-quality education. This tends to reinforce the socio-economic gap between private and selective schools on the one hand and public schools in poorer areas on the other. Since enrolment numbers help determine funding, this creates a vicious cycle in which public schools are the clear losers.

Example Two

Council experienced the harm caused by the inaccurate presentation of school results as presented on the site first-hand when Lake Tuggeranong College in the ACT was singled out in a

²⁰ As seen in *The Canberra Times*, 28 January 2010.

joint press release by the Commonwealth and ACT Education Ministers. According to the release,

This school was identified from data available on the new *My School* website as in need of extra support to lift standards, falling below both the national average and that of statistically similar schools in national literacy and numeracy testing.²¹

Unfortunately, the Ministers had not done their homework and could not be further from the truth. Lake Tuggeranong College is a secondary college for Year 11 and 12 students. It does not generally educate Year 3, 5, 7 or 9 students. The reported NAPLAN results were those of only six Year 9 students attending a special 'Connect 10' unit for disengaged students on the same campus. By attempting to help students who had not engaged with the educational system elsewhere in the ACT, the College found itself singled out for concern as a 'bad' school. This is an example of how non-contextualised NAPLAN results can misrepresent schools and unfairly tarnish their image.

Protections against the publication of league tables

Council supports the collection of quantitative and qualitative information (such as socio-economic characteristics, reading recovery survey results, school profiles, school resources, indicators of student wellbeing and non-schooling factors) which contribute to the analysis of trends in outcomes assessments. It is recommended that when media and other sources collect data with the intent of publishing league-like tables that information can only be copied in full so to include qualitative and quantitative information on individual schools.

In the lead-up to the release of the *My School* site, the Commonwealth Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations repeatedly stated that the site would not be a 'simplistic

²¹ Julia Gillard and Andrew Barr, '\$17 million for Smarter Schools in the Australian Capital Territory', Media Release, 11 February 2010, http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Releases/Pages/Article_100211_131712.aspx.

league table'. To its credit, and unlike in some other countries, it is not. However, this has not prevented the *My School* website in being left wide open to the kind of misuse detailed above.

Ultimately, given the sensationalist nature of annual 'bad school' lists, the only way to prevent harm to school communities is legally prohibit harmful use of NAPLAN results. One model is supplied in NSW legislation, which provides that

- (3) School results must not be publicly revealed in a way that ranks or otherwise compares the results of particular schools, except as authorised by or under a relevant national agreement.
- (4) A person must not, in a newspaper or other document that is publicly available in this State:
 - (a) publish any ranking or other comparison of particular schools according to school results, except with the permission of the principals of the schools involved, or
 - (b) identify a school as being in a percentile of less than 90 per cent in relation to school results, except with the permission of the principal of the school.

Maximum penalty: 50 penalty units in the case of an individual and 500 penalty units in any other case.²²

In other words, ranking schools, comparing schools' results without their principals' permission, or identifying schools as 'bad' (there is an exception for identifying 'good' results in the 90-100th percentiles) is punishable by a fine of \$5,500 for an individual or \$55,000 for a newspaper, television station or other media outlet.

²² *Education Act 1990* (NSW) s 18A.

The law was a product of an alliance between opposition parties, and has not been enforced when newspapers have deliberately broken it to make a point.²³ There are also questions as to its compatibility with the implied freedom of political communication identified by the High Court in the 1990s.²⁴ It is problematic as it criminalises the provision of information, a characterisation that the Sydney newspapers have made the most of.

The better approach, given these issues, may be to regulate the manner in which information is presented. If a publication compares school results, it could be required to reproduce the *My School* data in full, including ICSEA scores. In fact, many newspapers have done precisely that. The problem is that ICSEA is a poor measure of a school's actual socio-economic status. To be effective this option would have to go hand-in-hand with improvements to the calculation of this score, and preferably the inclusion of other information on the site (such as the number of non-English speaking students, and, vitally, funding data).

Given these problems with the current state of the *My School* website, the best option in the short to medium term would be the enforcement by the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority (ACARA) of its copyright over the data on the *My School* website. This method was used to shut down the *Australia School Ranking* website in February 2010. This does not use the criminal law to penalise speech, but rather involves the legitimate enforcement by ACARA of its civil rights.

There is also a strong argument that data on student performance ethically belongs to only teachers, parents and students and should not be released publicly in such a way that unfairly stigmatises or damages the reputation of a school. One means of reducing the harm caused by the publication of NAPLAN results is to remove the raw school average on the School Profile page and replace this with the School's results in bands.

²³ Louise Hall, 'Labor refuses to move against league tables', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 January 2010, <http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/labor-refuses-to-move-against-league-tables-20100129-n48l.html>.

²⁴ George Williams, 'League tables law is simply rank', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 November 2009, <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/politics/league-tables-law-is-simply-rank-20091116-ii8k.html>.

