

To Whom It May Concern,

I would like to provide a submission to the Inquiry into NAPLAN Testing.

My qualifications are a Bachelor of Engineering (University of Central Queensland), Bachelor of Primary Education Studies (Charles Sturt University) and I am in my 5th year of part-time teaching at Waterfall Public School in NSW for a K/1/2 class and have had many years working as a project manager in software development projects prior to my teaching. I also tutor primary children in Reading, Writing and Numeracy from Year 1 to Year 5. I have four children ranging from 9 to 16 years, a keen interest in the curriculum, information technology, brain research and creating optimal learning environments for students in primary schools, hence my submission.

Firstly, the requirement for strict timing does not address the learning styles of many children who function at a slower than others and definitely slower than the 'average child' that the NAPLAN test timings are based on. These children are no less intelligent than children who can complete the test within the allocated time and in many cases I feel that the ability to complete these types of tests within a shorter timeframe is a 'learned' skill which comes with exposure to multiple choice questions, direct teaching on the test format and maturity. I propose that the timing be extended for those children who need more time and that perhaps a time to complete the test be recorded rather than cutting the test short for those children who are slower.

I understand the test results are not available until September some four months after the test is conducted. This raises the issue of the usefulness of this test to inform the teacher in the student's current year as the teacher has very little time to address any of the areas highlighted by the test. Of course teachers have their own assessments (they could not rely on the NAPLAN for that in any case as the results are only ready at the end of Term 3) but having the NAPLAN test results as early as possible would obviously be a useful assessment for their teaching. I believe that making the test online could go a long way to speeding up the process of marking.

I noticed that the texts used for the Reading tests for both Years 3 and 5 were very complex in comparison to the previous two tests. I would be interested to understand the reasoning behind this change as I feel a range of simple to complex texts in different text types would be more appropriate.

A large proportion of the Numeracy test was based on word problems or the 'Working Mathematically' strand of Mathematics as well as being mostly multiple choice style questions. Obviously you would want to know that a student is able to apply fundamental knowledge, however, I feel that the balance of 'basic skills' in this area are out of proportion to the 'application skills' and could be re-addressed. Many students who struggle with reading and are not permitted to have any assistance to read the questions are at a disadvantage when completing this test, not because they cannot work it out but because they incorrectly read the problem. I understand in special circumstances a 'reader' is allowed to assist the student but from what I have observed this is in extreme cases only. Perhaps we can use information technology to allow students to have the question read to them if required by clicking on a sound icon next to the question.

I believe that multiple choice questions do not comprise the bulk of the work students do in their primary classrooms. In fact in the schools I have worked in, the NAPLAN test and other University run tests conducted in primary schools are the only assessments in this style that students experience. In order to prepare students for NAPLAN style questions teachers use older tests, however, I do not think this adequately prepares students for the NAPLAN test as they need exposure to multiple choice style questioning throughout their schooling, not just prior to the test.

Incorporating this style of questioning into the students learning could be achieved via the curriculum as well as changing the style of the NAPLAN test to incorporate more of the usual questioning techniques used in schools. The power of technology could be used to capture this information for the NAPLAN test ie. the student calculates the answer on a scrap piece of paper and types in the answer as opposed to choosing an answer from a multiple choice list. Now that interactive whiteboards are becoming part of the landscape, it would be easier for teachers to incorporate multiple choice style questions into their teaching toolkit.

Last but not least, I think is grossly unfair to use the NAPLAN tests as a measure of schools and students. This is one test conducted on one day in a particular style and most students experience a change of teacher between tests. Obviously these types of tests are used on students who are older to measure entry levels to University courses, however, younger students appear to be tested for the sake of comparison only and to measure the school for funding purposes. I fully support national standards for teaching but I strongly feel this must be provided to teachers in the form of best practice lessons, clarity about what is mandatory and core teaching material and access to best practice hard copy and online resources. Currently teachers (especially beginning teachers) must re-invent the wheel, find resources and lesson plans or spend inordinate amounts of time creating their own when it has obviously been done before by more experienced teachers. The online resources are numerous and hard to find if you aren't in the know and there is no top down approach or interface to finding what you need. The NAPLAN testing is not integrated in any way to the teacher's job of educating their students according to the curriculum and appears to be an imposition with little use especially as results are received so late. There is a need for national standards for assessment that is more incremental and that informs teaching.

Please contact me if I can be of further assistance with any of my suggestions or recommendations.

With regards,
Karen Carpenter