



**Australian Education Union**  
**Submission to the Senate Education Employment and**  
**Workplace Relations Committee into**  
**the Administration and Reporting of NAPLAN Testing**

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**Angelo Gavrielatos**  
Federal President

**Susan Hopgood**  
Federal Secretary

**Australian Education Union**  
Ground Floor  
120 Clarendon Street  
Southbank VIC 3006

Telephone: 61 3 9693 1800  
Facsimile: 61 3 9693 1805  
E-mail: [aeu@aeufederal.org.au](mailto:aeu@aeufederal.org.au)

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Appendix One.  
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Appendix Two.  
What do the Experts Really Say – collection of summarised evidence concerning the dangers of high stakes testing

The Australian Education Union represents 180,000 teachers and educators in the primary, secondary, early childhood and TAFE sectors throughout Australia. As such it is uniquely placed to represent the views of teachers and educators on the issue of the administration and reporting of NAPLAN testing. This is an issue which the AEU believes is vital to the educational welfare of Australian students and the AEU welcomes the Senate inquiry into this very important matter.

**(a) the conflicting claims made by the Government, educational experts and peak bodies in relation to the publication of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing;**

Supporters of the publication of student test data on the My School website have presented it as a reform aimed at increasing parental choice of school, improving schools, improving the quality of teaching and learning and overcoming educational disadvantage.<sup>1 2</sup> Much of the argument is couched in the language of social equity, with talk of lifting the performance of disadvantaged schools to enhance educational opportunities for Indigenous students and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Whilst the stated aims are laudable, claims that the publication of school test data improves equity and student outcomes are not supported by the evidence. On the contrary, the weight of international and academic evidence strongly suggests that such a regime does not deal with the real issues involved in providing excellence and equity in education, and at worst is destructive to both quality and equity, harming the very students it aims to help.

### **The international evidence**

The debates concerning standardised test based accountability and league tables in Australia have been strongly influenced by the debates and experiences of standardised test based accountability systems overseas, particularly in England and the United States. It is accordingly worth examining these programs and how they have impacted on schools, student achievement and educational equity.

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<sup>1</sup> Gillard, J. (2009, June 19). *A New Progressive Consensus for Australian Schools*. Speech delivered to the Brookings Institution Roundtable on Education Reform, Washington DC. Retrieved 3 June 2009 from: [http://www.brookings.edu/events/2009/~media/Files/events/2009/0619\\_australian\\_education/0619\\_education\\_gillard.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/events/2009/~media/Files/events/2009/0619_australian_education/0619_education_gillard.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Rudd, K. (2008, August 27). *Quality Education: The Case for an Education Revolution in Our Schools*. Address to the National Press Club, Canberra. Retrieved 28 August 2008 from: [http://www.pm.gov.au/Media\\_Centre/Transcripts?tid=10](http://www.pm.gov.au/Media_Centre/Transcripts?tid=10).

In 2001 the US Congress and the Bush administration passed the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) legislation. Described by President Bush as addressing “the soft racism of low expectations”, NCLB aimed to narrow the literacy and numeracy gap between the higher and the lower ends of the educational spectrum and end the educational disadvantage of minority students. NCLB policy required all students to be tested in maths and reading in grades 3 to 8, and at least once in grades 9 through 12. Federal funding was linked to school performance, with states required to administer tests and meet mandated standards in core subjects, publish reports of achievement disaggregated by ethnicity and sub-groups, publish school league tables based on the testing data and put into place a series of rewards and sanctions on individual schools.

US academics Nichols and Berliner<sup>3</sup> and others<sup>4</sup> document how such a high stakes testing regime has had a profound effect on schools, curriculum, teaching and students. They present a wide range of data to show how it has led to a narrowing of the curriculum, with an increasing amount of classroom time devoted specifically to coaching and cramming for tests. Subjects not tested such as history and art have been marginalised and even core subjects such as English narrowed to areas most specifically related to testing, discouraging richer pedagogies such as classroom discussions, creative writing and critical thinking.<sup>5</sup>

Nichols and Berliner argue that NCLB has led to the exclusion from the educational system of many of the students it was purportedly designed to help. Students seen as low performing, who were previously seen as challenges schools were obliged to assist, have increasingly been viewed as liabilities. Excluding them from enrolling or encouraging them to leave is an effective way by which schools can meet their prescribed proficiency and improvement targets. They report incidences of students being bullied into leaving and dropped from rolls in states as diverse as New York and Alabama. Other tactics include suspending students during tests and ‘farming’ them prematurely into special education streams.<sup>6 7</sup> Nichols and Berliner document that high school drop-out rates, particularly amongst minority students,

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<sup>3</sup> Nichols, S., & Berliner, D. (2007). *Collateral Damage. How High Stakes Testing Corrupts America's Schools*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press.

<sup>4</sup> Wood, G. (2004). A View from the Field: NCLB's Effects on Classrooms and Schools. In D. Meier and G. Wood (Eds.), *Many Children Left Behind* (pp. 33-52). Massachusetts: Beacon Press.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pp. 38-41.

<sup>6</sup> Nichols, et al, Op Cit, pp. 58-64.

<sup>7</sup> Wood, Op Cit, pp. 36-37.

actually increased in years 11 and 12 after the introduction of NCLB,<sup>8</sup> a finding echoed by Darling-Hammond.<sup>9</sup>

According to Nichols and Berliner, high academically achieving students are also adversely affected as schools concentrate upon what they call ‘bubble kids’; students on the cusp of achieving the benchmark levels. To maximise a school’s chances of meeting its benchmarks such students are given priority and resources, to the detriment of both students deemed unlikely to reach them<sup>10</sup> and higher achieving students.

Nichols and Berliner refer to evidence of systematic cheating by schools, states and teachers, increased stress levels amongst teachers and students, erosion of the teacher pool due to problems with retention and recruitment, and unfair treatment of teachers in schools deemed ‘underperforming’. They also point to a lack of evidence that NCLB has led to any meaningful educational improvement.<sup>11</sup>

Numerous other critics have questioned whether NCLB achieved its goals. In 2006 US academic Jaekyung Lee published a report on NCLB under the auspices of the Harvard University Civil Rights Project, claiming that “neither a significant rise in achievement, nor closure of the racial achievement gap is being achieved”.<sup>12</sup> His report cites the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) a long standing national program which has been collecting information since the Nixon administration. Lee points out that the data demonstrates that progress has not been made since the introduction of NCLB amongst either minority students or the student cohort as a whole. He compares this with the situation in the 1970s and 1980s during which substantial progress was made in lowering educational socio-economic achievement gaps under civil rights and anti-poverty programs. The report characterises NCLB as “little more than a theory about how to force change without any grounding in specific educational approaches or targeted resource”.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Nichols, et al, Op Cit, pp. 57-71.

<sup>9</sup> Darling-Hammond, L. (2004). From “Separate but Equal” to “No Child Left Behind”: The Collision of New Standards and Old Inequalities. In D. Meier and G. Wood, (Eds.), *Many Children Left Behind* Massachusetts: Beacon Press, pp. 18-20.

<sup>10</sup> Nichols, et al, Op Cit, pp. 73-77.

<sup>11</sup> Nichols, et al, Op Cit, pp. 33-56.

<sup>12</sup> 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.  
[http://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/esea/nclb\\_naep\\_lee.pdf](http://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/esea/nclb_naep_lee.pdf),

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

Several conservatives and former supporters of NCLB have reached similar conclusions, including Chester Finn, education secretary under Ronald Reagan. In a speech on September 9 2009 he said that, “....despite all the reforming, U.S. [test] scores have remained essentially flat, graduation rates have remained essentially flat, and our international rankings have remained essentially flat.....Big picture, over 25 years, is flat, flat, flat”<sup>14</sup>. Mark Schneider, writing in the blog of the conservative American Enterprise Institute, noted that student achievement in Maths actually increased faster before NCLB than since its introduction, including for minority and low performing students.<sup>15</sup> Diane Ravitch, Assistant Secretary of Education under George Bush Snr, has also accused NCLB of promoting “false, anti-educational values”, of making schools obsessed with testing to the detriment of a wider curriculum,<sup>16</sup> and of misusing test data to mislead the public and punish students, teachers and schools.<sup>17</sup>

The nature of a high stakes testing regime damages the integrity of the tests themselves. Nicholas and Berliner note that the high stakes attached to NCLB and league tables leads to what they call “the prevalence of many forms of cheating” by teachers and schools.<sup>18</sup> In a survey reported by the Chicago Times in August 2009, nearly a third of Chicago public high school teachers said they had been pressured to change student grades in the previous school year. One in five reported they raised a grade under such prodding. And dozens of teachers said they believe someone changed their grades last year without their approval.<sup>19</sup>

Darling-Hammond<sup>20</sup> examines the ‘unintended’ effect that test-based ‘standards reform’ has had on educational equity and comes to similar conclusions. She also concludes that it has undermined access for low achieving students, created a hierarchy amongst schools, increased dropout rates for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and caused qualified teachers to

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<sup>14</sup> Finn, C. (2009) *Is it Time to Throw in the Towel on Education Reform?*

[http://edexcellence.net/doc/200909\\_CheckerFinnSpeech.pdf](http://edexcellence.net/doc/200909_CheckerFinnSpeech.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Schneider, M. (2009, October 14) *NAEB Maths Results Hold Bad News for NCLB.*

<http://blog.american.com/?p=6061>

<sup>16</sup> Merrow, J. (2009, August 4) *Privatisation Will Not Help Us Achieve Our Goals: An Interview with Diane Ravitch.* <http://learningmatters.tv/blog/op-ed/privatization-will-not-help-us-achieve-our-goals-an-interview-with-diane-ravitch/2413/>

<sup>17</sup> Ravitch, D. (2009) *Bridging Differences.* [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/Bridging-Differences/2009/06/lies\\_damn\\_lies\\_and\\_statistics.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/Bridging-Differences/2009/06/lies_damn_lies_and_statistics.html)

<sup>18</sup> Nichols, et al, Op Cit, pp. 33-56.

<sup>19</sup> *Chicago Sun-Times*, (2009, August 29). *Chicago Public High School teachers say they felt pressure to change grades.* <http://www.suntimes.com/news/education/1741991.CST-NWS-grades30.article>

<sup>20</sup> Darling-Hammond, L. (2004). Standards, Accountability, and School Reform. *Teacher College Record*, 106, (6), pp. 1047-1085.

leave schools deemed low-performing “in droves”, to be replaced by teachers without experience and often without training.<sup>21</sup> She contrasts this with what she considers more successful strategies which “focused on broader notions of accountability, including investments in teacher knowledge and skills, organization of schools to support teacher and student learning, and systems of assessment that drive curriculum reform and teaching improvements”.<sup>22</sup>

Many of the criticisms of NCLB in the US have been echoed in England about benchmark testing, “performance accountability” and league tables.

Originally introduced under a Conservative government in 1992, National Curriculum tests and their use for the production of school league tables were embraced by Labour when it came to power in 1997. They were extended that year by the establishment of national targets based on school tests. At that time, schools in England were evaluated by student performance in National Curriculum tests of English, Maths and Science at ages seven and eleven and at age sixteen by their five highest General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) results.<sup>23</sup> A more recent addition has been the introduction of a contextual ‘value added’ measure to data reporting, taking into account student improvement rather than raw results and factors such as ethnicity and socio-economic background.

The National Union of Teachers (NUT) has complained that teachers are forced to teach to the test and that tests distort the curriculum, that resources are allocated to students on the margin of the benchmark results to the detriment of others, that league tables confuse parents by measuring factors not related to the quality of teaching and that testing demoralises students and teachers and undermines the quality of education. Furthermore, the NUT has pointed out that the results of the National Curriculum Tests and the school league tables based on them are often considerably at odds with school evaluations produced by the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (OFSTED) system of school inspections which bases its assessments on observed educational practices and qualitative factors rather than test results alone.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, pp. 1058-1059.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 1047.

<sup>23</sup> Tests in England at age 14 were discontinued in 2008.

<sup>24</sup> National Union of Teachers. (2008). *The Case Against National Curriculum Tests*. Retrieved 22 April 2008 from: [http://www.teachers.org.uk/resources/pdf/case\\_against.pdf](http://www.teachers.org.uk/resources/pdf/case_against.pdf).

Similar issues are documented by Mansell. He notes the narrowing of the curriculum in England, and he suggests this is caused by “accountability testing”. He also points to the evidence of systemic cheating by schools to meet their benchmarks, the focus on ‘borderline’ students to the detriment of others and an actual decline in English student performance in international measures.<sup>25</sup>

The exclusion of lower performing students from schools has also been documented. A study of school selection practices amongst London comprehensive schools found that those with autonomy over their own admissions were more likely to exclude children with special social, medical and educational needs than schools whose admissions were controlled by a local authority, and that they did so on the basis of the effect this would have on their standing in the league tables. Schools with such policies had lower numbers of students from lower socio-economic and immigrant backgrounds, scored higher in public testing regimes and found it easier to reach their benchmark targets. West and Hind attribute the steep hierarchy in school positions in league tables in London to these school admission practices.<sup>26</sup>

Gillborn and Youdell<sup>27</sup> conducted an extensive study on the effects of National Curriculum Tests and league tables on two English government schools, concluding that they deepened racial, ethnic and class inequalities and led to irrational and unfair allocation of educational resources. They claim that students are allocated educational resources in a similar manner in which US schools invest disproportionately in ‘bubble’ students. They label this process ‘educational triage’.<sup>28</sup>

Gillborn and Youdell note that educational triage excludes lower performing students from the assistance they need, and also has a detrimental effect on academically achieving students who “place demands on the school that are at odds with, that is in excess of, the demands of Government and educational bureaucracy”.<sup>29</sup> In one of the schools they studied, higher achieving students were discouraged from taking more than the five minimum GCSE subjects

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<sup>25</sup> Mansell, W. (2007) *Education by Numbers. The Tyranny of Testing*. London. Politicos Publishing, p. 193.

<sup>26</sup> West, H., & Hind, H. (2006). Selectivity, Admissions and Intakes to “Comprehensive” Schools in London, England. *Educational Studies*, 32, (2), pp. 145 – 155.

<sup>27</sup> Gillborn, D. & Youdell, D. (2000). *Rationing Education*. Buckingham. Open University Press.

<sup>28</sup> Gillborn, D. & Youdell, D. (1998). *Raising Standards and Deepening Inequality: Selection, League Tables, and Reform in Multiethnic Secondary Schools*. Paper presented at the symposium, “Racism and Reform in the United Kingdom: The Market, Selection, and Inequality,” held at the Annual Meeting of the American Education Research Association, San Diego, p. 12.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12.



they needed to allow school resources to concentrate on those students on the cusp of the required results.<sup>30</sup>

Gillborn and Youdell also discuss the claim that league tables aid parental choice of schools. They note that while parents may express a preference for a certain school they have no right of access. Schools which listed higher on the league tables are accordingly in a position to choose their students, and given they are under pressure to maintain their positions in league tables this has a further detrimental impact upon students from lower socio-economic and minority backgrounds.<sup>31</sup>

The narrowing of the educational experience of students in England due to the testing and reporting regime has also been commented upon by Ken Boston, a former CEO of the South Australian education department, a former Director-General of Education in NSW and a former CEO of the UK Qualification and Curriculum Authority. In a seminar in Melbourne in 2009 he said:

In England the government's use of the key stage tests has seriously damaged the breadth and quality of primary education. The tests have changed from an essentially diagnostic test for the purpose of school and system improvement, to a high stakes summative test on which depend - amongst other things - the pay and future employment of the head teacher and staff. As a result the school curriculum is narrower and poorer than it was when the tests were introduced in 1997. In many schools, the time spent on areas of the curriculum which are not externally assessed has contracted sharply.<sup>32</sup>

In England there is increasing pressure from educational academics as well as from the teaching profession for reform of the testing and reporting regime. In October 2009 the final report of the largest inquiry into primary education in England for 40 years, the Cambridge University-based *Cambridge Primary Review* was released. It was based on a three year study and included over sixty research consultants. The report is extremely critical of what it calls the "state theory of learning"; the testing/league tables regime embodied in post-1997 UK government strategies and policies. The review's media release refers to the "damage the apparatus of targets, testing, performance tables, national strategies and inspection is perceived to have caused for questionable returns". The report calls for the abolition of

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, pp. 11-12.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Boston, K. (2009). *Response to the APPA Position Paper on the Publication of School Performance Data*. Speech to the Australian Primary Principals Association, November 2009. <http://is.gd/2Kig4>.

Standard Achievement Tests (SATs) at the end of primary school and their replacement with a more qualitative, encompassing, teacher-based form of assessment. It also calls for “separation of assessment for learning from assessment for accountability”, in other words an end to the assessment of school performance based on test-based measures.<sup>33</sup>

A report published by Britain’s biggest exam board, *The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance*, on 15 September 2009 called for league tables to be scrapped to stop schools ‘teaching to the test’. A panel of experts commissioned by the alliance said schools were “frequently preoccupied” by official rankings, and lessons often reduced to rote learning to maximise pupils’ scores.<sup>34</sup>

Moves towards reform have also come from within British Parliament. In January 2010 the House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee brought down the first volume of its report *School Accountability. First Report of Session 2009-10*. Its findings concerning the Achievement and Attainment Tables of school test results published by the UK Department of Children Schools and Families (the English equivalent of the student data published on My School) were unambiguous:

The Achievement and Attainment Tables present a very narrow view of school performance and there are inherent methodological and statistical problems with the way they are constructed....Yet most of those who may wish to use the Tables, particularly parents, remain unaware of the very serious defects associated with them and will interpret the data presented without taking account of their inherent flaws. As a result, many schools feel so constrained by the fear of failure according to the narrow criteria of the Tables that they resort to measures such as teaching to the test, narrowing the curriculum, an inappropriate focusing of resources on borderline candidates, and encouraging pupils towards ‘easier’ qualifications, all in an effort to maximise their performance data. There is an urgent need for the Government to move away from these damaging Achievement and Attainment Tables and towards a system which gives a full and rounded account of a school’s provision.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Cambridge Primary Review. (2009). *Children, their World, their Education. Final report and recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review*. Cambridge University.

<sup>34</sup> The Telegraph, (2009, September 15). *Scrap school league tables say experts*.  
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/6193787/Scrap-school-league-tables-say-experts.html>

<sup>35</sup> House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee. (2010). *School Accountability. First Report of Session 2009–10 Volume One*. Released 7 January 2010. p. 7.  
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmchilsch/88/88i.pdf>

It should be noted that the testing and league table regime no longer extends to the whole of Britain. In the face of the issues discussed Wales abolished league tables in 2001,<sup>36</sup> Northern Ireland<sup>37</sup> and Scotland in 2003.<sup>38</sup>

## The dangers of League Tables

The greatest danger to the quality of education provided to students produced by the publication of school test data is the use of such data for the production of league tables. This danger was highlighted by a report produced by the ACT Government School Education Council in 2004 entitled *School Performance Information* commissioned by the Australian Capital Territory Minister for Education and Training.<sup>39</sup> It found that reporting student test results as a measure of school quality, whether raw or value added, is unreliable, misleading, and damaging to schools and the quality of education they deliver. It concluded that the use of exam and test scores to judge schools publicly is not useful either as a device to assist parents in choosing a school or as a form of public accountability.