Eliminating any raw score and only providing percentages of students across bands will make it difficult for media and other organisations to develop simplistic league tables. Parents, however, can still compare which school is best for their child and can evaluate where their child sits in relation to the rest of the school.

It will be important to make sure appropriate clarification of the bands is provided and made clear for parents to understand.

Recommendations

1. Enforce ACARA copyright over the *My School* website.*
2. Introduce legal measures to protect the information on *My School* to be misused.
3. Remove the NAPLAN average result on the School Profile page and only publish results in bands.

* Council understands that there has been a proposal by the Federal Education Minister to implement copyright over the contents of the website. Council would like to ensure that this is implemented as soon as possible.

PART C

WHAT WE CAN LEARN

Lessons from Around the World

The United States and the United Kingdom are two countries around the world that have adopted a similar system of national testing and public reporting of results. Unfortunately, they too are experiencing similar problems.

In the United States high stakes are attached to the performance of schools in state and national testing with the publication of school league tables and the possible threat of school closure. It has been reported that in the US there has been a narrowing of the curriculum and most concerning is the exclusion of students who are most in need from adequate education.²⁵ Low performing students are being seen as liabilities with schools introducing measures to limit the intake of low performing students, or suspending students during testing.²⁶

In 2006, academic Jaekyung Lee from the United States published a report on the effect of the US policy *No Child Left Behind*. The report concludes that despite the higher degree of accountability there had been “neither a significant rise in achievement, nor closure of the racial achievement gap”.²⁷ He then goes on to say that “it is evident that test-driven external accountability, whether it was a state or federal initiative, has not advanced equity on a large scale”.²⁸ Similar findings have been found in New York City where student results have flat lined, despite Joel Klein’s introduction of school report cards, an initiative held in high regard with Julia Gillard.²⁹

²⁵ Nichols, S.L. and Berliner, D.C. (2007) *Collateral Damage. How High-Stakes Testing Corrupts America’s Schools*. Cambridge, Massachusetts. Harvard Education Press. Chapter 5.

²⁶ Nichols & Berliner, Ibid.

²⁷ Lee, J. (2006) *Tracking Achievement Gaps and Assessing the Impact of NCLB on the Gaps: An In-depth Look into National and State Reading and Math Outcome Trend*. Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University. p. 5.

²⁸ Lee, Ibid.

²⁹ Donnelly, K, ‘I was wrong on league tables for schools’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 15, 2010. Available from: <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/contributors/i-was-wrong-on-league-tables-for-schools-20100115-mbq5.html>

A similar scenario is being played out in England. In 2006, England adopted a Contextual Value Added (CVA) measure to compare schools, taking into consideration factors including poverty, ethnicity, ESL and special needs students. The benefit of such a measure has been heavily criticised as not reflecting the true qualitative and gradual progression of students that cannot be measured in this way and that such a measure is too complex to ever be accurate in providing meaningful comparison between schools.³⁰ Using CVA has not reduced the negative consequences that have occurred from the public publication of school results. There are still high stakes involved that has led to teachers teaching to the test, narrowing the curriculum, prioritizing teaching time to “middle of the range” and ultimately failing to develop children with a well-rounded curriculum.³¹

Council would like to draw the Committee’s attention to a call by Newcastle University’s Vice-chancellor, Chris Brink, in relation to comparing universities. Brink argues that universities should be compared based on whether it is “good at what it does” and not whether it is “better than others”.³² It would still be possible to ask whether one university was better than another, however, the answer would differ based on the needs of the person asking.

Council suggests a similar philosophy be adopted in the comparison of Australian schools. Doing such, will provide superior information to parents that allow comparison of the different strengths and weaknesses of different schools and better reflects the diversity of what schools offer students. Quality profiling of schools should provide multiple layers of school data, adopting a similar “spidergram” approach to providing data on schools as being considered by UK’s Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills.

³⁰ Wilson, D. and Piebalga, A. (2008) *Accurate Performance Measure but Meaningless Ranking Exercise? An Analysis of the English School League Tables*. The Centre for Market and Public Organisation. Bristol Institute of Public Affairs, University of Bristol. p. 11.
<http://www.bris.ac.uk/Depts/CMPO/workingpapers/wp176.pdf>

³¹ Shepherd, J. “‘Fairer’ School League Tables Misleading – Study.” *The Guardian*, (Manchester) January 7, 2008. <http://www.bris.ac.uk/Depts/CMPO/workingpapers/wp176.pdf> Viewed April 22.

³² Newman, M. ‘League tables should be replaced, says v-c’, *Times Higher Education*, 27th August, 2009. Available from: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=407915>.

