

Submission to the Senate Inquiry into NAPLAN testing  
made on behalf of Tamworth Teachers' Association.

This response has been organised according to the Inquiries' Terms of Reference.

(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;

The publication of NAPLAN results by media outlets provides a simplistic view of a very complex situation that can adversely impact on the welfare of schools.

NAPLAN is based on a very narrow focus. It does not allow for the assessment of the full range of student abilities including such aspects as higher order thinking and extra curricula activities.

The general public's understanding of the complexity of this situation is limited due to the lack of education provided to the general public by the federal government on NAPLAN testing and test results.

The ranking of schools in the public arena based on NAPLAN is illegitimate as NAPLAN provides only a snapshot of data from an extremely narrow slice of educational data.

There is no consideration of the broader education provided by schools in the ranking of schools.

The quality of the data collected by NAPLAN can be questioned when individual students are 'coached' for the test.

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

NSW currently is the only state or territory where legislation relating to the improper publication of 'League Tables' constructed from NAPLAN test results has been enacted. Unfortunately the NSW government have appeared to lack the political will to enforce the legislation as there has already been an example of League Table publication in the print media.

Other instances of illegal League Table publication have been reported to have been used by real estate agents to influence buyer choices and hence real estate values.

The so called guarantees of anonymity afforded by the reporting of NAPLAN test data has been proven incorrect in a local Tamworth area school where only two students were in the cohort reported upon making it relatively simple to identify individual students results in the public arena.

(c) the impact of the NAPLAN assessment and reporting regime on: (i) the educational experience and outcomes for Australian students,

Students in Australian schools currently enjoy exposure to a broad curriculum which has contributed to a well rounded education which is highly regarded in international terms.

Over emphasis on NAPLAN by schools responding to potential negative impacts of League tables of schools will only have a negative impact on this well rounded education. Australian students are ranked higher in terms of literacy and numeracy than students in the UK and USA where League tables have been published for some time. League Tables in these countries have not improved educational outcomes for students.

(ii) the scope, innovation and quality of teaching practice,

International examples of significant narrowing of the curriculum following publication of NAPLAN style test data are evident.

Pressure to perform in literacy and numeracy tests coerces teachers to focus their teaching practice on improved test performance rather than improved educational outcomes for students. Specific examples of this type of practice have been presented to Tamworth Teachers Association by members who have taught in the UK on exchange programs.

(iii) the quality and value of information about student progress provided to parents and principals

Parents can gain information from NAPLAN test result data supplied to them relating to their child's progress at school giving them comparative information referenced against expected standards. It is essential that clear explanatory information accompanies the data supplied to parents.

The provision of individual NAPLAN data supplied to schools can be of assistance in enabling teachers to focus on aspects of literacy or numeracy that are identified as requiring additional attention.

School programs that interpret syllabus documents can be tailored to best suit the needs of students in a particular class or at a particular school.

(iv) the quality and value of information about individual schools to parents, principals and the general community; and

Information about individual schools based wholly on NAPLAN data provided to the community will give the community an invalid view of local schools.

The government's attempt at grouping like schools is patently flawed.

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

The international experience of published 'League Tables' of schools has had the impact of suspending a broad approach to curriculum and a focus on the practise of coached preparation for external examinations.

Narrowing of the curriculum will limit the access to all areas of the curriculum not included in the external testing regime.

e) other related matters.

School comparisons in country towns where there is only one school will have little or no impact. However in towns where there is a choice of two or more schools 'League Tables' may create residual schools where the socially mobile move schools to a more favourable location and those who are unable to move will end up with limited curriculum options.

In country areas, like Tamworth, where satellite towns exist, 'League Table' stimulated migration of students may lead to the viability of local schools being questioned and the value of the local school a centre of the community being lost.

The Tamworth Teachers' Association feels strongly about the issue of published 'League Tables' and welcomes the opportunity provided by this Senate Inquiry to present the opinion of country teachers in NSW.

Greg Parker - Vice President - Tamworth Teachers Association