Furthermore it stated:

The Government Schools Education Council (A.C.T) considers that the Australian Government proposal is likely to undermine a key principle and policy goal of public education in the ACT, namely, improvement of equity in school outcomes.<sup>40</sup>

The report summarises the arguments against league tables as follows:

League tables are likely to:

- exacerbate the problems of misleading and inaccurate information about school performance associated with reporting school averages;
- lead to a public debasement of schools with very poor results and a low ranking, and to public labelling of their students and families as ‘failures’;

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<sup>36</sup> BBC News online, 20 July 2001. *Welsh league tables abolished*.  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/education/1448158.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/1448158.stm)

<sup>37</sup> BBC News online, 14 February 2003. *School league tables scrapped*.  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/education/1109516.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/1109516.stm)

<sup>38</sup> BBC News online, 25 September 2003. *School league tables to be scrapped*.  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/scotland/3137808.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/scotland/3137808.stm)

<sup>39</sup> *School Performance Information. An Issues Paper for the ACT Minister for Education and Training*. (2004). Government School Education Council, ACT.  
[http://www.gsec.act.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/38808/School\\_Performance.pdf](http://www.gsec.act.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/38808/School_Performance.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p. 23.

- lead to greater education inequities and social segregation of schools as high ranking schools select ‘good’ students and reject ‘poor’ students, while the best teachers move to the high ranking schools; and
- undermine effective school improvement.

League tables may provide misleading rankings of schools because:

- rankings of raw results tend to reflect the socio-economic background of the families of students;
- different measures of school results lead to different rankings of schools;
- rankings can create non-existent differences between schools and create failure where none exists.<sup>41</sup>

The very nature of league tables and the public reporting of data creates a situation of blame and increases inequities. A market based concept of competition inevitably creates winners and losers, designating schools as successes and failures. This is true whether or not the data is true or misleading, and league tables make it inevitable not only that some schools will be stigmatised, but often stigmatised regardless of the actual quality of education delivered or the commitment of their teachers. As the GSEC ACT report points out, the labelling of some schools as ‘failing’ creates a climate of recrimination and retribution which may undermine teaching and learning.<sup>42</sup> The report quotes several sources to demonstrate that under such a process students become very much aware of the status of their school, and that this has negative consequences for their own self images and commitment to education:

Students who are humiliated for their learning accomplishments are unlikely to respond positively in their future learning.<sup>43</sup>

The stigma attached to schools labelled as ‘failing’ and ‘underperforming’ can damn a school in the eyes of the public and parents, causing parents to withdraw students from a school or decline to enrol them regardless of the actual quality of education and school programs. Supporters of the publication of school ‘performance’ data see this as an appropriate and positive encouragement of the exercise of parental choice, yet not only is such choice often based on misleading information but the actual choice exercised is constrained by the selection policies of schools. As previously discussed, schools feel obliged to select students in the interests of their own ‘performance’ rankings and school image. Schools with higher rankings effectively choose students rather than parents choosing schools, leading to the

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

further narrowing of the educational options for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and creating greater societal segregation and educational inequities. As the GSEC ACT report notes, in England there has indeed been an increasing segregation of schools by both class and race since the introduction of league tables.<sup>44</sup>

When schools are labelled as underperforming, teachers in such schools run increased risks of being stigmatised as failures regardless of their commitment or capabilities. Due to the increased stigma and stress, as well as the potential damage to their careers in a blame-based accountability system, teachers are likely to become increasingly unwilling to work in disadvantaged schools.

By their nature test based ‘performance’ measures and league tables discourage school collaboration and lead to an increasing focus on the marketing of a school image rather than educational improvement. To maximise test results schools reduce both the scope of the curriculum and the nature of their teaching. The narrowing of the curriculum caused by an excessive emphasis on performance measures is demonstrated by a quote from a teacher in England, originally from the Daily Telegraph, reported by Warwick Mansell:

Securing good coursework results is simple. All my pupils ‘chose’ the same questions. I teach them lessons in which I more or less dictate the answers. I give them worksheets with detailed guidance on how to answer each question. I give them words with which to start and link their sentences. I mark their work, correct the grammar and then re-mark it until they get it right. I hate doing it. But it works.<sup>45</sup>

Both lower and higher academically capable students suffer as their educations and needs are subjugated to requirements for schools to meet performance benchmarks based on narrow accountability measures or pressure to achieve in league tables.

The creation of school league tables will inevitably lead to a diminishing of the quality of education in Australia, a narrowing of the curriculum to the detriment of all students and an abandonment of the goal of education to increase social equity. It increases privilege, inequity and disadvantage and harms the very students the supporters of a testing and reporting regime most claim to wish to help.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 16.

<sup>45</sup> Mansell, Op Cit, p. 77.

## Value added and 'like school' measures of school and student achievement

The My School website presently employs the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICESA) measure, which uses ABS data regarding where students live in determining the socio-economic status of a school's student population, as a tool in making comparisons between supposedly similar schools. The MCEECDYA communiqué of 10 June 2010 announced that ACARA has also been tasked to investigate the feasibility and desirability of drawing SES data on "student background from parents at schools" as an alternative to using data from the ABS. The communiqué also noted that once NAPLAN data is available on the website, My School will be able to show 'growth measures' of student achievement in literacy and numeracy over time.<sup>46</sup> The employment of such methodologies in comparing schools or measuring improvement should also be seen in the context of international experience.

In the face of mounting challenges to the validity of league tables and raw test data, value added performance measures were introduced in England in 2002.<sup>47</sup> They purport to judge schools not on their raw data alone, but by how much they 'add value' to their cohorts and boost their test performances compared to their primary school scores. The validity of such measures, however, has been questioned by researchers on a number of grounds.

Writing in 2005, Stephen Gorard examines the 2004 value added measures in York, Leeds, East Riding, Yorkshire and North Yorkshire. He finds that schools that produce a high value for raw 'performance' scores also produce a very similar high score for the 'value added' score as well, and vice versa. There are no low or mid attaining schools with high value added scores, and no high attaining ones with low ones.<sup>48</sup> He concludes that value added scores are measuring the same things raw scores do, namely the underlying socio-economic factors that make the 'performance' scores for different schools different in the first place. "Value-added scores are no more independent of raw-score levels of attainment than outcomes are independent of intakes".<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> MCEECDYA. Forth MCEECDYA Meeting Communiqué, 10 June 2010.

[http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/verve/\\_resources/C04\\_Communique\\_-\\_10\\_June\\_2010.pdf](http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/verve/_resources/C04_Communique_-_10_June_2010.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> Gorard, S. (2006). Value-Added is of Little Value. *Journal of Education Policy*, 21, (2), p. 236.

<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/143649.htm>

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 239.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 240.

Writers in the US have also pointed out that value added school performance scores can be affected by elements such as student mobility, changes in the demographic profile of schools and a variety of similar factors, as well as simple statistical uncertainty and sampling errors. Kane and Staiger from the National Bureau of Economic Research in Cambridge, Massachusetts conclude:

Although gain scores are often touted as better indicators of a school's 'value added', they are much more likely to be affected by idiosyncratic fluctuations in scores from year to year.....attempting to estimate a school's value-added is analogous to looking for a smaller needle in a bigger haystack.<sup>50</sup>

Linn and Haug from the University of California also conclude:

This volatility results in some schools being recognised as outstanding and other schools identified as in need of improvement simply as the result of random fluctuations. It also means that strategies of looking to schools that show large gains for clues of what other schools should do to improve student achievement will have little chance of identifying those practices that are most effective.<sup>51</sup>

Since 2006 England has added a Contextual Value Added (CVA) measure that takes into account a range of socio-economic factors including poverty, ethnicity, English as an additional language and special educational needs. However, in January 2008 a study by Bristol University cast doubt on the effectiveness of such measures.<sup>52</sup> The researchers point out that the value added scores of many schools are very similar, leading the differences in their positions on league tables to be determined by very small differences in scores. These small differences, far too small for reasonable comparative differences in educational quality to be deduced, nevertheless leave them hundreds of places apart in the tables:

Given that almost half of the schools cannot be statistically distinguished from the national average, any ranking exercise based on these numbers will be largely spurious.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Kane, T.J., & Staiger, D.O. (2001). *Improving School Accountability Measures. Working Paper 815*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: National Bureau of Economic Research, pp. 4-5.

<sup>51</sup> Linn, R.L. and Haug, C. (2002) *Stability of School Building Accountability Scores and Gains, CSE Technical Report 561*. Center for the Study of Evaluation, National Center for Research and Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing, University of California, Los Angeles. <http://research.cse.ucla.edu/Reports/TR561.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> Wilson, D., & Piebalga, A. (2008). *Accurate Performance Measure but Meaningless Ranking Exercise? An Analysis of the English School League Tables*. Bristol: The Centre for Market and Public Organisation, Bristol Institute of Public Affairs, University of Bristol.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11.

In comments reported by *The Guardian* the researchers were franker still, claiming that such contextually value added tables are “meaningless”, with some of the data “at best misleading, at worst dishonest”.<sup>54</sup>

With respect to ‘Like School’ models, Trevor Cobbold of Save Our Schools has identified the following flaws in such methodology:<sup>55</sup>

- As partial league tables they incur the same problems as full league tables. They provide incentives for schools to rig their results, discourage collaboration between schools and lead to the pillorying of the lowest ranked schools in each like-school group.
- Like-school comparisons fail to compare like with like. For example, performance disparities between schools in one group may reflect differences in ethnic composition, rather than differences in school practices.
- There are flaws in the measures of SES used to determine like-school groups which may create misleading comparisons. For example, some schools may be classified in a low SES group because there is a large pensioner population in their area, even though families with school-age children may be well-off.
- Using individual family data is just as problematic as around 40% of families, largely in the lower SES categories, do not state their income or occupation on school enrolment forms. As a result, some schools with a high proportion of low SES families may be incorrectly classified to high SES school groups.

## **The My School website and ICSEA**

With the publication of student NAPLAN results and the lists of supposedly statistically similar schools in late January 2010, it quickly became apparent the school groupings which were supposed to allow fair comparisons between similar schools contained a large number of anomalies. To list but a few:

- One of the richest private schools in Australia, The Kings’ School at Parramatta is compared with Gundaroo Public School in a small town outside Canberra.
- Blacktown Boys High in Sydney’s west is compared with Alice Springs School of the Air.

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<sup>54</sup> Shepherd, J. (2008, January 7). ‘Fairer’ School League Tables Misleading – Study. *The Guardian*.

<sup>55</sup> Cobbold, Trevor. *School League Tables – Success or Disaster?* Speech delivered to Politics in the Pub, Sydney, 4 September 2009. <http://soscanberra.com/league-tables/league-tables-discussed-at-politics-in-the-pub>



- Terrigal High School with 1300 students is compared with Cameron Downs Public School with six students on an outback property in Queensland.
- Geelong Grammar is compared with Arthurs Creek Primary School in Victoria, a tiny school with 71 students.
- Haileybury College, a wealthy private school in Melbourne, is compared with Welton Primary, a small Victorian bush school with 41 students and with Cleveland Street Intensive English High School, a NSW public school which specialises in teaching “newly-arrived, non-English speaking background students of high school age”.
- Scotch College in Melbourne is compared with Wyandra Public School in Queensland, a very remote school with 15 students and with Teelba State School, another remote Queensland school also with 15 students.
- Presbyterian Ladies College in Sydney is compared with Bellevue Heights Primary School in South Australia, which offers an intensive English program for students newly arrived in Australia.
- Tara Anglican School for Girls, Sydney, is compared with Turner School in the ACT which has 13 special education classes and 120 students from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Following the publication of the NAPLAN results on the My School site, concerns were voiced throughout Australia by teachers and principals. The principal of Queanbeyan High School described the comparisons as being based on “rubbish statistics” and incomparable results between schools. “It’s not fair to test everyone who does the full range of students with a group that cuts out 20 per cent or 10 per cent of the kids,” he said, explaining that the school in particular tested its special education students, including students with a disability.<sup>56</sup> A former teacher at Lake Tuggeranong College in the ACT explained that his schools’ results were influenced by a specialist program for a small cohort of Year 9 students who were at risk of disengaging or had already disengaged from school, leaving parents and the community with an inaccurate impression of the quality of education delivered by the school which primarily educates Year 11 and 12 students.<sup>57</sup> The principal of Melbourne High School, Jeremy Ludowyke, described the My School website as “a crock”, stating, “Our Students come from almost every postcode in the greater Melbourne area yet the ICSEA index fails to

<sup>56</sup> The Queanbeyan Age, 5 February 2010. *Website misleading: principal.*

<sup>57</sup> The Canberra Times, 29 January 2010. *My School does not give complete picture of performance.*

take into account the only common characteristic that they share...that they were selected...through a state-wide entry test.”<sup>58</sup>

The AEU believes that these comparisons were brought about by the nature of the ICSEA measure itself. ICSEA fails to take into account critical factors that affect educational outcomes including:

- The background of students attending a school. Instead, census data for the general community or communities that students are drawn from is used. This biases the results towards non-government schools. Families with higher incomes are more likely to send their children to private schools. Some higher income families live in lower SES regions and vice versa. The families in a given area which send their children to a non-government school are on average from a higher SES background than those which send them to public schools, yet they are measured the same when determining a school’s ICSEA. This causes an over estimate of the SES of government schools and an under estimate of that of non-government schools. This in turn impacts upon their placement in the so called statistically similar groupings.
- Whether students come from a non-English speaking background or have special needs. Public schools have on average more students in both these categories. Both these factors have a significant impact upon student achievement, yet they are not taken into account in any way in ICSEA.
- The size of a school, its funding, resources and staffing levels. Funding, resources and staffing of a school have a significant impact on factors which have been demonstrated to impact on student achievement, such as class sizes and the quality of facilities. The failure of ICSEA to take these factors into account or the My School website to include them is a significant omission.
- Whether or how a school practices selective entry. The selective entry of students based on their academic results is clearly a factor which would have a very significant impact on average student achievement. Schools which practice selective entry have done very well in the My School rankings, both in overall NAPLAN performance and in regard to their ‘statistically similar’ groupings. Many non-government schools practice various forms of selective entry.

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<sup>58</sup> The Age, 8 February 2010. *My School website a ‘crook’ says top educator.*

- Student mobility. Many schools, particularly those serving disadvantaged cohorts, have high turnover of their student populations. Student mobility is a factor that has been demonstrated have a significant impact upon student achievement.<sup>59</sup>

As a result of this flawed index, schools that are dissimilar have their results directly compared on the site in a way that is both misleading for parents and unfair for schools and students.

The AEU's concerns in regard to these comparisons are shared by members of the academic community. Independent researcher Barbara Preston points out that the Australian Bureau of Statistics itself strongly cautions against the use of area based indexes of disadvantage to indicate the disadvantage of individuals living in the area.<sup>60</sup> In examining the school attendance patterns between government and non-government schools in the ABS Collection Districts on which the ICSEA measure is based, she states:

...if drawing from just the ten most disadvantaged CDs, a public school would have 16 disadvantaged (LOW family income) students for every one advantaged (HIGH family income) student, while an independent school drawing only from the same CDs would have equal number of disadvantaged and advantaged students. Yet if an index that was similar to the SEIFA index of advantage/ disadvantage (such as the DEEWR SES index or the ICSEA) was applied, both schools would be classified as equally disadvantaged.

She concludes:

...the use of area-based indexes of disadvantage/ advantage are not appropriate for measuring the disadvantage/ advantage of schools in Australia, especially for high stakes purposes and where there will be comparisons ('matching') between schools from different sectors or which have different formal or informal selection and exclusion practices.<sup>61</sup>

Professor Margaret Wu of Melbourne University notes that NAPLAN tests have a high degree of measurement error, as well as sampling and equating errors, and are too inaccurate for the determination of either individual student improvement over time, changes in school performance from year to year or differences in educational effectiveness between different

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<sup>59</sup> Commonwealth Department of Education Science and Training. (2002) *Changing Schools: Its Impact Upon Student Learning*. <http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/2DA9C037-5A44-47B9-9316-F4905C363F83/1571/mobilityreport.pdf>

<sup>60</sup> Preston, B. (2010). *Notes on the ecological fallacy when area-based indexes of disadvantage/advantage are applied to schooling in Australia*. *Australian Policy Online*. <http://www.apo.org.au/node/20905>, p. 1.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, p.2.

schools.<sup>62</sup> She points out that such inaccuracies call into doubt in particular the validity of ‘like school’ comparisons, which require even more precision to detect differences between schools.<sup>63</sup> Suggestions that school and teacher quality can be assessed by test data are also refuted by Wu, who points out that student knowledge and skills are cumulative, acquired over years of schooling, while a school and individual teacher would on average have taught a student for three months when NAPLAN tests take place. She states:

An appropriate way to use school level student results is for education authorities to identify schools with low scores and, in private and in consultation with the school, conduct further investigations into the reasons for low scores. When possible reasons are identified, remedial actions can be taken. Publication of school results without appropriate cautions can only lead to mis-interpretation and mis-information, and in some cases, defamation of school staff.<sup>64</sup>

As previously mentioned, the MCEECDYA communiqué of 10 June 2010 announced that ACARA has also been tasked to investigate the feasibility and desirability of drawing SES data on “student background from parents at schools” as an alternative to using data from the ABS, and of measuring ‘growth’ of student achievement in literacy and numeracy over time. The AEU supports the development, in full consultation with school teachers and principals, of a revised index that better reflects the socio-economic status of students enrolled in a school along with factors which impact on educational outcomes.

However, while the AEU believes such measures may be of assistance in identifying schools with particular needs which may require additional targeted resourcing, it cautions against the over use of such measures in making fair and accurate comparisons concerning the quality of education provided by schools. As previously discussed, the evidence strongly suggests that value added and like-school measures are not sufficient to produce helpful or meaningful comparisons of educational achievement. Such comparisons based solely on SES data or the proposed ‘growth measures’ of student achievement will continue to be potentially misleading and counterproductive to fostering an atmosphere of educational professionalism and quality learning in schools. Meaningful assessment of school achievement must be made in a wider context involving a range of qualitative and quantitative measures supported by resourcing and system support to foster improvement.