PART D

REPRESENTING THE INTERESTS OF PARENTS

Appropriate Representation of Parents' Interests

Parents consider NAPLAN and the *My School* website to be a fundamental issue affecting their child's education. Both the national testing and the website have been devised to enhance the educational achievements of Australian children and to provide *parents* with greater transparency of school performance. Council is concerned that there is currently no parent representative on the board of the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and Council was again disappointed to hear that a parent representative has not been placed on the working party to resolve the issues surrounding the *My School* website and the use of student performance data.

The website is meant to be a resource to provide parents with information regarding their child's education so it is surprising that parent's have been excluded from informing decisions about NAPLAN and the website. The views of parents continue to be discounted in these important decision making processes. Parents need to be consulted to ensure a well rounded discussion is carried out between teachers, parents and the government in a way that will assist parents in making informed decisions about their child's education.

CONCLUSION

Parents should be provided multi-faceted data on the performance of their child's school. This data should not be made publically available in such a way that third parties can actively select data to create simplistic league tables. The *My School* website should function as a means to strengthen the collaboration between parent and school and not stifle student learning, narrow school curriculum and increase inequalities between students and schools.

Parents have a right to access information about how their school is performing. There is a difference, however, between accountability based on supporting teachers and schools and strengthening lines of communication with parents to one based on blame, which stigmatises teachers and schools and stifles the academic, social, physical and emotional development of children. Accountability should not stop with the teacher. Schools need the support of the wider community to improve the educational experience of Australian children.

APPENDIX A

PARENTS AND NAPLAN

A RESEARCH REPORT

Introduction

Extensive controversy has surrounded the *My School* website since it went live in January, 2010. The *My School* website has been promoted by Julia Gillard to provide parents with transparent, robust and meaningful information about their child's school that will increase accountability.³³ However, critiques have questioned the sites ability to provide an accurate and fair representation of schools.³⁴ The Australian Education Union threatened a moratorium on the 2010 NAPLAN tests until the Government agreed to consider changes that would protect the public publication of NAPLAN results. With all the talk about what the *My School* website and claims of what it does for parents, the Council of P&C Associations decided to survey parents of ACT public schools to evaluate whether NAPLAN tests and the reporting of results provided parents with the level of valuable information and transparency that the government was reporting.

Methodology

In May, the ACT Council of Parents' and Citizens' Associations emailed a survey to the contacts of parent of the schools it represents. The survey was emailed to a range of primary, combined and public colleges in the ACT area. Council represents a total of 84 schools and 52 responses were received within a two week period. The survey asked a range of questions in relation to the reporting of NAPLAN results to parents and the *My School* website.

Results and Discussion

³³ Gillard, J 'My school website for parents live [dailytelegraph.com.au](http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au) blog with Julia Gillard', *The Daily Telegraph*, January 27, 2010. Available from: <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/opinion/my-school-website-for-parents-live-dailytelegraphcomau-blog-with-julia-gillard/story-e6frez0-1225823697826>

³⁴ For example, see Cobbold, T 2010. 'Like school comparisons do not measure up: An analysis of flaws in like school comparisons on *My School*', *Save Our Schools*.

The survey yielded some interesting responses, particularly in response to the *My School* website. Overall, parents supported the NAPLAN testing in providing an opportunity to assess and compare students nationwide. The vast majority of parents understood the reporting of results in their child's reports and found the reports to be useful. Most parents also believed that NAPLAN had been beneficial to their child's learning; however, other parents felt that the means by which teachers were teaching to the test outweighed the benefits that could be achieved by providing parents with nationally comparable data on their child's learning.

A number of parents noticed a change during NAPLAN year of how and what teachers taught. Parents found that they thought teachers were preparing students for the tests and other parents had noticed a greater focus on numeracy and literacy as opposed to other subjects, although many parents saw this as a positive.

Interestingly, the majority of parents wanted to see changes to the *My School* website, nearly a quarter of these parents called for the site to be removed all together. There were a number of reasons for why parents did not like the website. Many parents who liked being able to access information about their child's school were not interested in comparing their school's performance to other schools with many parents considering the "similar-school" comparison as inappropriate and unfair. Other parents asked for greater detail and more information to adequately form an opinion about the quality of education and student experience at individual schools.

Part A Reporting of NAPLAN Results to Parents

Council gathered information on the effectiveness and sufficiency of the current form of NAPLAN reporting to parents of their child’s performance. Most parents valued the feedback provided from the tests and found student’s individual reports easy to understand, however, a number of parents thought that greater detail in the reports would be appreciated by providing individual questions in the test which would greater assist in identifying a student’s weaknesses.

Analysis of Responses

Q1. Did you find your child’s/children’s individual NAPLAN report to be valuable?

