

15 June 2010

Committee Secretary  
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Australia

Dear Committee Secretary

I am the Principal of a Prep. – Year 12 school in a small mining town. Due to this, I am easily identifiable. I ask you therefore to keep my name confidential. I stress that I make this submission in a private capacity as my views may not reflect those of my employer.

It is my belief that there are serious issues with the publication of results from NAPLAN Testing, and the subsequent creation of league tables by media outlets or other organisations. I make the following points:

- My school is the only school in the area. If parents were to lose confidence in the school, their only option is to send their children away to boarding school. This decision would have implications for the social fabric of the town.
- The publication of NAPLAN results does not tell the story of the school. One of our year levels in 2009 had approximately 40% of the cohort with diagnosed learning difficulties or with Special Needs. That is not taken into account anywhere – the result for this group simply shows up as “red”.
- Parents, with the best of intentions, want their school to “perform”. They don’t look into all the facts and figures involved. They don’t analyse the data – they look at the colours. Green is good, red is bad. This is a very simplistic view of a complex situation.
- The My School website does not give a balanced view. I have no opportunity to talk about programs that are positively affecting students. We run “Multi-Lit” programs. We use teacher aide time targeted for early intervention for students struggling with Literacy and Numeracy. Where can we show things like this to explain or balance the data presented?
- NAPLAN results are good for tracking the improvement of an individual student. These point-in-time tests are not sophisticated enough to then create “averages” that are then used to compare schools.
- I pose this question: which school is doing the better job, the school

that moves a majority the cohort from Band 5 to Band 6 yet this shows as “red”, or the school that had a significant percentage of the cohort on Band 9 and they maintain this, showing green?

- It would be reasonable to expect that the other mining towns in the general area, within 100km, would be considered as similar to our school. None of them appear on the list of schools we are compared to statistically.
- The pressure on Principals and teachers to meet arbitrary targets means that a substantial amount of time is spent on trying to prepare for the NAPLAN tests. This subsequently limits time spent on other educational experiences.
- The pressure that is subsequently placed on students to achieve has seen a rise in the number of parents withdrawing their student due to anxiety about the testing.
- Parents of students that are likely to fall below the National Minimum Standard are generally aware that this is the case. NAPLAN then serves very little purpose.
- My school has a transient population of students. To group NAPLAN data is not terribly useful. Tracking an individual could be.
- My school has a high turnover of staff due to our non-preferred location. On average, around 25% to 30% (up to 8 individuals) transfer out each year. We sometimes have difficulty attracting staff. Publishing negative NAPLAN data will just make this even more difficult.

I am not against the idea of a national diagnostic test to track individuals. I can see that this may be beneficial to parents. Grouping this information and publishing it, in my opinion, serves little purpose and could be detrimental to individual schools. I urge the inquiry to suggest protocols and safeguards to protect schools from this possibility.

Thank-you for taking the time to consider my submission.