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<sup>62</sup> Wu, Margaret, (2009) Keynote address presented at PROMS 2009, Hong Kong. <http://www.promshk.org/>

<sup>63</sup> Wu, Margaret, (2009) *Like with like*. <http://www.theage.com.au/national/letters/prejudice-not-faith-20090927-g7n4.html>

<sup>64</sup> Wu, Margaret, (2010) *Interpreting NAPLAN Results for the Layperson*. <http://www.appa.asn.au/images/news/naplanforlayperson20091022.pdf>

The AEU also believes that the My School site is incomplete and fails to deliver vital information parents need. It does not include vital information on the funding and resources available to schools. As Ms Gillard told parliament, “Only by understanding the total amount of funds at the disposal of individual schools is it possible to understand the relationship between resourcing and educational outcomes.”<sup>65</sup>

Another anomaly with My School is that it includes, in like school groups, years 7 - 12 high schools with P-7 primary schools. It is incongruous that a school’s performance is expected to be judged by year 7 results in the jurisdictions where year 7 is the first year of high school and when the students would have only been there for just over three months at the time of NAPLAN.

The site also does not include a plain English explanation of the NAPLAN results of a school. The government’s own research in 2009 found parents struggled to comprehend the NAPLAN results and “for many the data was too detailed and they would give up before taking the time required to work out how to read this chart”.<sup>66</sup>

### **The impact of NAPLAN, My School and League Tables**

As predicted by many, within days of the student data going online on the My School website it was used for the creation of league tables. League tables were created by the Herald Sun in Melbourne, the Sydney Morning Herald, the Northern Territory News and the Canberra Times. Listings of various kinds were also published in a number of regional papers, including The Mackay Daily Mercury in Queensland, the Colac Herald in Victoria and the South Gippsland Sentinel Times in Victoria. More recently the Hobart Mercury has published a league table, while The Australian has published lists of “Australia’s best schools” in its print edition as well as an interactive version online. In February a private company *Australia School Ranking* established a website from which it was selling for \$97 a 854 page report containing rankings and league tables of all kinds of all Australian schools. To its credit, the threat of legal action by ACARA forced the company to withdraw its report from sale. More

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<sup>65</sup> The House of Representatives. Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008, Second Reading, 21 October 2008. [http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/genpdf/chamber/hansardr/2008-10-21/0060/hansard\\_frag.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf](http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/genpdf/chamber/hansardr/2008-10-21/0060/hansard_frag.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf)

<sup>66</sup> ACARA *Website testing report*. Prepared by Colmar Brunton Social Research September 2009.

recently, however, the *Better Education Australia* website has been established, an advertising sponsored site which lists schools in league tables by NAPLAN and Year 12 results.<sup>67</sup>

The manner in which the league tables were listed and reported added to concerns about ranking and shaming schools and the misinterpretation of the data. The Herald Sun listed all schools in a dedicated eight page guide. The paper also had a listing on page four of the “Top 5” and “Bottom 5” primary and secondary schools under the tested areas of reading, spelling, grammar and punctuation, writing, numeracy and ICSEA.<sup>68</sup> Interestingly, the manner in which ICSEA was listed alongside the other categories would probably have led many readers to assume it was a measure of academic achievement, a factor which must have been demoralising for those listed bottom for ICSEA but not in the actual tested areas. It should also be noted that many of the schools ranked both highest and lowest across the tested areas in the Herald Sun tables were small schools, where a small number of students can produce a large impact on the average result. In most cases these results were substantially different to the 2008 results due to the changing cohort of their small enrolment of students. For example, Fish Creek and District Primary School in Victoria with 105 students was ranked second last by the Herald Sun on Year 5 writing, with a score of 402, 82 below the national average. The same school in 2008 scored 477 on Year 5 writing, just 8 below the national average. Swan Reach Primary School has 83 students and was equal second last in the Herald Sun league table on numeracy with a year 5 score of 411 in 2009. The year before they got 472 in the same subject. Year 5 grammar and punctuation in Swan Reach Primary moved 84 points, from 505 in 2008 to 421 in 2009.

The Canberra Times front page of January 29 led with the headline, *Capital’s private schools a cut above*. The first column of the article which accompanied it listed a number of public schools as the “lowest performing” in the territory. The league tables which accompanied the edition listed all ACT primary and secondary schools from top to bottom in the five tested areas of reading, spelling, grammar and punctuation, writing and numeracy.

The Sydney Morning Herald published lists of all primary and all secondary schools in alphabetical order, but assigned them a numerical state ranking from top to bottom. Under the

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<sup>67</sup> Better Education Australia. <http://bettereducation.com.au>

<sup>68</sup> Herald Sun, 29 January 2010.

heading *Top of the class* it listed the top performing primary and secondary schools in the five areas.

The Northern Territory News published league tables for primary and secondary schools, listing them top to bottom in order of their scores in all five tested areas on Saturday 30 January. The day before it published a less complete list under the heading *How does your school rate*, listing the ten “top” and ten “bottom” primary and secondary schools in each tested area.

There were also reports and listings published by regional newspapers. The Mackay Daily Mercury in Queensland published separate lists of government and non-government secondary schools in the region along with their scores in the tested areas.<sup>69</sup> The Colac Herald in Victoria published a bar graph with the scores of fifteen schools directly compared for reading. It named three schools as having “received at least one substantial below average performance”.<sup>70</sup> The South Gippsland Sentinel Times in Victoria sang the praises of a local private school, describing it as having “blitzed its peers”, while under the headings *Report card shock for some schools* and *Writing on the wall for some primary schools* it credited the My School website with exposing “serious problems” and a “worrying side” in some of the regions’ government schools.<sup>71</sup>

Beyond the damaging effects, the absurdity of league tables is further highlighted by the approach taken by some outlets in their construction. The Sydney Morning Herald, for example, produced its league table by averaging the school mean scores of student test results in the five tested areas across literacy and numeracy to produce a “state ranking” from top to bottom in the primary and secondary sectors. There is no statistical validity in averaging literacy and numeracy results.

In the online league tables produced by the Australia School Ranking the top primary school in the nation was Mount Blowhard Primary School in Victoria which has only 45 students in total. If the table had been constructed the year before this school would never have figured in

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<sup>69</sup> Daily Mercury, 27 February 2010. *Schools to work on literacy, numeracy.*

<sup>70</sup> The Colac Herald, 29 January 2010. *Principals criticise results.*

<sup>71</sup> The South Gippsland Sentinel Times, 2 February 2010. *Report card shocks for some schools* and *Writing on the wall for some primary schools.*

the top rankings as some of its year 3 results were over 100 points higher in 2009 than 2008 due to the changing cohort of students.

The My School website had a profound impact on schools, teachers, students and communities throughout Australia, especially in the jurisdictions in which league tables were published. The following is a selection of statements from AEU members in jurisdictions in which league tables were published, used with their permission.

Our school was named and shamed on the front page of The Canberra Times, but not mentioned as a school with high ‘value added’ between Years 3 and 5...I felt considerable pressure as the Year 3 teacher to ensure the kids’ understanding of questioning techniques and [to use] practising kits for the test, even where this is not the highest learning need.

Teacher morale [at our school] is at an all-time low based on the implications of league tables.....We received negative comments from parents regarding us being a ‘low performing’ school based on newspaper league tables. Students commented that our school was “hopeless or last” in the newspaper.

[There was] high pressure from CEO and School Network Leaders to prepare students for the tests under the banner of ‘test ready’ or ‘test wise’. The CEO said, “I’m happy if people are teaching to the test.”

In the local primary schools the focus is on “improving” NAPLAN results. This has resulted in things like language programs being suspended during the NAPLAN preparation period. All writing tasks [are being] restricted to 45 minutes to fit with NAPLAN. Students are stressing out and not wanting to attend school because of fear of failure at NAPLAN....Teachers have commented that the requirement to improve NAPLAN results has resulted in the teaching practices being modified in a manner that is detrimental to internationally recognised teaching practice and thus student learning.

Overall at our school it is difficult enough to attract teachers.....The publication of league tables has exacerbated this problem with prospective recruits thinking about the impact that teaching at a ‘low ranked’ school might have on their career. When our school was named in the ‘bottom 5’ on ABC TV, one of our Exec teachers (who has taught at our school since it opened) was extremely upset and seriously discussed early retirement – she repeatedly asked, “why have I bothered?”



Our students are raised in a heavily poverty stricken environment with many of them enduring horribly depressing home lives. Our damaged community has suffered enough emotional damage without being embarrassed further through use of suggestive league tables.....The schools that are compared to [our school] are not in any way, shape or form 'like' us. We are unique and cannot be compared. It is shattering to us to be compared to schools that are completely different. The data is bare and does not reflect the history of where we have come from and what we have achieved.....[Our school] has fantastic staff working really hard to make a difference in the lives of our children. Please do not shame us like this! Our kids have nowhere else to go.

I am the principal of [a regional Victorian school]. There are more private/Catholic/Low fee Christian secondary schools in [our region] than there are public schools. Over 50% of year 7 students (our first year of secondary education) attend private schools.....The private schools take the majority of high skills students. Year 7 students entering my school in 2009 had an average reading ability equivalent to the year 4 standard and an average numeracy ability equivalent to less than the year 4 standard.....For my school's teachers the main game is... to progress students to a point where they have caught up to the year 10 standards by the end of year 10. That means making progress of much more than one year's development in literacy and numeracy per year for four years. This we are doing for many students and the number grows each year as we get better at this project.....In 2009 the school's internal testing program showed that 615 of our year 7 students progress at a faster than expected rate between February and September. They were catching up. However, on NAPLAN results the overwhelming majority of students were below the year 7 benchmark. So when results are published it is this fact that is published - not the progress that the students have made. By the time they are in year 9, the students will have made more progress but will still give results in NAPLAN that suggest that they have not met the year 9 benchmarks. More progress but more reported failure.....But by the end of year 10, eighteen months later, there is very strong evidence to suggest that they will be at the required standard. Four years of dedicated work by teachers and students. Expectations of success at the end of the journey. But public naming and shaming at both key stages along the journey from year 7 to year 10. The students' school publicly listed as being one that is unsuccessful in delivering literacy outcomes.....The publication of NAPLAN results does not support student learning at my school. It does not give parents a true picture of the learning in literacy and numeracy that is taking place. It does not provide any valuable information for my teachers that they don't already get from elsewhere. NAPLAN results are misleading, summative data.....I oppose the use of NAPLAN on the My Schools website.

Teaching materials coaching students on how to succeed in the NAPLAN tests are popular. Teachers ... are using these materials in class up to one month prior to the test. As a consequence other areas of the curriculum suffer and the results of the test are becoming less valuable as a snapshot of student performance. While the NAPLAN website discourages teaching to the test publishing school data in the media and online and the linking of results to funding means that coaching for performance is inevitable...The NAPLAN outcome data does not capture or represent the broader curriculum or the school environment. Using only the NAPLAN assessment and reporting data to determine school 'success' will limit the breadth and depth of the curriculum. I am particularly concerned with the effect that this will have on students who are learning to read and write in their first language and the future funding for, and emphasis on Indigenous language and culture within the national curriculum.

It is completely unreasonable and unfair to compare different cohorts and groups of children. Some classes are loaded with children with learning difficulties, some are loaded with disadvantaged children etc. Some schools have more money — giving them resources to provide students with needs more one- on-one help. Some children excel in the arts, in sport, in music etc. but struggle in literacy and/or maths. Some schools will make it their priority to teach to the test, others will fight this urge as they philosophically disagree with this form of teaching — for good reason. On one hand we claim to be a nation that 'embraces differences' - yet on a fundamental level — this negates any differences in children. The resources and focus is on the gathering and distribution of the data — instead of the money going to actually providing adequate and essential help to those individual children who need it.

NAPLAN results are worthwhile when they are used for what they are designed for – an assessment of a student's performance in literacy and in numeracy at a particular time in their school year.....However they are not a measure of a school's worth and are even worse when used as a basis for forming league tables. That would be akin to awarding the AFL premiership to the team who polled the most votes in the Herald Sun Player of the Year award. They are using the wrong measurement tool and it is ethically, intellectually and professionally unacceptable that this continue.

As a result of the wide range of preparation strategies the validity of the test results is placed in doubt. I am deeply concerned that the "playing field" is extremely uneven before the first test is administered. By this, I mean that many schools, particularly in the private sector have undertaken a comprehensive and systematic program of preparing students for the test. This goes beyond the usual familiarity with test technique practice which students who are

unfamiliar with handling multiple choice questions and strict time referenced testing periods should spend a little time rehearsing. What I see is the many schools who treat the NAPLAN as a game to be won for the sake of the perception and marketability of their school.

Given the impact of NAPLAN, My School and league tables, it is not surprising in these circumstances that there is evidence of increasing pressure on schools and teachers to change their teaching practices and time allocations to improve NAPLAN results. This apparently includes pressure brought about by competition between jurisdictions. In 2009 a memo by the secretary of the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Peter Dawkins, was leaked to the media. Addressed to all Victorian schools and principals, he directed them to devote time and resources to preparation for the NAPLAN tests. Noting that the tests have “a high profile on the national stage” he said:

The 2008 NAPLAN results showed that Victoria is firmly among the top performing jurisdictions in Australia. The proportion of Victorian students at or above the national minimum standards was shown to be above the Australian proportion across all domains and for all year levels. These are pleasing results. However, there are still too many students at or below the minimum benchmark. We need to work together to reduce these numbers and achieve high numbers in the performance categories.

Accordingly, this year, our objective should be to improve on the 2008 results. In particular, we should aim to reduce the proportion of students who are at or below minimum standards and to see more students in the top band of results.<sup>72</sup>

In early 2010 a further memo from DET Victoria was sent to schools in rural Victoria setting out a ten week “delivery strategy” in the lead up to the 2010 NAPLAN tests. Principals were directed to appoint a NAPLAN coordinator, to “facilitate a sample testing benchmarking process which may require further resourcing”, to “provide additional assistance to students identified as capable of making significant improvement” and to “privilege the testing as an event of significance”. Teachers were directed to, “explicitly teach for NAPLAN by including the genre of NAPLAN, commonly used terms and a daily NAPLAN item in the program of instruction”.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> DET, Victoria. Memo S172-2009. *National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy*.

<sup>73</sup> DET, Victoria. *Loddon Mallee 2010 – A NAPLAN Delivery Strategy for Teachers*.

Further evidence of pressure on schools to improve NAPLAN results to the detriment of wider learning is provided in a report by the Australian Primary Principals Association released 11 June 2010. It reports that:

In some systems principals report that line managers are transmitting this pressure in ways that are threatening and unprofessional. Because so much kudos is being assigned to schools with ‘good’ NAPLAN results, a climate is emerging where, in the absence of clear guidelines that can be invigilated, unethical practices are being adopted in order to inflate the school’s NAPLAN results.<sup>74</sup>

It further elaborates:

Some line managers exerted pressure on principals to improve their test results at all costs without taking into account what the school has been doing to improve the students’ performance and the particular factors that have made progress so challenging. As a consequence, principals reported feeling unfairly “threatened” if they failed to treat raising the average test performance as their absolute goal. It was implied that their job would be on the line if the school’s results did not improve.<sup>75</sup>

Other evidence concerning the distorting influence of the high stakes nature of NAPLAN after My School include reports that some ACT schools have been spending up to 90 minutes a day completing dummy tests<sup>76</sup> and that parents of ‘underperforming’ students have been told to keep their children home from school during the tests.<sup>77</sup>

The AEU strongly asserts that the central purpose of schooling is the educational wellbeing of students. It is the responsibility of departments, officials, governments and ministers to support teachers and schools in this fundamental ethical responsibility. It is deeply concerning when this essential goal of education is subjugated to the purpose of achieving in standardised test results to satisfy political imperatives, requirements of systems, bureaucracies or politicians.

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<sup>74</sup> Australian Primary Principals Association (2010). *The Reporting and Use of NAPLAN*, p. 3. <http://www.appa.asn.au/images/news2010/papernaplanreportinganduse20100611.pdf>

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>76</sup> The Canberra Times, 11 May 2010. *Students sitting two mock tests a day, parents complain.*

<sup>77</sup> ABC News Online. *Struggling students ‘exempt’ for NAPLAN tests.* <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/05/11/2896141.htm>

## **The AEU Principal Survey**

In March 2010 the AEU conducted a survey of over 1,000 principals across Australia concerning My School, League Tables and their impact on schools and students. The results confirmed the warnings of parents, teachers and principals about the consequences of allowing league tables to be published. It also highlighted the deep concerns held by principals about the accuracy and validity of the current version of My School and the negative impact it will have on teaching and learning.

The survey found that the publication of league tables had a profound effect on hundreds of school communities. Principals reported that parents and students felt stigmatised as a result. They said the task of educating students had been made much more difficult.

The impact on teachers was also significant, with many upset that their efforts in schools, which in many cases serve the most disadvantaged students, had been ignored or dismissed and they too had been branded failures.

Among those principals whose schools were listed in the bottom section of a league table, 78 per cent said it would have a negative impact on students. An even greater number said the league tables would have a negative impact on the school's reputation (84 per cent) and on staff (87 per cent).

There was also an overwhelming view that My School presented an inaccurate picture of school performance and created misleading and invalid comparisons between schools. Of the principals surveyed:

- 88 per cent said the website did not present an accurate picture of school performance.
- 61 per cent said the public comparison of test scores on the site will lead to greater teaching to the test. Over 80 per cent of those principals said that would be to the detriment of other areas of the curriculum.
- 90 per cent of principals said they were concerned nothing had been done to prevent the publication of league tables using test scores from My School.
- 88 per cent said it was wrong to launch the My School website without details of the total income and resources available to a school.

- 89 per cent said that all the schools that their school was compared to on the site were not similar to their own.
- 52 per cent said they believed the index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA) value they were given was inaccurate.

The consistency of opinion from these professional and experienced educators concerning the impact of the public reporting of NAPLAN data and the dangers of league tables should be heeded as a key consideration in decisions regarding the future of My School.

**(b) the implementation of possible safeguards and protocols around the public presentation of the testing and reporting data**

As stated, the AEU strongly asserts that the central purpose of schooling is the educational wellbeing of students. It is not only appropriate but necessary that governments should act to protect students when their educational wellbeing is put at risk. In this regard the AEU notes that the earlier *Principles and Protocols for the Collection and National Reporting of MCEETYA Key Performance Measures for Schooling in Australia* published in July 2008 stated that an ethical principle underpinning the publication of reports was:

The avoidance of harm to members of the community: this could occur where the privacy of individuals would be compromised or where the reputation of an institution or group of people would be damaged through the publication of misleading information or stereotyping.<sup>78</sup>

The AEU regrets that the later version of the protocols published in June 2009 removed this very important principle.<sup>79</sup>

In discussing the issue of league tables and the public reporting of school data a decade ago, Dr Ken Rowe of the Australian Council for Educational Research wrote:

...it can be argued strongly that the public disclosure of information cannot be held to be an *absolute* principle. This is recognised by governments, for example, who normally reserve the right to withhold information deemed to threaten the ‘security’ of a nation. Similarly, if the publication of certain information has the potential for harming individuals, or may be

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<sup>78</sup> MCEETYA, (2008). *Principles and Protocols for the Collection and National Reporting of MCEETYA Key Performance Measures for Schooling in Australia*. p. 4.