Yes, very helpful	58%
Somewhat helpful	28%
Not at all helpful	4%
Do not know/not stated	10%

Parents commented on the value of information in the report that allowed them to compare where their child sat compared to other children, identified strengths and weaknesses and confirmed other information that they had received about their child’s academic ability. Some comments included:

“I found the individual report very helpful in terms of understanding how she compared to her peer group”

“The report provides a useful measure of a child’s literacy and numeracy performance against not only general expectations for a child at the particular lever, but also against other children”

“It confirmed/supported other evidence about her learning”

“It is great to have information that shows how my children are performing at a national level”

“It highlighted areas where we knew she was having difficulty and then we addressed it with the school”

While the majority of parents found the report very useful, a few parents only found it somewhat helpful and provided suggestions on ways to improve the reporting of information provided to parents. For some parents, the NAPLAN results were not a true reflection of their child’s academic ability or were inadequate in assessing what level their child is at as the test did not take into account what had been taught at school. Some comments included:

“This year’s NAPLAN report is not out yet and won’t be for some time. The delay in releasing the reports is understandable given the scale of the testing but means that schools and parents cannot respond for months”

“Only a snapshot/one of academic estimate”

“It is interesting and useful to see how they are progressing verses the year group, however it is important to realize that their particular class may not have covered certain topics in the test by the stage the test is sat”

The NAPLAN test reports appear to assist parents by providing them with information on their child’s performance at school compared to their peers as well as highlighting a student’s weaknesses and/or strengths.

Q2. Are there any parts of your child’s/children’s individual NAPLAN report that you did not understand?

Yes, there were parts I did not understand	4%
No, I understood the report	86%
Do not know/not stated	10%

The overwhelming majority of parents had no issues understanding the NAPLAN report provided to parents

Q3. Are there any extra details you would like to see in your child’s/children’s individual NAPLAN report?

Yes	16%
No, it is fine the way it is	70%
Do not know/not stated	14%

While the majority of parent’s thought the individual NAPLAN report was adequate in providing information about their child’s academic ability. A few parents made some suggestions that could improve the reporting to parents. These included greater detail on areas that a child needed to do further learning assistance by providing a breakdown of the areas tested and

examples of questions for each area. A suggestion was made to have annual testing so that progression from each year at school could be measured and provide feedback on individual teachers performance. Another parent thought it would be helpful to have the state or territory average as well as the national average to compare their child’s performance.

Q4. Do you understand the achievement bands used in the NAPLAN reports?

Yes	88%
No	4%
Do not know/not stated	8%

The overwhelming majority of parents understood the achievement bands that are used in reporting NAPLAN test results.

Q5. Have you read the Annual Board Report for your child’s/children’s school?

Yes	38%
No, I chose not to read these reports	20%
No, I have not heard of these reports or don’t have access to these reports	40%
Do not know/not stated	2%

It was concerning to see that a number of parents had not heard of their schools Annual Board Report or did not have access to these reports. A number of parents who said they were not aware of the school’s Board Report had attempted to access the report but were unsuccessful.

Of those parents who had read their school’s Board Report, the majority found the report useful in explaining the school’s NAPLAN performance and provided insight into how the school was performing as a whole and areas of concern that needed to be addressed across the board. There were a lot of parents, however, that thought the school’s Board Report did not adequately reflect how the school had performed in NAPLAN as it either did not provide any real comment about the school’s overall results and what measures it would take in the future or was biased in its presentation of how the school had performed.

Q6. Do you have a child that has ever sat the ACT Assessment Program (ACTAP)?

Yes	56%
No	40%
Do not know/not stated	4%

Q7. Which reporting did you prefer/understand better?

ACTAP	26%
NAPLAN	41%
Do not know/not stated	33%

Council asked this question to get an idea of how NAPLAN compared to ACTAP which was an across the board test conducted in all ACT schools prior to 2008 when NAPLAN was introduced.

Parent’s opinion was split on which reporting they thought was better and easier to understand. Parents who preferred ACTAP said:

“ACTAP in breaking numeracy down into sections gave a clearer understanding of the child’s success in separate areas in the initial reading of the report”

“There were more dimensions to the testing and reporting, eg. speaking skills as well as reading and writing”

Parents who preferred NAPLAN said:

“NAPLAN because it reports across a boarder student base”

It seems parents appreciate the use of NAPLAN to compare children with other children, across schools and nationally. However, parents would prefer greater detail in the NAPLAN reports to parents that gives greater insight into specific areas where their child has underperformed.

Q8. Has NAPLAN changed how your child is taught?

Yes, very much so	18%
Yes, to some degree	48%
No, not at all	16%
Do not know	18%

Parents tended to recognise that there had been a change in how their child was being taught at school as a result of NAPLAN. These changes included a shift in focus in subjects, with more emphasis on numeracy and literacy or how the subjects are taught to ensure NAPLAN test

material is covered early in the academic year. Some parents also noted that there had been more time spent preparing children to sit tests and doing practice test questions. For some parents these changes were seen as a positive, particularly the shift in focus to numeracy and literacy. For other parents however, it was thought that the different levels in which children may be prepared for the test by their teacher defeats the purpose of the test or that material was taught to the test and did not allow for the natural progression of student understanding on particular topics. Some parents commented saying:

“I find the subjects chosen at the start of a NAPLAN year to be an artificial construct definitely derived by the need to prepare children for tests, so NAPLAN means that the teaching of mathematics is now not necessarily for understanding but a means to an end to get through the required work”

“Yes, this year I understand that due to the bad results the teachers have taught my child to the test”

“Too much time is spent practicing for it in the primary schools. Writing lessons suffer a loss of richness because students are specifically practicing to the types of prompts likely to be in the testing”

“Since the results of the 2009 NAPLAN test were revealed, the school has definitely focused more on teaching the basics – reading, writing, mathematics. The parents are thrilled about a return to basics”

“There has been a switch to providing extra support to the children performing at the upper end”

Many parents felt that NAPLAN has assisted their child’s learning by prompting the school to take action to improve poor test results. However, it was recognised that this change meant that more time was spent in class focusing on particular curriculum areas that were tested and

a shift in teaching that has meant more time is spent in class on test-taking skills and practice tests aimed at improving test scores. There also appears to be a shift in focusing on particular students. Improving the test results of middle-range students has a greater influence on overall school performance than improving the results of low-end students. This shift in focus of teachers may further disadvantage students that are already struggling.

Q9. Has NAPLAN changed what your child is taught?

Yes	46%
No	40%
Do not know/not stated	14%

Responses to this question were similar to the previous question. Parents commented that:

“When NAPLAN is coming up, particular things they are going to be tested on are taught constantly prior to the test”

“Now teaching is concentrating on just the NAPLAN subjects and redoing old NAPLAN tests etc. Very bad outcome”

“A very limited and repetitive style of writing was practiced in one of my children’s classrooms in term one in what appeared to be practice of response to test type writing stimuli. They kept writing a number of very similar stories again and again”

“They are actually being taught maths and English. It is not coaching, it is teaching them the content they should be learning”

Many parents saw the change to what schools were teaching as a positive. Although, it was noted that at times particular topics were taught repeatedly to students detracting from other important curriculum areas.

Q10. Has NAPLAN been beneficial for your child's/children's education?

Yes	52%
No	30%
Do not know/not stated	18%

The majority of parents thought that overall a system of across the board testing had been beneficial in the learning outcomes of their child. Parents felt that a national system of assessment was beneficial in highlighting areas in which their child needed improvement and opened up opportunities for discussion between schools, teachers and parents. Some comments included:

"I know exactly what to work on at home with my child"

"We can't wait for the results so we know where our child needs support for the rest of the year. It is much more useful than teacher reports where every child is a winner"

"This testing is a great way to improve my children's education because it provides objective data on the progress of my children's education. The school cannot control their final attainment, but it does play a large part in their rate of progress NAPLAN provides one of the few objective measures of that performance"

“As a parent I feel NAPLAN has been beneficial because it shows me where my child’s strengths and weaknesses are and I can discuss this with my child’s class teacher. NAPLAN can open up lines of communication between parents/teachers and schools. We didn’t need a website to make this happen”

While the majority of parents supported NAPLAN and believed it to be worthwhile assessment a number of parents did not approve of the test nor thought that NAPLAN would improve the educational outcomes of their child. Parents argued that:

“It had provided no additional information to that already provided by teachers”

“The information was useful but only confirmed what I already knew. The value of this does not outweigh the teaching time I feel has been wasted preparing for the tests”

“Now my child is being taught to pass a single test on a single day and not the life skills and overarching education that I would much prefer”

“It is limited because of the testing undertaken – isn’t a good representation of holistic achievements at school”

In general parents seem to approve of a national system of assessment to provide quantitative data about their child’s capabilities and educational performance. The degree to which schools had started preparing students for the tests and the repetition of subject areas and other negative changes to teaching and the curriculum have occurred as a result of the public publication of results. Attempts should be made that creates a testing procedure that does not result in a high degree of negative consequences in what and how children are taught at school.

Q11. Have you use the *My School* website in the past?

Yes, I access this site regularly	26%
Yes, but I have only spent a short time on this site	50%
No, I have never accessed this site	24%

The majority of parents had accessed the *My School* website at some point, although it seems most parents have only spent a short amount of time on the site. Parents had used the site to look at their child’s school performance, schools that their child was interested in attending in the future and the distribution of students across bands. Some parents had also used the site to compare their child’s school to the national average, to identify similar schools and to compare their child’s school with other local schools.

Q12. Is there anything you would like to see changed with the *My School* website?