[http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/\\_resources/Protocols\\_for\\_Collection\\_Reporting\\_of\\_KPMs.pdf](http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/Protocols_for_Collection_Reporting_of_KPMs.pdf)

<sup>79</sup> MCEETYA, (2009). *Principals for reporting information on schooling*.

[http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/verve/\\_resources/Principles\\_and\\_Protocols\\_2009.pdf](http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/verve/_resources/Principles_and_Protocols_2009.pdf)

seriously misleading, then a justifiable case can be mounted for refusing its publication. It could be contended that much of what might be described as *educational performance indicators* based on measures of student achievement falls into this category. Its ability to reflect objective reality may be extremely limited, and its publication may therefore cause both misleading and incorrect inferences about schools and ‘school effectiveness’ to be drawn....In such circumstances, there is a strong case for withholding publication.<sup>80</sup>

The AEU’s preferred position remains the introduction of legislation making it unlawful to publish school league tables and providing an exemption under FOI legislation for documents or data which would allow for the publication of school league tables replicated in each State and Territory and in the *Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Act 2008* (Commonwealth) and in the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (Commonwealth). This would result in a uniform approach in all jurisdictions and have more certain outcomes than having to rely on administrative measures intended to achieve the same ends.

In the absence of such legislation there are administrative measures which can be taken, and the AEU puts forward the following proposal.

## **The AEU Approach**

The AEU believes that it is possible to achieve the goals of greater accountability and reporting without harming students and school communities and without damaging the quality of education delivered in our schools.

The changes suggested in this proposal are designed to ensure that My School provides accurate and meaningful information to parents in a way that will have a positive impact on the provision of education in Australia.

### **1. Stop the misuse of student data and the creation of league tables**

The current situation where commercial operators can use averaged NAPLAN results to create damaging and misleading league tables is unacceptable. Students and school communities must be protected from these league tables.

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<sup>80</sup> Rowe, K. (2000). Assessment, League Tables and School Effectiveness: Consider the Issues and ‘Let’s Get Real’! *Journal of Educational Enquiry*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 83.  
<http://www.education.unisa.edu.au/JEE/Papers/JEEPaper5.pdf>

The NAPLAN results held by ACARA, both published and unpublished, must be protected from misuse. This can be achieved through the consistent application of existing copyright, trade practices and FOI laws.<sup>81</sup> In this regard the AEU notes and commends the use of such legislation by ACARA to force the company *Australia School Ranking* to withdraw its report from sale. The AEU believes this action should serve as a model for wider use of these powers.

## **2. Ensure full financial disclosure**

The site must include information about the total income and resources of a school to allow for the meaningful analysis of the relationship between resources and outcomes. The information on the site cannot just be per-student recurrent expenditure, allowing schools to hide the extent of their wealth and income-raising capacity.

## **3. Introduce an index that works**

A properly constructed and comprehensive index of community socio-educational advantage can encourage a better understanding of the levels of disadvantage and student needs in each school. A revised index that better reflects the socio-economic status of students enrolled in a school along with factors which impact on educational outcomes should be created in full consultation with school teachers and principals.

## **4. Improve the reporting of student performance on My School**

My School currently includes an average score for students in each skill area in year 3, 5, 7 and 9. These numbers suggest a precision in measuring student and school achievement that simply does not exist. The scores have widely varying margins of error according to school size and student cohort and demonstrate nothing of the span of student achievement in a school.

The average scores should be replaced with graphs that shows the full span of student achievement in literacy and numeracy in each year tested (Year 3, 5, 7 and 9).

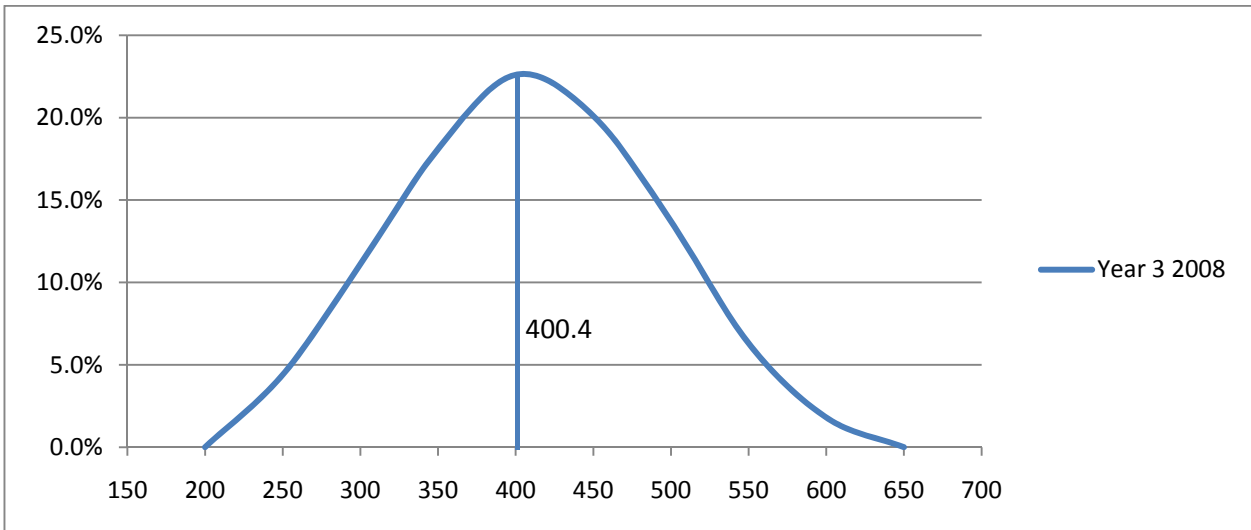
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<sup>81</sup> Further details of legal advice the AEU has received regarding this matter are contained in the letter the AEU sent to state and territory ministers proposing protections that could be enacted. Appendix One.



### Student achievement in reading literacy, Year 3 2008

Vertical line = National Mean



This is consistent with the individual student progress report that parents already receive.

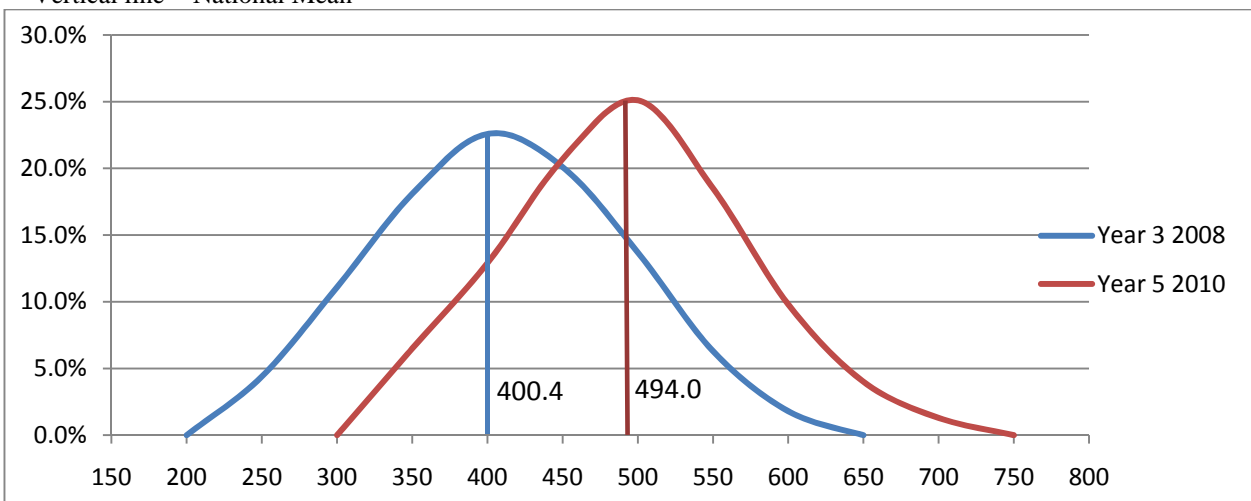
Each graph would also show the national average and the percentage of students above the average and the percentage below.

Once the results from the 2010 NAPLAN results are available it will also be possible to illustrate how successful schools have been in improving the performance of students.

This would be done by the addition of a second line on the graphs of Year 5, Year 7 and Year 9 students.

### Student achievement in reading literacy, 2008 and 2010

Vertical line = National Mean



Through this type of graphic presentation and via a simple explanation on the site (see below), parents will get a richer and more meaningful picture of student performance at a school.

However, the AEU believes data for grades of less than ten students should not be reported publicly due to the high margin of error and the risk of identifying individual students.

## **5. Explain the results of each school**

Graphs showing student achievement on each school's homepage should be accompanied by a plain English explanation of the literacy results and the numeracy results. The achievements of each school would be highlighted along with the areas where it is judged that improvements can be made.

As a further benefit for parents a comprehensive plain-English guide to interpreting school results and NAPLAN should be made available on the site for download.

## **6. Allow meaningful analysis**

Parents and prospective parents have the right to know whether schools are delivering effective teaching and learning programs. The approach outlined above provides parents, teachers and policy-makers access to rich and meaningful information on all schools.

### **(c) the impact of the NAPLAN assessment and reporting regime on:**

#### **(i) the educational experience and outcomes for Australian students**

Evidence regarding the impact of league tables and the public reporting of student test data on students has been presented in the response to Term of Reference A, under the heading *The international evidence*. This impact can be summarised as:

- The primacy of the educational needs of students is subjugated to the requirements of schools to achieve in testing regimes.
- Learning is narrowed. Subjects not tested such as history and art are marginalised and even core subjects such as English narrowed to areas most specifically related to testing, discouraging richer pedagogies such as classroom discussions, creative writing and critical thinking.

- Students from disadvantaged backgrounds suffer. Students seen as low performing, who were previously seen as challenges schools were obliged to assist, are increasingly viewed as liabilities. Excluding them from enrolling or encouraging them to leave is a way by which schools can improve their average test scores.
- The educational needs of underachieving students and those with learning difficulties and special needs are marginalised as schools feel forced to engage in ‘educational triage’ and concentrate on borderline or ‘bubble kids’ to the detriment of both higher and lower achieving students.
- Higher achieving students suffer. Subjects and pedagogies that challenge them and employ higher order skills are marginalised in favour of subjects and strategies that improve test scores.
- Educational inequity increases as schools come under increasing pressure to select students capable of improving their test scores. Differences between schools and communities increase and educational opportunities for disadvantaged students decrease.
- The breadth of staffing at schools serving disadvantaged cohorts diminishes as experienced teachers, fearful of the impact that it may have on their careers, become less inclined to teach at such schools. Schools serving disadvantaged communities become increasingly staffed with less experienced teachers.
- Student engagement suffers as learning narrows and becomes less interesting.
- Students are demoralised as their schools and communities are branded as failures.

In the AEU Principal survey, principals were asked to explain the impact they believed league tables have on their students. The following are a selection of their responses.

We are trying so hard to build belief in our students (many of whom live in poverty) that another kick in the guts will shatter both parental and student self belief that they are capable of growth and change.

Students need to feel good about school. Students’ self esteem is compromised by such tables. If students feel they are not attending a good school then they unfortunately act accordingly. Our school is working very hard to raise aspirations and standards. These comparisons only make things more difficult.

Our students are already stigmatised because of where they live. This will only add to that and pigeon hole them - a kind of self fulfilling prophecy.

Our kids actually speak well of their school and they feel embarrassed that all our work is just a thin red line.

No cohort of students need 'branding' in the way league tables do.

I fail to see how undermining the confidence of students in their school helps improve educational standards.

Try developing a sense of school pride among students when they believe they are underperforming.

Our school has been trying to build the self esteem of our students...this sets us back to where we started 5 years ago.

Children have been taunted on the bus home from other students.

Why don't we all wear a sign around our neck saying.....Poor school... avoid!! It is a humiliating tactic and unnecessary. We don't need to be labelled as a low socio-economic environment. We know that and so does everyone else, including parents.

As a public school we are supportive of all other schools in the area and do not wish for children to have a sense that they are better or worse than others because of the school they attend.

As it is, the students are not proud enough of themselves and their achievements...this can often just reinforce the negativity.

**(ii) the impact of the NAPLAN assessment and reporting regime on the scope, innovation and quality of teaching practice**

The detrimental impact of league tables and the public reporting of student test data on schools, the quality and equity of educational outcomes of students and teachers has already been discussed in the response to Term of Reference A, under the heading *The international evidence*. The impact of such a regime in Australia has to be examined in the context of the

quality of education delivered to Australian students and the requirements of quality teaching and learning in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Australian schools.

The evidence indicates that Australian teachers overall produce a very high standard of educational achievement, as demonstrated by the performance of Australian students in international measures. International measures, of course, should be examined with some caution. Differences between countries may occur due to complex and differing circumstances, such as differences in the homogeneity of cultures or differing parental attitudes. Debates also remain about the validity of comparing the quality of education delivered by schools in different countries using test based comparisons between them. Nevertheless, even within the framework of test based comparisons the evidence does not at all suggest that Australian schools perform poorly.

The OECD Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) has been conducted every three years since 2000. The study assesses reading, science and mathematics. Whilst all three areas are included in each three years cycle, each round has a particular focus on one of the three. The last published study occurred in 2006 and the particular focus was science.

As in previous cycles, Australia did very well in the 2006 round, achieving results significantly above the average in all three areas.<sup>82</sup> In science it was significantly outperformed by just three countries, Finland, Canada and Hong-Kong China. It was not significantly different to seven countries, and it significantly outperformed 46 countries.<sup>83</sup> Australia's results for reading literacy in 2006 were of a similar high standard. Five countries significantly outperformed Australia, five achieved results that were not significantly different, while 46 countries were significantly below Australia.<sup>84</sup> In mathematical literacy eight countries performed significantly better than Australia, five countries were not significantly different and 43 countries performed significantly below Australia.<sup>85</sup> It is notable that in all three areas Australia performed substantially better than both the United Kingdom and the United States, whose educational agendas on the public reporting of student test results have recently served as models for policies adopted here.

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<sup>82</sup> Thompson, S., De Bortoli, L. (2008). *Exploring Scientific Literacy: How Australia measures up*. ACER Press, Melbourne.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p. 64.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p. 160.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, p. 196.

The insights of outside observers of the Australian education system may put educational debates taking place within the country into some perspective. In an address in 2007 to the European Reading Conference in Berlin, Andreas Schleicher of the Directorate of Education of the OECD noted that Australia's achievement in the 2003 PISA literacy results placed it amongst the top tier of countries. He went on to attribute this high level of literacy achievement by Australian students to a high level of Australian teacher professionalism.<sup>86</sup>

Whilst all teachers, schools and educational systems should strive for continual improvement, an entirely different approach should be taken in the face of a system that is demonstrably failing to one for which the evidence suggests is fundamentally succeeding. The former situation would call for systemic changes, while the latter would call for assessing strengths as well as weakness and building upon the strengths. The evidence suggests that Australian teachers have been very effective in achieving successful outcomes for their students, demonstrating a high level of professionalism and knowledge of pedagogical practices.

An understanding of the impact of the NAPLAN assessment and reporting regime on the quality of teaching practice must also be based on an understanding of the complex role of teaching and learning in modern Australian society and the importance of equipping students with the knowledge and skills required to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Kalantzis and Cope, when discussing learners in the knowledge economy, describe the requisites of learning as follows:

Excellent learners in the knowledge economy will be autonomous and self-directed – designers of their own learning experiences, in collaboration with others as well as by themselves. They will need to be flexible, possessing problem-solving skills, multiple strategies for tackling a task and flexible solutions-orientation to knowledge. Importantly, good learners will also be collaborative, recognising that knowledge is increasingly created collaboratively, whether in work teams, in scientific research laboratories or through community development. They will themselves be good teachers and communicators, and of open sensibility, able to work productively with linguistic and cultural diversity. Effective learners will be intelligent in more than one way – that is their intelligence may in turn be communicative, numerate, technical or process-oriented, or it may be emotional, analytical, creative or critical. Finally, good learners will be broadly knowledgeable, and in particular

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<sup>86</sup> Schleicher, A. (2007). *Literacy Skills in the Information Age*. Paper presented to the 15th European Conference on Reading, Humboldt University, Berlin.

able to engage with the different interpretative frameworks and contexts of specific information.<sup>87</sup>

The Melbourne Declaration also recognises the importance of young people becoming successful, creative, innovative and resourceful learners able to think logically and evaluate evidence, able to solve problems in ways that draw upon a range of learning areas and disciplines and able to work independently as well as collaborate with others.<sup>88</sup>

In order to achieve these goals it is necessary to ensure that students are not only provided with an education that is rich, rigorous and rewarding, but also one that provides for the needs of a diverse student cohort and places the importance of the equity of student achievement on a par with its quality. In other words, the goal should be the achievement of what a number of academics and researchers call ‘high quality, high equity’ outcomes. Luke, Weir and Woods point out that there is no contradiction between these goals:

The OECD data shows that quality and equity do not necessarily have to be traded off against each other. The achievement of “redistributive justice” is not incompatible with the system producing high quality, relevant and powerful resources for the new economy.<sup>89</sup>

Luke et al have also pointed out that US studies have demonstrated that effective teachers of lower socio-economic and disadvantaged students have high levels of professionalism and are afforded opportunities to use their professional judgment and adapt curriculum to the needs of their cohorts’ cultural backgrounds and cognitive strategies.<sup>90</sup>

It is essential that all students regardless of their backgrounds be provided with a rich, rigorous and rewarding curriculum which provides them with excellence in literacy and numeracy along with the creative and critical thinking skills needed to achieve successful careers and lives in a changing society. Subject and teaching methodologies that create flair and encourage thinking processes are essential. As well as developing aware, innovative and involved citizens, they generate the flexible and creative skills that equip students best for the future, and are often what employers explicitly say they want.

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<sup>87</sup> Kalantzis, M., Cope, B., & Harvey, A. (2003). Assessing Multiliteracies and the New Basics. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*. Vol. 10. No. 1 p. 17.

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a713613242&db=all>

<sup>88</sup> MCEETYA. (2008) *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*. p. 8.

<sup>89</sup> Luke, A, Weir, K & Woods, A. (2008). *Development of a set of principles to guide a P-12 Syllabus framework. A Report to the Queensland Study Authority*. p. 42.