Yes	62%
No	26%
Do not know/not stated	12%

The vast majority of parents thought that there should be significant changes made to the *My School* website, mostly to ensure that results were published in such a way that was adequate and fair for all schools and placed school results within a broader context of other curriculum areas provided at schools as well as the role played by schools in enriching students as a whole. Of the parents that would like to see changes to the *My School* website 24 percent of parents called for the complete removal of the website saying:

“Get rid of it, as parents I don’t want to see their school compared to the rich private school down the road”

“I would like to see it removed completely. It is a waste of time and resources cast a shadow over many good schools and teachers trying to do their best with what they have. The controversy and stress this has caused to those in the education system overall with the information that is provided by the My School website it is just not worth the effort”

“I would like to see the My School website deleted. I don’t believe in the My School website at all. I can’t see any benefit from league tables...There is more to a “good” school than their NAPLAN results and how they compare to “like” schools as per a league table”

“The site is terrible. It should be taken down. It does nothing to provide me with information that I can act upon. For example, what would I do if my child’s school was rated lower than others not in my area? Or worse, lower than a private school that I can’t afford. How do I explain this to my kids?”

The majority of parents who wanted to see some changes to the site did value having access to a website that provides information about the performance of their child’s school, however, they either wanted greater detail about schools or were unconvinced that the data used was adequate for any worthwhile comparison or believed that the method in comparing “similar” schools data was unfair on many schools. Parents commented saying:

“I don’t like how the school is compared to other schools. I don’t believe it is a true reflection on the schools strengths. I think it has a negative reaction and it leaves room for unnecessary judgment...the My Schools website is definitely labeling children because of the school they attend...so to me the My Schools

website is a terrible website to go on and don't go on if you want to have a bad taste left in your mouth"

"More school data added related to class sizes, quality of teachers, etc that is updated regularly"

"I don't think it is at all necessary to be able to put more than one school on a graph"

"More information about schools achievements and programs then just NAPLAN, which only covers two grades"

"More non-quantitative data, more related data and background information"

"Comparisons of schools are very inaccurate and unfair. The groupings of "like" schools are a joke, particularly as they play out with Canberra's demographics. Also, by focusing on test scores, other aspects that could be more important tend to be ignored"

"I don't think information about schools/results should be made public. The information gathered should be used to better understand the needs of individual communities and, coupled with other information about the socio-economics of various communities, should be used to ensure all schools/students get the best and most appropriate resources/programs"

Parents were generally concerned about the presentation of data on the *My School* website and the negative effect that the website may have on some schools. The majority of parents called for greater detail to paint a more accurate and overall picture of their child's school.

Conclusion

The public publication of school results has been touted by the Government as a robust and accurate means of generating accountability by providing parents with a useful tool to compare schools. However, many parents, while appreciating national assessments and comparable data were unconvinced that the website provided enough qualitative data on schools, to portray an accurate and complete picture of schools. Many parents were also unconvinced that the “like” school comparison was adequate in generating any meaningful comparison between “like” schools. It should be noted that the survey generated some interesting results that challenge the notion that the website provides a useful tool for parents and the way it is used and perceived by parents.

APPENDIX B Characteristics of Effective Schools

What makes an effective school?

Effective schools are those that successfully progress the learning and development of all of their students.

There is no simple recipe for an effective school. Many factors combine to make each school what it is, and each school is unique. However, it is possible to identify a set of factors or characteristics that contribute to school effectiveness.

Based on research and consultations with parents, the ACT Council of P&C Associations has identified nine characteristics of effective schools:

- [A cohesive leadership team led by a caring and inclusive principal](#)
- [Teachers with a variety of skills and experiences](#)
- [Clear positive philosophy](#)
- [Environment supportive of learning](#)
- [Easily accessible student support](#)
- [Effective school organisational framework](#)
- [Broad, balanced curriculum](#)
- [Meaningful assessment and reporting on student progress](#)
- [Active parent and community participation](#)

For each characteristic, Council has prepared a broad description and examples of indicators. Many possible indicators are given for each characteristic, but there are certain to be others that could be added. Also, the descriptions and indicators may need to be modified as new issues and research findings emerge. As such, this document is intended to be a guiding or framework document that may change over time.

There are a number of important issues to bear in mind when using information on the characteristics of effective schools.

A school's context and culture

A school's context and culture will be important in determining the relevance of the characteristics. For example, student participation (one aspect of creating an environment conducive to learning) may be much more important in high schools and colleges than at primary schools (while still very valuable at primary schools).

Resources

Underlying the characteristics is the adequacy of resources and funding for schools. The issue of resourcing illustrates the complexity of school effectiveness, for example, there may be a marked difference in the effectiveness of schools with similar resource levels. Further, there is little evidence to suggest that simply increasing resource levels directly and automatically translates into improved school effectiveness. However, resources provide the opportunity for schools to become more effective. Adequate resources are needed to implement programs and provide a physical environment conducive to learning.