[http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/downloads/publications/qa\\_p-12\\_principles\\_dev\\_ppr.pdf](http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/downloads/publications/qa_p-12_principles_dev_ppr.pdf)

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. p. 40.

An approach which moves away from a focus on rich learning and higher order thinking is not likely to produce motivated and engaged students or equip them with the knowledge and skills required to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Proponents of the publication of NAPLAN data have argued that a test based regime focusing on literacy and numeracy is the most effective way in which to improve student achievement in these areas. Julia Gillard, for example, recently said, “if by teaching to the test they mean that kids will be taught absolutely fundamental skills - reading, writing, spelling, grammar and numeracy - then I think most parents would see that as a good thing.”<sup>91</sup> This is not a position supported by the evidence. Research shows that literacy and numeracy are best learned in a wider pedagogical context and provision of breadth in learning does not in any way conflict with high standards in these areas.<sup>92</sup>

In discussing the move away from a broader and more innovative education which has accompanied the imposition of the testing and league table regime in England, the Cambridge Primary Review states:

Fuelling this loss of entitlement has been a policy-led belief that curriculum breadth is incompatible with the pursuit of standards in ‘the basics’, and that if anything gives way it must be breadth. However, evidence going back many decades, including reports from HMI and Ofsted, consistently shows this belief to be unfounded. Standards and breadth are often positively related, and high-performing schools achieve both. This is one of several modern manifestations of the historic divide between ‘the basics’ (protected) and the rest of the curriculum (viewed as dispensable).<sup>93</sup>

A regime in which the main aim of teaching is to maximise NAPLAN test scores in order to achieve an appearance of satisfactory achievement on the My School website or in league tables is not one which will best facilitate quality student learning. It is essential that the NAPLAN testing regime be placed in an appropriate context in the wider curriculum. It must not be allowed to dominate or narrow the broader education and pedagogy of schools.

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<sup>91</sup>The Age, (2010, May 8). *How Gillard gave truculent teachers a caning.*

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/how-gillard-gave-truculent-teachers-a-caning-20100507-ujoo.html>

<sup>92</sup> Volante, L, (2004) Teaching to the Test: What Every Education and Policy-maker Should Know. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, No. 35 Sep 2004.

<http://www.umanitoba.ca/publications/cjeap/articles/volante.html>

<sup>93</sup> Cambridge Primary Review, Op Cit, p. 493.



The publication of student NAPLAN test scores and the manner of their presentation on the My School website makes it inevitable that inappropriate pressure will be placed on schools and teachers to achieve NAPLAN results to the detriment of wider learning and the quality of education provided to students.

NAPLAN as it is presently constituted is a tool of problematical assistance to teachers. The tests take place in May, yet the results are not provided to schools, teachers, principals or parents until September. The scope for teachers to use them as diagnostic tools for student improvement is very limited. Most importantly, the ability of teachers to use NAPLAN and other test data in the assessment of the students' achievements, abilities and requirements is in no way dependent on the publication of such data.

Teachers have a wide range of diagnostic tools available to them that they use on an ongoing basis, based on what they actually teach to students. These include assignments, course based tests, essays and various forms of ongoing coursework. Professional teachers have the capabilities and knowledge to utilise such tools, to make judgements concerning student achievement and capabilities and to teach in a manner that addresses the needs of their cohort and individual students. Teachers also work in teams with others to share knowledge and experience of their students and address their needs.

The NAPLAN testing regime as it is presently constituted is one of limited utility as a tool for assessing student achievement or for the planning of pedagogical strategies. Ultimately it is teacher professional judgement employing a range of strategies, used appropriately in a collegial manner and assisted with adequate and targeted system support that is most likely to maximise educational opportunities for all students and enhance their prospects of educational achievement.

In the AEU Principal survey principals were asked to comment on the impact league tables have on their teaching staff. The following are a selection of their responses.

It won't matter if your school receives good or bad results, teachers will have increased pressure (to improve or remain on top) not to improve student outcomes for the benefit of individuals but to meet an expected score.

Teachers will feel pressured to teach to the test. Teachers are likely to want to avoid teaching the year groups being tested, especially if we know that a particular year is a low performing year - which all schools know they have every so often - even if it is a good year, but lower than a normal year or the previous year.

My staff and I truly believe that we do everything that we possibly can to make learning meaningful. We have individual plans, support for those students that need it. We do the best we can given the group that we have to deal with. These students make very slow progress. Some of it cannot be reflected in a test on how well you are able to write, read and use numbers.

Staff work very hard to do the best for students. This kind of negative press totally deflates their desire and does not recognise the excellent work that they are currently doing. Staff with difficult cohorts of students / families often can achieve far more from their students than some staff at more affluent schools.

Staff may look to work in schools that are better performing, thus providing a disincentive to get our best teachers to the places they are most needed.

Teachers will become disillusioned about their whole year of professional efforts being judged on one simplistic measure.

We have a talented teaching staff and negative publicity just slaps them in the face after a terrific effort all year. Our school has amazing programs and staff. The results of the testing should not be the determining factor of a school.

Cohorts of students do change. You can be heroes one year and poor teachers the next.

Teachers at this school work exceptionally hard at improving the outcomes for students. Additional funding, smaller classes and exclusivity would assist us immensely. That is not something we can manage.

**(iii) the impact of the NAPLAN assessment and reporting regime on the quality and value of information about student progress provided to parents and principals**

Effective assessment is at the heart of successful teaching and learning. It provides information on student progress to students and their parents and important diagnostic evidence that assists teachers in planning for ongoing improvement.

It is the right of all parents to access relevant information on their child's progress in school. Ethically, information about student performance belongs to students, their parents and their teachers. AEU policy states:

5.1.1 Assessment should be authentic (closely linked to the purposes of the curriculum), and integrated with curriculum and classroom experiences....

5.1.3 Assessment should be based on a range of assessment activities. These may include structured and impromptu observations some of which may be recorded and filed; formal and informal discussions/interviews; collections of students' work; use of extended projects, performances, and exhibitions; tests and practical exams.

5.1.4 The best forms of assessment rely on and value informed teacher judgement, as this ensures the integration of a range of factors including knowledge of the student and performance in a variety of forms of learning and assessment.<sup>94</sup>

There is a danger that the growing emphasis on NAPLAN as a measure of student achievement will degrade the overall quality and breadth of information supplied to parents, providing them instead with reports that place too great an emphasis on narrow standardised test based measures. There is a further danger that the growing emphasis on NAPLAN results by departments, the media and politicians will give parents and the community a distorted sense of their importance to the detriment of wider qualitative factors. It is important that NAPLAN results be placed in the proper perspective by departments and schools in the manner they provide information to parents about the progress of their children.

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<sup>94</sup> AEU. (2007) *Curriculum Policy*. <http://www.aefederal.org.au/Policy/Curric2007.pdf>

The NAPLAN results are not course based. They take place in May, yet the results are not provided to schools, teachers, principals or parents until September. Even accepting NAPLAN as a quality measure of student achievement, it is only a one point in time snapshot and its value as a report to parents on the progress of their children is limited. Effective school reporting must be based upon a range of measures predicated upon professional and collegial teacher judgement.

It should be emphasised that parents require and have a right to information about the progress of their own children. There is no inherent right to information concerning other children at the school. On the contrary, parents and children have a right to privacy concerning their results and reports. When NAPLAN is used for assessments of student achievement or reporting to parents such use does not depend at all on the public reporting of student NAPLAN results on the My School website or elsewhere.

Principals need quality information based upon a range of factors. Principals are knowledgeable professionals who develop collegial relationships with their staff and consult with them concerning the progress and requirements of the students at the school. Tests constitute one measure upon which they draw, in conjunction with a range of factors, once again predicated upon professional and collegial teacher judgement.

**(iv) the impact of the NAPLAN assessment and reporting regime on the quality and value of information about individual schools to parents, principals and the general community**

School and teacher accountability is essential. Parents, students and the public have a right to know that schools and teachers are competent, professional, and engaged in high quality teaching practices. They also have a right to know whether governments are fulfilling their obligation to ensure that schools and teachers are properly supported, and that all students have access to a public education system of the highest quality.

As a profession teachers collect and interrogate data, formal and informal, every day. Governments and systems also have an obligation to aggregate and interrogate data, and they have an obligation to act on information regarding student performance. It is the responsibility of governments to act in a way that targets resourcing necessary to lift overall student performance and underachievement.

Aggregated school wide information can be meaningfully reported to each school's community in ways which will enable parents and prospective parents to make an informed judgement about the effectiveness of school programs.

It is essential, however, that information is not presented in a manner that is either misleading or damaging to schools and students. At present the My School website does both of these things. Under Term of Reference A this submission has already presented extensive evidence concerning the damaging impact of the reporting of student test data on schools in a manner that can be used for the creation of league tables. It has also presented evidence concerning the inaccurate and misleading nature of the information presented on the My School site. The AEU is deeply concerned about the potential for this inaccurate and misleading information to undermine relationships between schools, parents and the wider community in a manner beyond the control of the schools and not related to the quality of education they provide to students.

NAPLAN is also a very limited measure of school and student achievement, and a fuller picture of school effectiveness requires broader and more qualitative information about programs and pedagogies.

Under Term of Reference B this submission provides the AEU proposal for the presentation of information in a manner to achieve the goals of greater accountability and reporting without harming students and school communities and without damaging the quality of education delivered in our schools. The AEU hopes that the Federal Government, ACARA and MCEECDYA will use this proposal as a pathway to reform.

In the AEU Principal survey, principals were asked to comment on the impact league tables have on the reputation of their school. The following are a selection of their responses.

It has had a very negative impact on our school and has shocked many members of our small community.

Poor perception by the public who are informed only by raw data that does not place a context around the work been delivered within the school, nor does it show the value adding that is occurring across the whole school.

This has had an extremely negative impact. We have lost students from our school because of 'the league table' This in turn lost a teacher, teacher aide time, Learning Support Time and only made our classes larger.

People do not understand the complexity or indeed the distortion of data with such small numbers of students. One or two students can throw the data.

We battle perceptions as a LSE [low socio-economic] school already without making our work to be recognised as being positive any harder than what it already is. Our school community recognises our value and the hard work of teachers but the wider community take a lot of convincing. Teachers in LSE schools are often deemed to be less capable and effective and often they are far higher quality teachers. We do not need to be fighting harder for positive recognition - this is definitely degrading for us in our perspective at the school.

This school was in the top 15% last year and bottom 2% this year. What has changed? Only one thing - the cohort of children doing the test.

We have a very supportive community but when they see our school listed, for all intents and purposes, as a failing school, it creates concern and worry on their part and pressure on our part when we know we are working extremely hard to support the many and varied learning needs of our students.

Current and prospective parents may gain an inaccurate view of the school based on a very limited data set.

**(d) international approaches to the publication of comparative reporting of the results, i.e. 'league tables'**

Evidence from England and the United States in regard to the publication of comparative reporting and league tables and their impact has been presented in Term of Reference A under the heading *The international evidence*. Appendix Two contains summaries of a wide range of further evidence, mostly academic papers and the findings of research and inquiries, concerning the impact of high stakes testing, the publication of school test data and the creation of league tables. Most are from England and the United States where such regimes are well established. Although the nature, scope and location of these inquiries vary, there is a remarkable consistency in the themes and findings which emerge from them:

- The public reporting of student test data and its use for school comparisons and league tables is a misleading measure of school effectiveness. Rankings tend to reflect the socioeconomic backgrounds of students rather than the quality of the education provided by the school. Such rankings stigmatise schools, teachers and the students in them regardless of the actual quality of education delivered or the commitment of their teachers. The stigma attached to schools labelled as ‘failing’ and ‘underperforming’ can damn a school in the eyes of the public and parents, causing parents to withdraw students from a school or decline to enrol them based on misleading information. Such labelling creates a climate of recrimination and retribution which undermines teaching and learning.
- The labelling and blaming of schools also stigmatises the students in them and the communities they serve. Evidence suggests that students in such schools are very much aware of the status of their school, and that this has negative consequences for their own self images and commitments to education. This makes it harder for schools to improve educational outcomes, as students who are humiliated for their learning accomplishments are less likely to respond positively in their future learning.
- Researchers in both the US and the UK have found that both ‘value added’ and ‘like school’ comparisons are not a valid measure for making comparisons between schools or assessing a schools’ educational achievements. Such measures do not sufficiently take into account the background factors influencing pupil achievement, and are likely to be affected by factors such as student mobility, changes in the demographic profile of schools and measurement factors such as statistical uncertainty and sampling errors. Results from such mechanisms have a high degree of measurement error and are too inaccurate for the determination of either changes in school performance from year to year, or differences in achievement between schools.
- Researchers in both the US and the UK have noted that educational improvement has not taken place under standardised test-based accountability and league table regimes. The US National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) demonstrates that progress has not been made since the introduction of No Child

Left Behind (NCLB) amongst either minority students or the student cohort as a whole. The position of the UK has continued to fall in the International Program for International Students Assessment (PISA) surveys of literacy and numeracy under testing/league tables regimes. Both the US and the UK, which have had such regimes in place for years, perform considerably below Australia in the PISA surveys.

- The publication of school test data and league tables increases social segregation between schools and heightens educational inequity. Schools which score higher experience greater demand and are consequently in a position to select their students. Given they have an incentive to do so in the interests of maintaining their positions in league tables and performance measures, this has a further detrimental impact upon students from lower socioeconomic and minority backgrounds.
- Testing is a valid pedagogical tool. But, for testing to be valid and effective it must provide guidance to students, teachers and parents, be closely linked to what students are actually studying and be undertaken in a manner that legitimately and accurately measures what they know and learn. Testing for school accountability purposes encourages curricula and teaching to be built around tests, and the higher the reporting accountability mechanisms the stronger this trend will be. This leads to a narrowed curriculum and a lowering of the quality of teaching. The publication of school test data and league tables causes schools and teachers to spend an increasing amount of classroom time coaching and cramming for tests to the detriment of other important aspects of learning. Subjects not tested, such as science, social studies, physical education, and the arts, are marginalised and even core subjects such as English are narrowed to areas most specifically related to testing. While these issues apply to all students, they particularly impact upon schools serving disadvantaged cohorts, as such schools come under the most pressure to increase their test scores. This narrow focus diminishes the quality of education provided to disadvantaged students and further increases educational inequity.
- Higher achieving students also suffer when ‘teaching to the test’ causes a ‘dumbing down’ of the curriculum, a reduction in the variety of subjects offered and for



subjects to be taught in less innovative and creative ways, demanding less higher-order skills.

- ‘Teaching to the test’ to improve pass rates in literacy and numeracy tests does not entail an increase in student learning and proficiency in literacy and numeracy. Quality learning in these areas requires a wider approach than learning to pass narrow tests.
- By encouraging a narrowing of the curriculum and learning, the publication of school test data and league tables erodes teacher professionalism and diminishes the role of teacher professional judgement in teaching and learning. This decreases the ability of schools and teachers to cater to the individual needs of their students and discourages the collaborative development of more innovative and effective teaching practices.
- Researchers in both the US and the UK have noted the phenomenon of ‘educational triage’. To maximise a schools’ chances of meeting its benchmarks or preserving its position on league tables, students on the cusp of achieving required test results are given inordinate priority and resources, to the detriment of both students deemed unlikely to reach them at all or proficient enough to reach them anyway. This increases inequity by further alienating low achieving students. It also ignores the needs of high achieving students and lowers the overall quality of education for all.
- The publication of school data and league tables leads to an increase in dropout rates and the exclusion of students from minority and lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Students seen as low performing are increasingly viewed as liabilities, and excluding them from enrolling or encouraging them to leave is an effective way by which schools can increase their test performances and improve their positions on league tables. Other tactics include suspending students during tests and farming them prematurely into special education streams. Such practices have been noted throughout the US and in England.
- Accountability systems which label schools as failures discourage qualified and experienced teachers from working at such schools. When schools are perceived as

underperforming, teachers in them run increased risks of being labelled as failures regardless of their commitment or capabilities. Due to the increased stigma and stress, as well as the potential damage to their careers, teachers are likely to become increasingly unwilling to work in disadvantaged schools. This creates a hierarchy of teacher experience, with the most disadvantaged schools having the least experienced teacher cohort, further increasing educational disadvantage.

- By its nature a testing based performance regime discourages school collaboration and leads to an increasing focus on the marketing of a school image rather than educational improvement.
- The creation of league tables and the reporting of school comparisons, as well as the pedagogies and teaching strategies that emerge associated with them, demoralise students and teachers and do not encourage student engagement.
- An emphasis on the publication of school test data, league tables, and school comparisons damages the quality of educational debate by shifting it from other matters of importance. These include school resourcing, system support, the needs of disadvantaged students and other matters of educational equity.

#### **(e) other related matters.**

In this section the AEU would like to discuss the issue of mass standardised testing itself.

The greatest concerns of the AEU in the present climate are the reporting of averaged student test results and the creation of league tables. Addressing these issues has been the thrust of this submission, and AEU calls for reform centre around the imposition of safeguards to protect Australian students.

In the broader context, however, the AEU has a clear position on standardised testing that is supported by a strong evidence base. The AEU believes mass standardised testing is counterproductive to the improvement of educational outcomes, and that alternatives are available that provide the information governments, schools and teachers require to address the educational needs of students and communities. AEU policy states:

5.3.1 Teachers welcome accountability used to build the capacity of education communities. Accountability needs to be based on valid processes, which are fair and equitable for all students, teachers and schools.

5.3.2 Standardised tests are a snapshot of limited learning at one point in time and are best used as a random sample over a large population to determine program effectiveness. Mass census testing is unnecessary, expensive and often counter productive in that it encourages poor teaching and learning situations.

5.3.3 Sample testing can provide the system-wide information required to support planning and resource allocation and enable governments and education systems to fulfil their responsibility to provide funding for programs in areas identified as in need.<sup>95</sup>

Along with other tools, exams and tests have always been a legitimate and important part of assessment. In particular course-based tests play an important diagnostic role in assessing student aptitudes, achievements and learning deficits. However, effective testing must be closely linked to what students are actually studying and undertaken in a manner that is a legitimate and accurate way of measuring what students know and learn.

United States academics Sharon Nichols and David Berliner identify four elements that must be present for a test to demonstrate that it is actually measuring what it is intending to measure, or that it can be said to possess validity.<sup>96</sup> They call this the four Cs: content validity, construct validity, criterion validity and consequential validity. Content validity means that a test should actually measure what it purports to measure; a geology test for example should measure geology knowledge and skills and be based on the actual criteria students were expected to learn in a geology course and curriculum. Construct validity is the extent to which a test measures the attributes and characteristics of the subject it claims to be testing. Criterion validity is the ability of a test to predict and measure a student's achievement now and in the future, that is how they can be expected to perform in a subject at present and as they progress through their education and work. Consequential validity is concerned with the consequences and decisions that are associated with a test score, the use of the data obtained and the extent to which it actually enhances student learning and well-being.

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<sup>95</sup> AEU. (2007) *Curriculum Policy*. <http://www.aefederal.org.au/Policy/Curric2007.pdf>

<sup>96</sup> Nichols, et al, *Op Cit*, Chapter 5.

Nichols and Berliner are critical of the extent to which externally imposed performance testing is capable of meeting the requirements of any of these criteria, but most particularly content and consequential validity. For a test to possess content validity it must derive from a curriculum and address its needs rather than the other way around. A test imposed upon students that does not derive from the actual curriculum is likely to lead to a distortion of the curriculum itself in order to address the requirements of the test, and this is especially so if high stakes consequences are attached to its outcome. Since any test can only examine a small part of the knowledge and skills in any area, the result may be that of forcing teachers and schools to teach to the test rather than to a broader curriculum, thus narrowing and limiting student learning. Teacher and school quality cannot be measured by a ‘snapshot’, especially based on testing divorced from course content.

National census testing encourages teaching to be built around tests, and the higher the reporting accountability mechanisms the stronger this trend will be. This leads to a narrowed curriculum and a lowering of the quality of teaching. This submission has presented strong evidence that high stakes census testing can increase educational inequity, harming the very students it claims to be helping.

There is also evidence that the process of attaching high stakes to a test itself corrupts it as a measure. In 1976 social researcher Donald Campbell coined what has since become known as *Campbell’s Law*, the adage that, “The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor.”<sup>97</sup> When undue weight is attached to a single indicator, efforts to achieve it at all costs corrupts it as a measure. The process of full cohort testing in itself invites comparisons, encourages competition and attaches high stakes to its outcome, and this means that it is less effective as a measurement tool. This submission has already presented examples of how this can happen. There is a strong argument that sample testing is more accurate and valid as a measurement tool than full cohort testing.

Attempting to measure school and teacher quality by a ‘snapshot’, of full cohort testing does not account for the range of outcomes and diverse factors that contribute to a modern

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<sup>97</sup>Campbell, D. (1976). *Assessing the Impact of Planned Social Change*. The Public Affairs Center, Dartmouth College. <http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/pubs/ops/ops08.pdf>

education. It does not measure important qualitative factors that are important to an individual's participation in modern society, her or his ability to acquire the skills necessary to thrive in the modern workplace, nor does it sufficiently take into account the complexity of factors that impact upon diverse student cohorts over time.

There is little evidence that national census standardised testing improves educational outcomes, and considerable evidence that it does harm. It should be noted that the two countries which score most consistently highest in the PISA measures, Finland and Canada, do not engage in national census standardised testing.

Where information is required regarding educational achievement or the particular requirements of schools and communities such information can be obtained through sample testing. Sample testing is not subject to the distortions of Campbell's Law and full cohort testing, nor does it distort curriculum and learning in the same manner. Examples of sample testing already exist in Australia. Since 2003, well before NAPLAN, the National Assessment Program has conducted a series of sample testing on a three year cycle in the areas of science literacy, civics and citizenship and information and communication technology (ICT) literacy. Results are published in a series of reports. Individual students and schools are not publicly identified. As high stakes are not attached to it at the individual school level such a program does not encourage teaching to test or distort the curriculum, nor does it distort the measure itself. As such it is arguably a more accurate manner in which to obtain information about school and community educational achievement and requirements than full cohort testing. Sample testing is the basis of the highly regarded OECD Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) which has been conducted every three years since 2000 in reading, science and mathematics.

While accountability is essential, it must be understood that testing or holding schools and teachers up to scrutiny can never be a substitute to measures that address the real causes of educational inequity in Australia. An over emphasis on school and teacher accountability shifts focus away from the responsibility of governments to ensure that all students have access to a quality public education. Accountability, particularly for the education of disadvantaged children, is increasingly being placed at the feet of public schools and their teachers alone and conflated with acceptance of assessment and reporting initiatives based upon external standardised testing. Blaming schools and teachers for real and perceived

educational deficiencies is an effective mechanism for deflecting scrutiny away from important issues of educational inequity and the under-resourcing of public education.

Identifying the requirements of schools and cohorts has never been the central issue regarding educational improvement in Australia. Such requirements are already demonstrated by a range of evidence. Evidence from the PISA data indicates that the main issues of educational achievement in Australia relate to equity of outcomes rather than overall quality. The majority of disadvantaged students attend government schools and only the public education system accepts and supports all students. It is the responsibility of governments to adequately and equitably resource and support public education to provide fair and equitable opportunities to all students in Australia regardless of their backgrounds.

It is these central issues of educational equity and quality that must be addressed if the opportunities for educational achievement of all Australian students are to be maximised and supported.



# *Australian Education Union*

*Federal Office:*

*Ground Floor, 120 Clarendon Street, Southbank, Victoria, 3006*

*Federal Secretary: Susan Hoggood*

*Federal President: Angelo Gavrielatos*

*Telephone: 61 3 9693 1800*

*Facsimile: 61 3 9693 1805*

*Email: aeu@aeufederal.org.au*

10 September 2009

The Hon. Julia Gillard MP, Minister for Education

Mr Andrew Barr MLA, Minister for Education and Training, ACT

The Hon. Verity Firth MP, Minister for Education and Training, NSW

The Hon. Bronwyn Pike MLA, Minister for Education, Victoria

The Hon. Geoff Wilson MP, Minister for Education, Training and the Arts, QLD

The Hon. Dr Jane Lomax-Smith MP, Minister for Education, SA

The Hon. Dr Elizabeth Constable MLA, Minister for Education, WA

The Hon. David Bartlett MP, Minister for Education and Skills, Tasmania

The Hon. Paul Henderson MLA, Minister for Education and Training, NT

Dear Minister,

## **Re: School “League Tables”**

We refer to representations made by the AEU and its Branches and Associated Bodies in relation to the implementation of the COAG decision on national reporting on the performance of Australian schools, in particular, the need for arrangements to prevent the misuse of student and school data.

The AEU notes your stated opposition to the creation and publication of simplistic school “league tables”. The damaging effects of simplistic “league tables” on the provision of education is well documented in international research. Given that the misuse of student and school data is antithetical to your stated objectives, the AEU again seeks your commitment to take measures to ensure that all data collected by ACARA is not misused. To this end, the AEU has set out below a number of options for your consideration.

As a starting point, the AEU’s preferred position remains the introduction of legislation making it unlawful to publish school “league tables” and providing an exemption under FOI legislation for documents or data which would allow for the publication of school “league tables” replicated in each State and Territory and in the *Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Act 2008* (Commonwealth) and in the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (Commonwealth). This would result in a uniform approach in all jurisdictions and have more certain outcomes than having to rely on administrative measures intended to achieve the same ends.

In the absence of legislation, there are administrative measures which could be taken.

Firstly, with respect to the use of data publicly disseminated by ACARA, it is the AEU’s understanding that the primary point of access to this data will be a website operated by ACARA and, that while the website would not include “league tables”, “league tables” could be created using data taken from the website. The AEU has received advice that, notwithstanding that the data on the website is being made publicly available, the

Commonwealth retains the copyright in that material. The AEU further understands that access to data to which copyright applies on this part of the ACARA website could be subject to terms and conditions on the use of the data obtained from the website. For example, a person going to the relevant part of the website would read the terms and conditions and only obtain access to the data by first indicating agreement to abide by the terms and conditions. Similar arrangements could be made in relation to the dissemination of data by other means. If this approach were adopted, ACARA would be able to take action for infringement of the copyright in the event that the terms and conditions were not observed.

The second area which requires your attention relates to how the Commonwealth or ACARA would respond to an FOI application. The AEU believes that both the Commonwealth and ACARA could rely on exemptions under the FOI Act to refuse to provide access to documents held by ACARA or the Commonwealth which would allow for the construction of school “league tables”. The AEU has advice that the Commonwealth could rely on the exemptions in sections 33A and 45 of the FOI Act. These exemptions relate to documents provided in confidence or documents, the release of which would adversely affect Commonwealth/State relations. As all State and Territory Education Ministers have stated their opposition to the creation and publication of school “league tables” because it is against the public interest, given the potential for the creation of “league tables”, it would follow that each State and Territory government would regard the data it provides to ACARA as confidential and its inappropriate release as adversely affecting its relations with the Commonwealth. The AEU asks all State and Territory governments to pass legislation or, at least, put in place administrative arrangements with the Commonwealth to give this effect.

In the interest of protecting our students and schools from the damage caused by the creation and publication of “league tables” and other misuse and invalid use of student data, we ask you to give appropriate consideration and act on this advice.

Yours sincerely

Angelo Gavrielatos  
Federal President



## Appendix Two

# What do the Experts Really Say?

## Research and Resources on Testing and League Tables

### Australian Education Union

The following resource consists largely of academic papers and the findings of research and inquiries into issues relating to test-based school accountability, league tables and the publication of school data. Most are from England and the US where such regimes are well established. Although the nature, scope and location of these inquiries vary, there is a remarkable consistency in the themes and findings which emerge from them.

This resource should be regarded as a sampling of the work available in this area rather than as a comprehensive listing.

**Amrein, A, Berliner, D. (2002). An Analysis of Some Unintended and Negative Consequences of High stakes Testing. *Education Policy Research Unit, Arizona State University.***

<http://epicpolicy.org/files/EPSSL-0211-125-EPRU.pdf>

This 138 page study contains a state by state analysis for sixteen US states. It provides evidence that high stakes testing increases dropout rates, decreases high school graduation rates, and increases the rates by which students enrol in GED (alternative) programs.

**Amrein, A, Berliner, D. (2002). High Stakes Testing, Uncertainty, and Student Learning. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, Vol. 10, No. 18.***

<http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v10n18/>

The paper examines the impact of high stakes testing on student outcomes in eighteen US states. Evidence is that student learning is indeterminate, remains at the same level it was before the policy was implemented, or actually goes down when high stakes testing policies are instituted.

**Amrein, A, Berliner, D. (2003). The Effects of High Stakes Testing on Student Motivation and Learning. *Educational Leadership, February 2003.***

<http://www.jonathanthughes.com/edu5650/Articles/2Amrein-Effects%20of%20High%20Stakes%20Testing....pdf>

This article reports on research from eighteen US states. It concludes that high stakes tests do not lead to higher student achievement and that such tests can decrease student motivation to learn and lead to higher student year level retention and dropout rates.

**Bernstein, D. (2004). *Adios Escula*. The Boston Phoenix.**

[http://www.bostonphoenix.com/boston/news\\_features/other\\_stories/multipage/documents/03666295.asp](http://www.bostonphoenix.com/boston/news_features/other_stories/multipage/documents/03666295.asp)

An article discussing the causes of the high dropout rates of Hispanic and African American students in Boston. It attributes it to the fact that schools encourage such students to leave in order to meet mandated test outcomes.

**Booher-Jennings, J. (2005). Below the Bubble: “Educational Triage” and the Texas Accountability System. *American Educational Research Journal*. Vol. 42, No.2, pp. 231-268.**

[http://www.columbia.edu/~jlj2102/Booher\\_Jennings\\_AERJ.pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/~jlj2102/Booher_Jennings_AERJ.pdf)

The findings of this paper indicate that teachers in the Texas education system respond to high stakes testing and league tables by using a constellation of “educational triage” practices to create the appearance of test score improvement. Educational triage was manifest in the diversion of resources to students believed to be on the threshold of passing the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (“bubble kids”) and to “accountable” students (those affecting the school’s accountability rating). Teachers also attempted to remove any liabilities to the school’s rating by referring these students for special education.

**Booher-Jennings, J. (2006). Rationing Education in an Era of Accountability. *Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 87. No. 10, pp. 756 – 61.**

Full text available - [http://susanohanian.org/show\\_nclb\\_outrages.php?id=2416](http://susanohanian.org/show_nclb_outrages.php?id=2416)

This article examines how high stakes testing and league tables force schools and teachers in the US to focus on the “bubble kids” on the cusp of passing the NCLB mandated tests to the detriment of both low achieving and high achieving students. This “educational triage” increases inequity by further alienating low achieving students and those from non- English backgrounds. It also fails high achieving students by limiting the teaching of higher order skills, and lowers the overall quality of education for all.

**Caldwell, B. (2009). *Want World Class Schools? It’s Time to Agitate*. Paper delivered in the Agitation Hill Lecture Series in Castlemaine, 29 May 2009.**

<http://www.educationaltransformations.com.au/files/Agitation%20Hill%20Lecture%20Publication.pdf>

A lecture by Professor Brian Caldwell, former Dean of Education at the University of Melbourne, in which he argues against the Federal Government’s program for publicly reporting school test

data. He argues that reporting on testing and the league tables that result from them strangle educational quality and cause “distorted priorities in pedagogy and strip mining in the curriculum of the arts, creativity and innovation”. He compares the situation to that of Finland, the highest ranking country in the PISA surveys, which does not have national testing or league tables and in which he says, “the public and the profession would never countenance what is occurring in Australia”. He calls for “agitation on an epic scale, such as refusal by teachers to administer the tests or by parents to have their children sit them”.

**Cambridge Primary Review. (2009). *Children, their World, their Education. Final report and recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review*. Cambridge University.**

<http://www.primaryreview.org.uk/>

The largest inquiry into primary education in England for 40 years, the final report of the Cambridge University-based Primary Review was released in October 2009. The report is extremely critical of what it calls the “state theory of learning”, the testing/league tables regime embodied in post-1997 UK government strategies and policies. The review’s media release refers to the “damage the apparatus of targets, testing, performance tables, national strategies and inspection is perceived to have caused for questionable returns”. The report calls for the abolition of Standard Achievement Tests (SATs) at the end of primary school and their replacement with a more qualitative, encompassing, teacher-based form of assessment. It also calls for “separation of assessment for learning from assessment for accountability”, in other words an end to the assessment of schools performance based on test-based measures. It calls for the narrowing of the gap between “vulnerable children and the rest”, which it notes the present regime has failed to do.

**Children’s Society. (2009). *A Good Childhood: Searching for Values in a Competitive Society*. Children’s Society.**

[http://www.childrensociety.org.uk/all\\_about\\_us/how\\_we\\_do\\_it/the\\_good\\_childhood\\_inquiry/1818.html](http://www.childrensociety.org.uk/all_about_us/how_we_do_it/the_good_childhood_inquiry/1818.html)

*The Good Childhood Inquiry* was commissioned by the UK Children’s Society in September 2006 as the UK’s first independent national inquiry into childhood. Its report was published in February 2009. It criticises the reliance on tests and exams on children and schools noting that, “to maximise its league table position a school has no incentive to improve the scores of the 30% of children who are well below the target level of five good GCSEs”. It calls for the replacement of all SATs tests with an annual assessment designed to guide a child’s learning, and calls for an end to the publication of data on individual schools from which league tables are constructed by the media.

**Clarke, B. (2004). *Leaving Children Behind*. Corpwatch.**

<http://www.couplescompany.com/Features/Politics/2004/ChildBehind.htm>

An interesting article on the impact of elements of NCLB in US schools. It includes an examination of the role corporate produced standardised tests and school materials have played

in driving “reforms” in some states, the cultural biases they contain and their impact upon minority groups.

**Darling-Hammond, L. (2004). From “Separate But Equal” to “No Child Left Behind”:  
The Collision of New Standards and Old Inequalities. In *Many Children Left Behind: How  
the No Child Left Behind Act is Damaging Our Children and Our Schools*. Deborah Meier &  
George Wood, Eds, Beacon Press 2004, pp. 3-32.**

Full text not available on-line.

An examination of how NCLB impacts on schools serving the neediest students by prominent US academic Linda Darling-Hammond. NCLB increases inequity by undermining schools’ abilities to deal with their real educational needs, forcing them instead to prioritise improving test results. This forces them to lower the standard of education they provide, as well as their abilities to deal with the individual needs of their students. The article documents the higher dropout rates caused by a testing accountability regime. It also notes the vast difference in resourcing available to needier and wealthier schools in the US and how this contributes to the achievement gap.

**Darling-Hammond, L. (2004). Standards, accountability, and school reform. *Teachers College Record*, Vol. 106, No. 6, pp. 1047-85.**

Full text available - [http://www.schoolinfosystem.org/archives/2006/03/standards\\_accou.php](http://www.schoolinfosystem.org/archives/2006/03/standards_accou.php)

This article examines how testing and league tables regimes have often had unintended consequences that serve to undermine access to education for low-achieving students. Amongst other things it reports that the vilification of schools deemed low-performing has caused qualified teachers to leave them “in droves”, to be replaced by teachers without experience and often without training. It argues instead for broader notions of accountability, including investments in teacher knowledge and skills, organisation of schools to support teacher and student learning, and systems of assessment that drive curriculum reform and teaching improvements.

**Darling-Hammond, L. (2007). Evaluating ‘No Child Left Behind’. *The Nation*, 21 May, 2007.**

<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20070521/darling-hammond>

An examination of the impact of NCLB, including its effect on minority and disadvantaged students.

**Dillon, S. (2009). 'No Child' Law Is Not Closing a Racial Gap. *New York Times*, April, 28, 2009.**

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/29/education/29scores.html?emc=eta1>

A New York Times article demonstrating that the achievement gap between white and minority students has not narrowed in recent years, despite the focus of NCLB on improving the scores of blacks and Hispanics.

**Eason, P. (2005). Location, Location, Location: What do League Tables Really Tell Us About Primary Schools? *Education 3-13*, Vol. 33, Issue 3, pp. 49-55.**

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~db=all~content=a780951466?words=school,league,tables>

This paper examines the use of league tables to distinguish between primary schools in England. Data from one Local Education Authority found that the position of a school in the league tables of unadjusted scores tended to reflect the background characteristics, in particular the socioeconomic status, of its pupil population. Furthermore, the “value added” measures do not sufficiently take into account the background factors influencing pupil achievement. The author concludes that league tables, both raw score and value added, present a simplistic and misleading picture of primary schools.

**Finn, C. (2009). *Is it Time to Throw in the Towel on Education Reform?* Speech to the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 9 September 2009.**

[http://edexcellence.net/doc/200909\\_CheckerFinnSpeech.pdf](http://edexcellence.net/doc/200909_CheckerFinnSpeech.pdf)

A speech to the conservative Thomas B. Fordham Institute by Chester Finn, education secretary under Ronald Reagan. He questions the effectiveness of NCLB and standards based reform in improving student outcomes or alleviating differences in educational achievement for disadvantaged or minority students. He complains that “despite all the reforming, U.S. scores have remained essentially flat, graduation rates have remained essentially flat, and our international rankings have remained essentially flat..... In other words, all the reforming has yielded little or nothing by way of stronger outcomes”. He also raises fears that NCLB “narrows what is taught and how teachers behave. That ‘drill and kill’ is taking the place of deep understanding. That it erodes teacher professionalism and motivation. That it cramps children’s individuality and unfairly penalizes some. That it is dumbing everyone down to basic skills while especially neglecting gifted and high-achieving youngsters who already possess such skills”.