Indicators

As noted above, for each of the nine characteristics of effective schools, a set of indicators is suggested (which is not intended to be exhaustive). Together, the indicators can be used to create an overall picture of what is happening in a school, but taken on their own indicators can be much less meaningful. Student satisfaction is a good example. A low level of student satisfaction, when viewed with other indicators, could point to an area for investigation or improvement. However, taken on its own, a low level of student satisfaction could reflect a range of circumstances, within and beyond the school.

Your Child

Aside from the characteristics of effectiveness, there may be many other factors to consider in deciding whether a school meets or will meet the particular needs of your child (for example, friends, size, specialist programs and resources, location). In the end, a school is not effective for you if it does not meet the particular needs of your child.

Using the information

The information about the characteristics of effective schools could be used to:

- assist parents in making decisions about school issues;
- assist parents when they are choosing a school;
- help guide schools in providing information to parents (and prospective parents) about their school;
- assist parents to take an active part in school improvement. In the ACT, the effectiveness of each government school must be reviewed at least once in every three years, taking account of the views of parents and students;
- assist schools to develop strategies for improvement.

As such, the information is primarily aimed at parents.

School Improvement

While the list of characteristics can serve as a guide or focus for school improvement, it does not show how to go about affecting change. Improvement is most likely to be successful if it involves:

- a commitment by the school community to ongoing improvement;

CHARACTERISTICS	INDICATORS
<p>A COHESIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM LED BY A CARING AND INCLUSIVE PRINCIPAL</p> <p>The principal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is qualified, competent and experienced • provides leadership and vision for the school community • strives to improve the school • manages resources wisely • works co-operatively with staff and students • works co-operatively with parents, the P&C and the School Board • facilitates parent participation in school activities and student learning • inspires high staff morale • promotes continuous learning and development of staff. 	<p>PRINCIPAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Details of the principal's qualifications and experience are available to the school community. • The principal is able to convey the school's vision in discussions with the school community. • The vision is demonstrated in the schools' operations and progress. • The school has an improvement plan in place that is regularly reviewed and updated • The issue of school improvement is able to be discussed by the school community in an open and constructive way. • The principal is well-regarded by the school community (including parents, students and staff). • The principal is available to talk with parents whenever needed. • The principal is visible in the school community – students and parents know who the principal is. • The principal is able to demonstrate detailed knowledge about the school and its students. • Parents feel welcome to participate in school activities and student learning. • There is high staff morale at the school, including limited turnover of teaching staff. • Teachers, including relief teachers, want to teach at the school.

TEACHERS WITH A VARIETY OF SKILLS & EXPERIENCE

The teachers:

- are qualified and competent
- have positive attitudes and high morale
- elicit optimal student achievement
- develop students' critical thinking, problem solving and creativity
- are sensitive to individual student needs
- maintain effective discipline
- welcome parent participation
- are interested in continuous learning and professional development.

Across the staff:

- a broad range of skills is represented, including skills in specialist areas
- teachers collaborate and work as a team.

TEACHERS

- Teachers are positive role models and use constructive and varied behaviour management techniques
- Details of teachers' qualifications and experience are available to the school community.
- There is limited turnover of teaching staff.
- The teachers are well-regarded by the school community.
- Students have positive views about their teachers.
- Teachers use a range of teaching approaches, and change these if needed.
- Teachers and parents are able to discuss any problem areas, as well as proposed approaches.
- Parents are able to observe that their child is progressing, and are satisfied with what they are learning and achieving.
- Parents are able to observe structure in the classroom.
- Parents are invited to assist with classroom activities such as reading, art, gym.
- Teachers attend professional development courses.
- Teaching staff have a range of skills, which may include areas such as languages, music, performing arts, remedial and special education.

CLEAR AND POSITIVE PHILOSOPHY

The school philosophy:

- involves high expectations for all students and staff
- encourages students to work towards their personal best
- aims to develop the full potential of each individual intellectually, emotionally, socially and physically
- places an importance on the development of life skills and positive values and relationships
- recognises that each child is an individual with different needs, backgrounds and aspirations
- values and welcomes the diversity of students' backgrounds
- recognises that education is a co-operative effort that involves teachers, students and parents.

PHILOSOPHY

- The school has a clearly defined philosophy set out in school documentation and talked about within the school community.
- The philosophy is supported by clearly defined school goals and policies.
- The philosophy is reflected in the school environment and operations.