**Fitzgerald, J. (2007). *No Child Left Behind: The Teachers' Voice*. Minnesota 2020.**

[http://www.mn2020.org/index.asp?Type=B\\_BASIC&SEC={4214752E-47E4-4FAA-89A9-AA7B07E89D62}&DE](http://www.mn2020.org/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC={4214752E-47E4-4FAA-89A9-AA7B07E89D62}&DE)

A survey of teacher attitudes towards NCLB by the *Minnesota 2020* think tank. The main findings:

- 65% say identifying schools that have not met targets will not lead to school improvement.
- More than 65% say that NCLB increases teacher focus onto students just under the passing score at the expense of other students.
- Only 13% say sanctions improve teaching.
- Almost 90% said they were under unfair pressure to improve student scores.
- Almost 88% believe NCLB causes teachers to ignore important aspects of the curriculum.
- Almost 90% say NCLB unfairly rewards and punishes many teachers.
- More than 90% say they are more likely to stay at a school designated “in need of improvement” if factors such as class size, having experienced teachers on staff and more money for materials and equipment are addressed.

**Forum on Educational Accountability. (2009). *Empowering Schools and Improving Learning*. Chaired by Fairtest, USA. Released June 9 2009.**

<http://www.fairtest.org/empowering-schools-and-improving-learning>

Signed by 84 national education, civil rights, religious, disability, parent and civic organisations, this paper calls for a thorough overhaul of NCLB.

**French, D. (2003). A New Vision of Authentic Assessment to Overcome the Flaws in High Stakes Testing. *Middle School Journal*, Vol. 35, No.1.**

[www.ccebos.org/french.ms9.03.doc](http://www.ccebos.org/french.ms9.03.doc)

This article examines the impact of high stakes testing on US schools and students, concluding that they are poor measure of student achievement. Furthermore it finds that high stakes testing “threatens to undermine the tenets of exemplary middle grades practice, and leave behind the very students that the legislation and testing movement purport to be helping”. It presents evidence that low income students are most negatively affected by high stakes tests, that the percentage of dropouts has increased under such regimes, and that these dropouts are increasingly African American, Latino or from disadvantaged backgrounds. It argues that testing accountability mechanisms “impede the drive toward creating more academically challenging courses of study for middle grades students and inhibits the creation of collaborative faculty teams of teachers engaged in discourse on improving instruction”. It offers a vision of alternative mechanisms of assessment that support student learning.

**Gillborn, D. and Youdell, D. (1998). *Raising Standards and Deepening Inequality: Selection, League Tables, and Reform in Multiethnic Secondary Schools*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Education Research Association, San Diego, CA, April 1998.**

[http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content\\_storage\\_01/0000019b/80/16/fb/3a.pdf](http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/16/fb/3a.pdf)

This early paper was based on an extensive study on the effects of National Curriculum Tests and league tables on two English government schools. It concludes that high stakes tests and league tables deepen racial, ethnic and class inequalities and lead to irrational and unfair allocation of educational resources. The article pioneered the use of the term “educational triage” to describe the concentration by schools on students on the cusp of achieving the required test results to the detriment of those below or above. Gillorn and Youdell note that educational triage excludes lower performing students from the assistance they need, and also has a detrimental effects on academically achieving students whom “...place demands on the school that are at odds with, that is in excess of, the demands of Government and educational bureaucracy.”

**Gillborn, D. and Youdell, D. (2000). *Rationing Education*. Buckingham. Open University Press.**

This book expands the analysis in the above paper on the detrimental effects of National Curriculum Tests and league tables on the quality of education delivered to students at all levels of achievement, ethnicity and economic status.

**Goldstein, H. (2008). Evidence and education policy – some reflections and allegations. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, Vol. 38, No. 3, pp. 393-400.**

[http://www.cmm.bristol.ac.uk/team/HG\\_Personal/Full%20Publications%20-%20download/2008/Evidence%20and%20education%20policy.pdf](http://www.cmm.bristol.ac.uk/team/HG_Personal/Full%20Publications%20-%20download/2008/Evidence%20and%20education%20policy.pdf)

In a section of this paper entitled *League tables – a short history of nearly everything a politician shouldn't do*, this paper discusses the failings of UK league tables as an effective measure of school achievement. This includes an examination of the “confidence intervals” or statistical uncertainty that affect both raw-score and value added league tables. It concludes that such tables are misleading measures of school achievement.

**Goldstein, H, & Leicke, G. (2008). Schools League Tables: What Can They Really Tell Us? (2008). *Significance*, June 2008.**

<http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/545/1/league%20tables%20critique.pdf>

This article examines the effectiveness of school league tables in the UK, measured both as raw scores and through value added mechanisms. Using statistical analysis, the researchers conclude that both measurements result in tables that are unreliable and misleading as measures of the quality of education delivered by a school and that “parents relying on a league table to select a school are using a measure not fit for that purpose”. Furthermore, the publication of league

tables leads to bad educational practices and an increase in educational inequity. The researchers call for the publication of league tables to cease.

**Gorard, S. (2006). Value added is of Little Value. *Journal of Education Policy*, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 235-243.**

<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/143649.htm>

In the face of mounting challenges to the validity of league tables based upon raw test data, value added performance measures were introduced in England in 2002. In this paper Stephen Gorard of the University of York examines the 2004 scores based on the value added concept in number of UK schools. He found that schools that produced a high value for raw “performance” scores also produced a very similar high score for the “value added” score as well, and vice versa. There were no low or mid attaining schools with high value added scores, and no high attaining ones with low ones. Gorard concludes that so-called value added scores are measuring the same things raw scores measure, namely the underlying socioeconomic factors that make the “performance” scores for different schools with different cohorts different in the first place. He describes such value added mechanisms as “rather worse than pointless” as a tool for measuring comparative school achievement.

**Government School Education Council, ACT. (2004). *School Performance Information. An Issues Paper for the ACT Minister for Education and Training.***

[http://www.gsec.act.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/38808/School\\_Performance.pdf](http://www.gsec.act.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/38808/School_Performance.pdf)

This paper was prepared by the ACT Government School Education Council in 2004 in response to the Howard Governments’ proposals on the public reporting of school data. Examining a wide array of evidence from around the world it concludes that the publication of school results is likely to lead to bad educational practices, including a narrowing of the curriculum, the exclusion of low achieving students from tests and a concentration of school resources on students who are close to achieving the required test results at the expense of both higher and lower achieving students. It finds that league tables are likely to exacerbate the problems of misleading and inaccurate information about school performance, lead to a public debasement of schools with a low ranking and to the public labelling of their students and families as “failures”. They also lead to greater education inequities and social segregation of schools as high ranking schools select “good” students and reject “poor” ones while the best teachers move to the high ranking schools.

**Harris, B. (2007). *Why Ranking Schools Would do More Harm than Good. Paper Presented to the Australian Education Union Federal Executive Meeting, Melbourne, 12-13 September 2007.***

<http://www.aeufederal.org.au/Publications/BHarris2007.pdf>

A short but effective paper by Bob Harris from Education International on the use of school testing and ranking systems around the world and their impact on educational outcomes.



**Harris, D. (2006). *High Flying Schools, Student Disadvantage and the Logic of NCLB*. Florida State University.**

[www.agi.harvard.edu/Search/download.php?id=89](http://www.agi.harvard.edu/Search/download.php?id=89)

This study examines the effects of NCLB on high achieving schools and disadvantaged students. It concludes that test-based accountability is “likely to produce counter-productive responses from educators and therefore hurt the students they are supposed to help”. Some schools try to meet accountability standards by simply teaching students how to take tests, by lengthening suspensions of disruptive students and assigning more students to special education. They also tend to focus resources on the children just “below the bubble” of proficiency, where the rewards for student improvement are greatest.

**Haydn, T. (2004). *The Strange Death of the Comprehensive School in England and Wales, 1965-2002*. *Research Papers in Education*, Vol.19, No. 4, pp. 415-432.**

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~db=all~content=a714024760?words=school,league,tables>

This paper examines the erosion of the ideal of the inclusive comprehensive school in England and Wales. In doing so it notes that the introduction of league tables to compare schools has led to a polarisation of secondary school intakes and a subsequent increase in educational inequity - the very opposite of what the original comprehensive system was intended to achieve.

**Heilig, J & Darling-Hammond, L. (2008). *Accountability Texas-Style: The Progress and Learning of Urban Minority Students in a High stakes Testing Context*. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Vol. 30 No. 2, pp. 75-110.**

[http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?\\_nfpb=true&\\_ERICExtSearch\\_SearchValue\\_0=EJ797551&ERICExtSearch\\_SearchType\\_0=no&accno=EJ797551](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=EJ797551&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=EJ797551)

This study examines longitudinal student progress and achievement on the elementary, middle, and high school levels in relation to accountability policy incentives in a large urban district in Texas. Using quantitative analyses supplemented by qualitative interviews, the authors find that high stakes testing policies that reward and punish schools based on student test scores creates incentives for schools to “game the system” by excluding students from testing and, ultimately, school.

**Herszenhorn, D. (2005). Brooklyn High School Is Accused Anew of Forcing Students Out. *New York Times*, October 12 2005.**

[http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/12/nyregion/12school.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/12/nyregion/12school.html?_r=1)

A New York Times article reporting an example of a school acting to increase its test scores by forcing low achieving students to leave, or making conditions at the school intolerable for them until they do.

**Hong, W, & Youngs, P. (2008). Does High Stakes Testing Increase Cultural Capital Among Low-income Racial Minority Groups? *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, Vol. 16 No. 6.**

<http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v16n6/v16n6.pdf>

This article draws on research from Texas and Chicago to examine whether high stakes testing enables low income and racial minority students to acquire cultural capital. While students' performance on state or district tests rose after the implementation of high stakes testing and accountability policies in Texas and Chicago in the 1990s, several studies indicate that these policies seemed to have had deleterious effects on curriculum, teaching, the percentage of students excluded from the tests, and student dropout rates.

**House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee. (2010). *School Accountability. First Report of Session 2009–10 Volume One*. Released 7 January 2010.**

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmchilsch/88/88i.pdf>

The House of Commons Examination of the School Accountability regime in the UK. Amongst the findings is the following:

“The Achievement and Attainment Tables present a very narrow view of school performance and there are inherent methodological and statistical problems with the way they are constructed.....Yet most of those who may wish to use the Tables, particularly parents, remain unaware of the very serious defects associated with them and will interpret the data presented without taking account of their inherent flaws. As a result, many schools feel so constrained by the fear of failure according to the narrow criteria of the Tables that they resort to measures such as teaching to the test, narrowing the curriculum, an inappropriate focusing of resources on borderline candidates, and encouraging pupils towards ‘easier’ qualifications, all in an effort to maximise their performance data. There is an urgent need for the Government to move away from these damaging Achievement and Attainment Tables and towards a system which gives a full and rounded account of a school’s provision”.

**Hursh, D. (2005). The Growth of High- Stakes Testing in the USA: Accountability, Markets and the Decline in Educational Equality. *British Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 5, pp. 605-622.**

[http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?\\_nfpb=true&\\_ERICExtSearch\\_SearchValue\\_0=EJ718874&\\_ERICExtSearch\\_SearchType\\_0=no&accno=EJ718874](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=EJ718874&_ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=EJ718874)

A British examination of the impact of NCLB and standardised testing and accountability in the US. It concludes that such regimes have not achieved their aims of increasing student achievement, and have led to a decrease in educational equity.

**Jones, G, Jones, D. & Hargrove, T. (2003). *The Unintended Consequences of High stakes Testing*. Rowman & Little Publishers, Inc. Washington.**

This book examines the myriad consequences that high stakes tests hold for US students, teachers, administrators, and the public. It argues that by spending large amounts of time on test preparation and driving teachers to teach low-level, rote memorization, schools are essentially wiping out non-tested subjects such as science, social studies, physical education, and the arts. It also demonstrates that testing has differentially negative effects on students with special needs, minority students, students living in poverty, and those for whom English is a second language.

**Karp, S. (2004). NCLB's Selective Vision of Equality: Some Gaps Count More than Others. In *Many Children Left Behind: How the No Child Left Behind Act is Damaging Our Children and Our Schools*. Deborah Meier & George Wood, eds., Beacon Press 2004, pp. 53-65.**

Full text not available on-line.

This article examines the mandate of NCLB to increase the equality of test scores in all student groups while failing to address the factors that help produce them. NCLB does nothing to promote equality of funding. As a result, “the larger and more culturally diverse a school is, the more likely it to be labelled as inadequate”. In special education classes in particular, such regimes also pressurise teachers to “substitute an inappropriate focus on test-taking skills instead of serving the needs of the individual students in front of them”. This limits the ability of schools to teach to the needs of their students and community, further increasing inequity.

**Keyes, D. (2007). Classroom Caste System. *Washington Post*, April 9 2007.**

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/04/08/AR2007040800925.html>

An opinion piece by a US teacher who claims NCLB has “caused many schools to give poor and minority students an impoverished education that focuses primarily on basic skills”.

**Knaus, C. (2007). *Still Segregated, Still Unequal: Analyzing the Impact of No Child Left Behind on African American Students*. National Urban League.**

<http://www.berkeleyrep.org/school/images/Knaus.pdf>

This article claims that under NCLB schools have continued to fail African American students through “separate and unequal” educational opportunities. It accuses NCLB of failing to address causes of fundamental inequalities, of shifting debate “from unequal schools to how to measure schools”, of punishing African American students for “the failure of their schools”, and causing “teaching to bare minimums rather than meaningfully educating African American students”.

**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.**

[http://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/esea/nclb\\_naep\\_lee.pdf](http://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/esea/nclb_naep_lee.pdf)

Published under the auspices of the prestigious Harvard University Civil Rights Project, this paper concludes that “neither a significant rise in achievement, nor closure of the racial achievement gap is being achieved” under NCLB. It cites National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a long standing national program which has been operating since the Nixon administration, to demonstrate that progress has not been made since the introduction of NCLB amongst either minority students or the student cohort as a whole. Lee compares this unfavourably with the situation in the 1970s and 1980s, during which substantial progress was made in lowering educational socioeconomic achievement gaps under civil rights and anti-poverty programs. The report reiterates the issues of the exclusion of students, the narrowing of curriculum and the demoralisation of teachers and students under NCLB, characterising the program as, “...little more than a theory about how to force change without any grounding in specific educational approaches or targeted resources...”

**Linn, R.L., & Haug, C. (2002). *Stability of School Building Accountability Scores and Gains, CSE Technical Report 561*. Los Angeles: Center for the Study of Evaluation, National Center for Research and Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing, University of California.**

<http://research.cse.ucla.edu/Reports/TR561.pdf>

This paper examines school accountability systems in the US that rely on comparisons of student test score achievement from year to year. In findings also relevant to “like school” comparisons, the researchers find that year to year changes in successive groups of students have a great deal of volatility and that the uncertainty in the scores is the result of measurement error and non-persistent factors that affect scores in one year but not the next. The researchers conclude that, “although gain scores are often touted as better indicators of a school’s ‘value added’, they are much more likely to be affected by idiosyncratic fluctuations in scores from year to year...attempting to estimate a school’s value added is analogous to looking for a smaller needle in a bigger haystack.”

**Madaus, G, Marquerite, C. (2001) The Adverse Impact of High Stakes Testing on Minority Students: Evidence from 100 Years of Test Data. In Orfield, G, and Korhaber, M (Eds) *Raising Standards or Raising Barriers? Inequality and High Stakes Testing in Public Education*. New York: The Century Foundation.**

[http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content\\_storage\\_01/0000019b/80/16/d9/5d.pdf](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/16/d9/5d.pdf)

Data from research conducted at Boston College over thirty years highlight four issues: high stakes tests do not have a markedly positive effect on teaching and learning; high stakes tests do not motivate the unmotivated; high stakes assessments are not a more equitable way to assess the progress of students who differ in race, culture, native language, or gender; and high stakes testing programs have been shown to increase high school dropout rates, particularly amongst minority populations.

**Mansell, W, (2007). *Education by Numbers: The Tyranny of Testing*. Politicos Publishing, London.**

This book examines the impact of high stakes testing and league tables on schools and students in England. Mansell demonstrates how teachers are forced to “teach to the test”- to adopt shortcuts that will improve statistics, whether or not they are in pupils’ long-term interests. He accuses the regime of corrupting the English education system and leaving a generation of pupils less willing and able to think for themselves. He highlights the focus on “borderline” students to the detriment of those both higher or lower achieving students, and on the detrimental impact of the regime on educational equity.

**Marchant, G, Paulson, S, & Shunk, A. (2006). Relationships between high stakes testing policies and student achievement after controlling for demographic factors in aggregated data. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, Vol. 14 No. 30.**

<http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v14n30/v14n30.pdf>

Using data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, (NAEP), a long standing sample assessment program that has been gathering data since the 1970s, this study examines state demographic characteristics for NAEP testing in reading, writing, mathematics, and science from 1992 through 2002, in an effort to examine the relation of high stakes testing policies to achievement. It finds that high stakes testing policies demonstrated few relationships with achievement. The paper concludes that, “considering the cost and potential unintended negative consequences, high stakes testing policies seem to provide a questionable means of improving student learning”.

**Medina, J. (2009). Number of Students Leaving School Early Continues to Increase, Study Says. *New York Times*, April 29, 2009.**

[http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/30/education/30graduation.html?\\_r=1&emc=eta1](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/30/education/30graduation.html?_r=1&emc=eta1)

A New York Times article reporting that early school leaving rates are rising under Joel Klein.

**Merrow, J. (2009) Privatisation Will Not Help Us Achieve Our Goals: An Interview with Diane Ravitch. *Taking Note. Thoughts on Education from John Merrow (Blog)*.**

<http://learningmatters.tv/blog/op-ed/privatization-will-not-help-us-achieve-our-goals-an-interview-with-diane-ravitch/2413/>

An interview with Diane Ravitch, Assistant Secretary of Education under George Bush Senior. She accuses NCLB of promoting “false, anti-educational values” and with making schools obsessed with testing to the detriment of a wider curriculum. She also accuses NCLB of doing “nothing to raise standards”, noting that student achievement levels increased faster before NCLB than after.

**McSpadden McNeil, L, Coppola, E, Radiga, G & Vasquez Heilig, J. (2008). Avoidable Losses: High stakes Accountability and the Dropout Crisis. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, Vol. 16 No. 3.**

<http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v16n3/v16n3.pdf>

Based on a seven year study of 271,000 students, this article examines the effect of the Texas testing accountability regime on dropout rates of Texan students, with a particular focus on what it calls “high-poverty” high schools. The Texan testing and league table regime served as the basis of much of NCLB. It finds that the Texan testing/accountability system has a direct impact on the severity of the problem and that high stakes, test-based accountability leads not to equitable educational possibilities for youth, but to avoidable losses of these students from schools.

**McNeil, L & Valenzulela, A. (2001). A. The Harmful Impact of the TAAS System of Testing in Texas: Beneath the Accountability Rhetoric. M. Kornhaber, M and G. Orfield, G, (Eds), *Raising Standards or Raising Barriers? Inequality and High Stakes Testing in Public Education*. New York: Century Foundation, 127-150.**

<http://www.edb.utexas.edu/latino/McNeil%20&%20Valenzuela.pdf>

Focusing on urban schools in which students are predominantly Mexican American, this essay outlines the ways in which the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) harms the educational quality and opportunity of minority and economically disadvantaged youth. The pressure to raise TAAS scores leads teachers to spend time drilling on practice examination materials. Subjects tested by the TAAS are reduced to isolated skills and fragments of fact. As a management system, the TAAS encourages administrators and teachers to aim at the lowest level of information and skills, to the neglect of complex assignments and content. The article

concludes that the TAAS system of testing does not agree with what is known in research on children's learning, and that the generic TAAS curriculum is divorced from the experiences, language, and culture of minority children.

**Monty, N. (2003). Leaving Children Behind: How No Child Left Behind Will Fail Our Children. *Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 85 No. 3, pp. 225-28.**

<http://www.jstor.org/pss/20441538>

This article presents a litany of flaws of NCLB that adversely affect low-income and minority students. It urges a new federal law that truly promotes high-quality schooling supported by fair assessments and accountability.

**Mortimore, P. (2008). *Why Copy England?***

<http://www.aeusa.asn.au/multiattachments/5852/DocumentName/PeterMortimoreOpinionPiece.pdf>

An article by prominent UK educational academic Peter Mortimore in which he argues against Australia adopting the English system of testing and league tables.

**Mortimore, P. (2008). These protesters are not dinosaurs. *Guardian*, May 6, 2008.**

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/may/06/schools.news>

An opinion piece which argues that the English "high stakes" testing regime has conditioned teachers to teach to the test, endlessly rehearse pupils to pass them and thus, of necessity, relegate their most imaginative teaching to whatever time is left over.

**Mortimore, P. (2008). Lies, damned lies and Sats-based league tables. *Guardian*, August 5, 2008.**

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/aug/05/sats.education>

An opinion piece calling for the UK government to ban school league tables.

**National Council of Churches. (2009). *Ten Moral Concerns in the No Child Left Behind Act. A Statement of the National Council of Churches Committee on Public Education and Literacy.***

<http://www.nccusa.org/elmc/2009moralconcerns.pdf>

This statement by the US National Council of Churches accuses NCLB of unfairly denigrating public education, demoralising and denigrating students from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds, increasing educational inequity and excluding disadvantaged students from

education. It claims NCLB blames schools serving disadvantaged cohorts for challenges not of their making, narrows what is taught in schools and exacerbates racial and economic segregation in metropolitan areas.

**National Indian Education Association. (2006). *No Child Left Behind in Indian Country.***

[http://www.niea.org/sa/uploads/policyissues/29.23.NIEANCLBreport\\_final2.pdf](http://www.niea.org/sa/uploads/policyissues/29.23.NIEANCLBreport_final2.pdf)

A report on the impact of NCLB on American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students, based on extensive consultations around the country. While supporting the concept of school accountability, the report concludes that NCLB has been counter-productive in this regard, “does not fit or respond to the unique situation of Native communities and schools”, and has left Native students further behind. It identifies major consequences that “resulted in major disruptions to the education systems, that may fundamentally alter the education potential of schools while significantly and coincidentally narrowing the broad public purposes of schools”.

**National Union of Teachers. *The Case Against National Curriculum Tests.***

[http://www.teachers.org.uk/resources/pdf/case\\_against.pdf](http://www.teachers.org.uk/resources/pdf/case_against.pdf)

A summary of the case against curriculum tests by the UK National Union of Teachers.

**Neill, M, Guisbond, L, & Scgaeffer, B. (2004). *Failing Our Children, How “No Child Left Behind” Undermines Quality and Equity in Education and An Accountability Model that Supports School Improvement.* Fairtest.**

<http://eps1.asu.edu/epru/articles/EPRU-0405-62-OWI.pdf>

A report commissioned by *Fairtest*, a US organisation campaigning for reform of high stakes testing and against the excesses of NCLB. The report claims “NCLB is aggravating, not solving, the real problems that cause many children to be left behind”, particularly for minority and disadvantaged children. It proposes alternative approaches for improving public schools for students in poverty and for creating “authentic accountability”.

**Nichols, S, Berliner, D. (2005). *The Inevitable Corruption of Indicators and Educators Through High stakes Testing.* Education Policy Research Unit (EPRU), Arizona State University.**

<http://eps1.asu.edu/epru/documents/EP1-0503-101-EPRU.pdf>

This 175 page research based report examines the effects of high stakes testing in the US, concluding that the very nature of the high stakes attached to them corrupts them as indicators. Across the US the researchers found that high stakes testing lead to administer, teacher and student cheating, to the exclusion of low achieving students from testing and from education, to an increase in dropout rates amongst vulnerable and minority students, to teaching to the test, to a narrowing of the curriculum, to a decline in teacher morale, and to wrongful categorisation of



schools as successes or failures based on misleading data. The report concludes that, “high stakes tests cannot be trusted – they are corrupted and distorted. To avoid exhaustive investigations into these tests that turn educators into police, this research supports building a new indicator system that is not subject to the distortions of high stakes testing”.

**Nichols, S and Berliner, D. (2007). *Collateral Damage. How High Stakes Testing Corrupts America's Schools*. Harvard Education Press.**

This book is a comprehensive examination of NCLB, testing accountability and league tables. The authors demonstrate that NCLB has led to the exclusion of low performing students, as preventing them from enrolling or encouraging them to leave is a way by which schools can meet their proscribed targets. High school dropout rates, particularly amongst minority students, have actually increased in years 11 and 12 since the introduction of NCLB. High academically achieving students are also adversely affected. To maximise a school's chances of meeting its benchmarks students on the cusp of achieving the proscribed levels are given priority, to the detriment of higher and lower performing students.

**Nichols, S. & Berliner, D, (2007). High stakes Testing is Putting the Nation At Risk. *Education Week*: March 12, 2007**

<http://www.joanwink.com/research/Berliner-Nichols-High-Stakes-Testing.pdf>

A summary by prominent US education academics of their finding in their book *Collateral Damage. How High Stakes Testing Corrupts America's Schools*.

**Nichols, S. & Berliner, D. (2008). Testing the Joy Out of Learning. *Educational Leadership*, Vol. 65, No. 6, pp. 14-18.**

[http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational\\_leadership/mar08/vol65/num06/Testing\\_the\\_Joy\\_Out\\_of\\_Learning.aspx](http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/mar08/vol65/num06/Testing_the_Joy_Out_of_Learning.aspx)

This article argues that the increase in testing under NCLB has not increased student achievement or narrowed education gaps, but has narrowed curriculum, marginalised students already at risk and increased inequity.

**Nichols, S, Glass, G, & Berliner, D. (2005). *High stakes Testing and Student Achievement: Problems for the No Child Left Behind Act*. Education Policy Research Unit (EPRU) Arizona State University.**

<http://epsu.asu.edu/epru/documents/EPSTL-0509-105-EPRU.pdf>

This study is specifically aimed at assessing the intended impact of high stakes testing in the US on student achievement. Using several analyses of National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test data from twenty-five states, a link between high stakes testing and student achievement could not be established. The results of this research suggest that increases in

testing pressure are related to increased school year level retention rates (keeping student down) and a subsequent increase in dropout rates.

**Paulson, S, & Marchant, G. (2009). Background Variables, Levels of Aggregation, and Standardized Test Scores. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, Vol. 17, No. 22.**

<http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v17n22/v17n22.pdf>

This paper examines the influence of student demographic characteristics on standardised achievement test scores, both in relation to individual student achievement and to the use of such data for accountability purposes under NCLB. It finds that the majority of variance amongst schools is related to demographic characteristics, and that while these factors are out of a school's control they nevertheless result in high stakes consequences under NCLB. It concludes that "such numbers (test scores) are not valid representations of educational equity", that "the dangers or misrepresentation are substantial" and that, "as part of a punitive accountability system, numbers are taking a toll on the qualities previously valued in our education system".

**Queensland Studies Authority. (2009). *Student Assessment Regimes. Getting the balance right for Australia. Draft discussion paper.***

[http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/downloads/publications/qa\\_paper\\_assess\\_balance\\_aust.pdf](http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/downloads/publications/qa_paper_assess_balance_aust.pdf)

This paper, produced by the Queensland Studies Authority, examines evidence on the effects of high stakes testing, testing accountability regimes and league tables in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. It concludes that, "when accountability for educational outcomes is measured solely by results in national full-cohort tests, the negative effects on teaching and student learning outweigh the positive intentions, and furthermore, that the data from such tests cannot be used by policymakers in meaningful ways".

**Ramsey James, R. (2009). *How to Mend a Broken Act: Recapturing Those Left Behind by No Child Left Behind. Southern University Law Center.***

[http://works.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=regina\\_james](http://works.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=regina_james)

Amongst the findings of this paper are that accountability regimes based on testing severely penalise schools which fail to improve without providing real guidance as to how to do so. Such regimes encourage greater school year level retention rates, but the evidence is that greater retention rates do not improve student learning and cause greater numbers to drop out of school. There is also a greater incentive for schools to encourage poorly performing students to leave. Many students, particularly those in the targeted subgroups, are dropping out of school at an alarming rate in large part to escape the harsh penalties associated with their performance on the high stakes tests mandated by the NCLB Act.

**Raudenbush, S. (2004). Schooling, statistics, and poverty: Can we measure school improvement? *The Ninth Annual William H. Angoff Memorial Lecture*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.**

[http://www.ets.org/Media/Education\\_Topics/pdf/angoff9.pdf](http://www.ets.org/Media/Education_Topics/pdf/angoff9.pdf)

This paper examines the scientific limits and policy implications for evaluations of school effectiveness based on test-based measures, including the requirements for adequate yearly progress under NCLB. It includes a particular examination of impact of such evaluations on schools and students in high-poverty areas. It compares measurements based both on school-mean proficiency, and on value added. It concludes that “measures based on mean proficiency are shown to be scientifically indefensible for high stakes decisions. In particular, they are biased against high-poverty schools during the elementary and high school years”. It also concludes that value added measures “suffer inferential problems of (their) own” and are not effective measures of school achievement or improvement.

**Rustique-Forrester, E. (2005). Accountability and the Pressures To Exclude: A Cautionary Tale from England. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, Vol. 13, No. 26.**

<http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v13n26/v13n26.pdf>

This article reports the findings of a study that examined the impact of England’s testing, accountability, school ranking and league tables regime. The study found that England’s high stakes approach to accountability led to a narrowing of the curriculum, the marginalisation of low-performing students, and a climate perceived by teachers to be less tolerant of students with academic and behavioural difficulties.

**Ryan, J. (2004). The Perverse Incentives of the No Child Left Behind Act. *New York University Law Review*, Spring 2004.**

<http://www1.law.nyu.edu/journals/lawreview/issues/vol79/no3/NYU303.pdf>

This article examines how NCLB creates perverse incentives that work against the achievement of the Act’s goal of increasing equity and raising student achievement. It argues that these perverse incentives are an unavoidable aspect of any test-based accountability system that focuses on absolute achievement levels.

**Schneider, M. (2009). NAEB Maths Results Hold Bad News for NCLB. *The Enterprise Blog*. October 14, 2009.**

<http://blog.american.com/?p=6061>

Writing in the blog of the conservative American Enterprise Institute, Mark Schneider, a former commissioner of the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics, notes that student achievement in Maths actually increased faster before NCLB than since its introduction, including for minority and low performing students.

**Sunderman, Tracey, C, Kim, J & Orfield, G. (2004). *Listening to Teachers: Classroom Realities and No Child Left Behind*. The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University.**

[http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content\\_storage\\_01/0000019b/80/29/dc/a0.pdf](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/29/dc/a0.pdf)

A survey of teacher responses to NCLB by the prestigious Civil Rights Project of Harvard University. Amongst its findings are that teachers do not believe publicly identifying schools' test scores leads to improvement, that NCLB causes teachers to leave schools serving disadvantaged students and that it is causing teachers to narrow their teaching, de-emphasising untested topics and focusing excessively in teaching to the test. Teachers do not believe NCLB improves teaching or the curriculum, and some indicted it had disrupted meaningful reforms that had been underway before its introduction.

**Valenzuela, A. (2004). *Leaving Children Behind, How "Texas-style" Accountability Fails Latino Youth*. State University of New York Press, Albany.**

A collection of essays on how the "Texas model" of performance accountability, based on high stakes testing and league tables, is failing Latino children and diminishing the quality of education in Texas schools and elsewhere.

**Volante, L, (2004) *Teaching to the Test: What Every Education and Policy-maker Should Know*. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, No. 35 Sep 2004.**

<http://www.umanitoba.ca/publications/cjeap/articles/volante.html>

This article examines practices of 'teaching to the test', including the use of teaching that utilizes actual or cloned items from these high-stakes tests. It concludes that such teaching to the test rarely helps learning and has a detrimental effect on the teaching profession as a whole. The paper addresses the dangers of directly teaching to a standardised test and the implications of this practice for students, educators and policy makers. It also discusses measures designed to promote constructive test preparation activities. It argues that educators and policy makers both have important roles in ending this practice.

**Walden, L. & Kritsonis, W. (2008). *The Impact of the Correlation Between the No Child Left Behind Act's High Stakes Testing and the High Dropout rates of Minority Students*. *National Journal for Publishing and Mentoring Doctoral Student Research*, Vol. 5, No. 1.**

<http://www.nationalforum.com/Electronic%20Journal%20Volumes/Walden,%20Lavada%20NC%20LB%20and%20Drop%20out%20Rates%20of%20Minority%20Students.pdf>

This PHD based article establishes a link between NCLB mandated high stakes testing and increased drop our rates amongst minority students.

**West, H, & Hind, H. (2006). Selectivity, Admissions and Intakes to “Comprehensive” Schools in London, England. *Educational Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 4, pp. 145 – 155.**

<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/15324/>

This article documents the exclusion of students with special needs from schools caused by the English testing and league tables regime. In a study of school selection practices amongst London comprehensive schools it finds that those with autonomy over their own admissions are more likely to exclude children with special social, medical and educational needs than schools whose admissions were controlled by a local authority, and that they did so on the basis of the impact this would have on their standing in league tables. As could be expected, schools with such policies had lower numbers of students from lower socioeconomic and immigrant backgrounds, scored higher in public testing regimes and league tables and found it easier to reach their benchmark targets. West and Hind accordingly attribute the steep hierarchy in school positions in league tables in London to these school admission practices.

**Whetton, C. (2009). A brief history of a testing time: national curriculum assessment in England 1989-2008. *Educational Research*, Vol. 51, No. 2, pp. 137-159.**

<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/routledg/rere/2009/00000051/00000002/art00002>

This article examines the history of the National Curriculum Assessment (NCA) program in England since 1989, which it contends has its origins in a political desire to regulate education and transfer accountability for educational outcomes to schools and teachers. Over this time the system has evolved from an attempt at a criterion-referenced system based on tasks marked by the childrens’ own teachers through to an externally marked examination system with an increasing emphasis on test-based mechanisms and league tables. This change “reflects the political purposes of the system for accountability”, and the pressure associated with it has led to growing criticism of the effects on children and their education.

**Wilson, D., & Piebalga, A. (2008). *Accurate Performance Measure but Meaningless Ranking Exercise? An Analysis of the English School League Tables*. Bristol: The Centre for Market and Public Organisation, Bristol Institute of Public Affairs, University of Bristol.**

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/cmpo/publications/papers/2007/wp176.pdf>

In 2006 England implemented a Contextual Value Added (CVA) measure to that claims to be a more “sophisticated” value added model than that previously used, taking into account a cocktail of socioeconomic factors including poverty, ethnicity, English as an additional language and special educational needs. This study casts doubt on the effectiveness of such measures. The researchers point out that many schools are very similar in CVA results, leading very small and statistically unreliable differences in scores to put them hundreds of places apart on the league tables. The researchers conclude that “given that almost half of the schools cannot be statistically distinguished from the national average, any ranking exercise based on these numbers will be largely spurious”.

**Wood, G. (2004). A view from the Field: Effects on Classrooms and Schools. In *Many Children Left Behind: How the No Child Left Behind Act is Damaging Our Children and Our Schools*. Deborah Meier & George Wood, eds, Beacon Press 2004, pp. 33-50.**

Full text not available on-line.

A teacher's perspective on how NCLB acts as a disincentive against schools enrolling and supporting educationally challenged students and how they are penalised under testing accountability regimes for doing so. It discusses the impact on dropout, grade retention and graduation rates, particularly for minority and disadvantaged students. It also examines the effects on classroom practices, including the "dumbing down" of the curriculum caused by teaching to the test and the overall narrowing of the school experience.

**Wu, M. (2009). *Issues in Large Scale Assessments*. Keynote address presented at PROMS 2009, Hong Kong.**

<http://www.promshk.org/>

This speech, by speech Professor Margaret Wu of the Assessment Research Centre of the Education Faculty of Melbourne University, questions the use of NAPLAN test data for assessment of school performance. She notes that NAPLAN tests are have a high degree of measurement error, as well as sampling and equating errors, and are too inaccurate for the determination of either individual student improvement over time, changes in school performance from year to year or differences in achievement between different schools. She pointed out that such inaccuracies particularly call into doubt the validity of "like school" comparisons, which require even more precision to detect differences between schools.

**Wyse, D, & Torrance, H. (2009). The Development and Consequences of National Curriculum Assessment for Primary Education in England. *Educational Research*, Vol. 51, Issue 2, pp. 213-228.**

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a911262168~db=all~jumptype=rss>

The main aim of this article is to review research and other evidence about the development of national curriculum assessment in England since 1988. The authors conclude that there were gains in national curriculum test scores up to 2000 but that they then plateaued. Research evidence reveals a number of negative consequences to primary schools caused by the implementation of a "high stakes" national assessment system in England, including teaching to the test, a narrowing of the curriculum, pressures on schools to adopt selective enrolment practices and a subsequent increase in inequity. The authors recommend a greater emphasis on formative assessment rather than tests, and replacement of Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs) with a system of sampling in order to evaluate educational progress nationally.