<p>ENVIRONMENT CONDUCIVE TO LEARNING</p> <p>The school environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is a stimulating environment where students want to be and learn • is safe, clean, secure and welcoming • fosters caring and positive relationships between people • promotes amongst students a sense of belonging and pride in the school • provides for student participation in aspects of school organisation and life • has sensible rules that are clearly defined and enforced • has effective behaviour management policies supported by a strong student welfare system. 	<p>SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students have positive views about the school. • The surroundings show that learning is valued (for example, on bulletin boards, classroom displays and hallways). • The school has a well-stocked and well-used library. • The buildings, grounds and equipment are clean and well-maintained. • Parents can observe positive relationships between people in the school environment. • Mechanisms are in place for student participation (for example, a student representative council) in aspects of school life such as rule-setting. • The school has clearly defined policies on issues such as discipline, bullying and student welfare. • Parents, students and teachers are aware of these policies. • Issues such as bullying and discipline are talked about in the school community.
<p>EASILY ACCESSIBLE STUDENT SUPPORT</p> <p>The school has a student welfare system in place that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supports the development of students to their full potential • addresses difficulties experienced by students effectively and efficiently • is sensitive to individual student needs and backgrounds • has links with community support services and resources outside the school. 	<p>STUDENT WELFARE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is access to support staff (for example, school counsellors and careers advisers) who understand the school and its community. • Students are aware of the support that is available and are able to access it easily. • Parents and students are aware of the links with community support services beyond the school. •

<p>EFFECTIVE SCHOOL ORGANISATIONAL FRAMEWORK</p> <p>The organisation of the school supports student learning, and there is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an effective school board • effective use of resources; • effective liaison with the school community; • time for planning, program development, reflection and collaborative decision-making; • support for staff appraisal and professional development; • flexibility to organise student learning in a variety of ways. 	<p>ORGANISATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents/parent representatives/school board are satisfied with the allocation of resources and expenditure decision, including timing and content. • Administrative and support staff are welcoming and promote the school through their contact with students, parents in the school community. • IT infrastructure and technology support learning. • The school has other physical resources eg educational resources, sporting equipment, library books. • A staff development and appraisal system is in place, which includes time for teacher professional development. • Time is set aside for staff to do planning and program development. • Class sizes do not exceed system-wide guidelines. • Alternative organisational arrangements are considered and used where appropriate, for example, smaller class sizes, multi-age groups. • Students are satisfied with timetable and subject choice arrangements.
<p>BROAD & BALANCED CURRICULUM</p> <p>The curriculum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides a range of learning experiences within and beyond the key learning areas • progresses the social, personal and physical development of students as well as their academic development • ensures students develop a positive attitude to learning • provides continuity from year to year and is integrated across learning areas • helps students to develop life skills, such as self esteem, motivation and self-discipline. <p>For this characteristic, please recognise that ACT colleges often specialise in particular areas of the curriculum.</p>	<p>CURRICULUM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All key learning areas and system-wide guidelines are addressed. • Parents are able to see progress in their child’s social, personal and physical development as well as their academic development. • Students with special needs, including those with learning difficulties and those requiring accelerated learning, are supported to maximise their educational potential. • A range of extra-curricula activities (for example, music and debating) is available. • Teachers are able to explain how the curriculum works and it is delivered. • In explaining the curriculum, teachers talk about the development of life skills and the philosophy of the school.

<p>MEANINGFUL ASSESSMENT & REPORTING ON STUDENT PROGRESS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The assessment and reporting arrangements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide clear and reliable information across the key learning areas and on the social development of students • lead to sound decisions about teaching approaches • identify problem areas and ways to work on these in partnership with parents • allow parents to observe and understand their child's progress • are undertaken in ways which support student learning and confidence. 	<p>ASSESSMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents understand and are satisfied with the level of information provided about their child's progress. • Information is provided to parents about the social, personal and physical development of their child, as well as their academic progress. • Parents can observe changes in teaching approaches in response to assessment reports. • Teachers use a variety of assessment methods. • Information provided to students about their progress is constructive and supportive.
<p>ACTIVE PARENT & COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION</p> <p>school environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encourages parents/carers to visit and participate in school life • recognises that partnerships between parents and teachers lead to better learning outcomes • promotes school and teacher responsiveness to parents' views, inquiries and concerns • supports the development of links with the broader community including other schools, business, and voluntary and government organisations. <p>all, there is a strong sense of community within the school.</p>	<p>PARENT PARTICIPATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents have a positive attitude towards the school and are keen to be involved in school activities. • Parents are involved in student learning in a variety of ways and are present at many school activities. • Parents are involved in establishing school goals and policies. • The school provides training or assistance to parents about helping at school (for example, how to assist with reading) and on education issues (for example, IT, gender issues). • There is an active P&C association. • The P&C and the School Board work collaboratively (for example, through overlapping representation). • Parents are satisfied with the methods and level of communication between home and school. • The school seeks and welcomes feedback from parents about their level of satisfaction with the school (for example, through a survey or by encouraging parent comments). • The school is seen as a key part of the wider community. <p>the school has links with other schools, government organisations, community support services, businesses and the community broadly</p>

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- a set of practical strategies for change; and
- the setting of priorities and timeframes.