

A) Investigation of the conflicting claims made by Government, educational experts and peak bodies in relation to the publication of NAPLAN test results. Publication of the raw data from the NAPLAN diagnostic testing of students in schools Australia wide, enabled the media to construct league tables, a simplistic ranking of students and schools from highest to lowest. Our whole school staff is united in our opposition to league tables. The recent publication of league tables, enabled by the Federal Government's "My School" website has had a negative and harmful effect on the self esteem and morale of students, staff and parents in each school community that was ranked as at or near 'the bottom'. For example 23 students were removed by their parents from Doonside Public School after the publication of data.

Our school received enquiries to enrol students from out of area but as all classes are currently full, taking students from outside our local area was not a possibility. The idea that publishing NAPLAN results will somehow empower parents by giving them more choice of schools is a fallacy. Only families who are financially able to relocate or can afford private schooling have more choice. A student is only ever guaranteed a place in their local school.

When for example, Kings elite private school in Sydney was matched on the 'My School' website with 'like' school Gundaroo Public in Victoria, or Holroyd High School was matched with Alice Springs School of the Air, the inaccuracy of the 'My School' data became glaringly obvious. The link between 'socio economic' level and educational achievement has been well established. The majority of students in lower socio economic areas perform at lower levels than the majority of students in more affluent areas. The Government already possesses data which identifies schools that are in need of assistance.

B) The implementation of possible safeguards and protocols for the public presentation of the testing and reporting of NAPLAN data.

1. Consultation with a range of experienced, professional educators in the development of NAPLAN reporting would be a useful and appropriate safeguard.
2. Prior consultation with those in the educational field is an essential protocol, to the presentation of any assessment data.
3. Legislation to prevent the publishing of league tables already exists in NSW. The political will to enact the existing legislation would protect schools and indicate the Government is serious about protecting low socio economic schools and their communities.
4. If the NAPLAN results have to be published, then they should be made available only to each individual school. It is totally unnecessary to compare schools and indeed such comparisons are often harmful schools identified as 'oranges' are mistakenly compared with schools identified as being 'apples'. Each public school is unique to its surrounding community. Each community has a right to respect and privacy. Assisting schools with low scores is not achieved through classifying them as 'failing' or ranking them to emphasise how 'bad' they are. Best practise would include identifying and examining: the school management system, the level of staff experience, availability and amount of funding for teacher professional development, the socio economic and ethnic composition of the school community, recognition and utilization of staff strengths, size and history of the school.

C) Educational experience and outcomes for students.

An ideal teaching and learning environment is generated in a school when creativity, diversity, mutual respect, honesty and fairness are acknowledged and encouraged. When NAPLAN testing results were used to create an artificial measuring scale, purporting to identify a schools' worth, they held up the most disadvantaged schools to public ridicule. It is well documented that negative reinforcement techniques such as public humiliation and ridicule are neither useful nor modern educational tools. The days when low performing students were 'named and shamed' by sitting them in a corner and making them wear a "dunce" hat are from a bygone era. In fact today we would regard this behaviour as insulting, degrading and abusive. A school where the atmosphere is non-threatening, positive and inclusive is created when progressive not regressive management techniques are employed.

The NAPLAN diagnostic tests are meant to give a snapshot of a child's progress in sections of a couple of syllabus areas on a given day. They were never intended to determine curriculum content. Unfortunately, NAPLAN does direct what is taught as schools do 'teach to the test'. This has the negative effect of narrowing the curriculum as areas are neglected or reduced to cater for the amount of time spent preparing for NAPLAN. Surely a test should reflect what is taught NOT what is to be tested! Tying funding to results ensures that schools will continue to 'teach to the test'. Pressure will be applied down the chain of command to 'improve the test results'. There are many ways to influence testing scores that have little to do with quality education.

For example: 1. Increases in the amount of time spent practising past tests, lessons on testing techniques, coaching on approaches to multiple choice questions.

2. In some schools low performing students are encouraged/told not to sit the NAPLAN test.

3. In the 2010 Easter school holidays, a 'NAPLAN camp' was advertised in the journal 'Sydney's Child'.

4. Some staff have been in schools where students were offered big hints and suggestions such as "You might like to check that answer again" during the administration of the test.

Schools that are performing at a low level are possibly in need of better teachers or better teaching methods; however, before this conclusion can be drawn, a more comprehensive assessment of the school would need to be carried out. Testing results would need to be assessed with a comprehensive look at the school, the breakdown of school population with regards to the backgrounds of the students, experience level of staff and so on. Support for a school may take the form of: a reduction in class sizes, more ESL or STLA teachers, a school counsellor/psychologist service for five days a week, better and more available in-servicing courses for staff, simplifying and reducing the size of the curriculum, services of interpreters, higher salaries to retain and attract experienced staff. Higher order thinking is not fostered in a climate of fear, negative criticism and shame. Furthermore, higher order thinking cannot be assessed by a diagnostic test alone.

Impact on quality and value of information about a students progress.

In order to meaningfully compare any testing results, factors likely to skew the data need to be considered. For example school starting age, (this differs from State to State), socio economic level of families, educational level of parents, ethnicity with regard to knowledge of and experience with speaking English, any indigenous families, any refugee families.

As educationalists we are not opposed to NAPLAN (formerly 'Basic Skills' in NSW) or any other diagnostic test, however, we recognise that the data from such a test provides a **limited** indicator of a student's progress. NAPLAN does not give immediate or clear feedback. The feedback for parents is not given until 6 months after the test. This years' data supports the argument that most schools in the public system are performing well. The data is not enough to create anything more than a snapshot view of a schools' performance. When assessing student progress, teachers use a multitude of assessment tools.

Educational assessment in 2010 is not a simplistic task but a sophisticated integration of: classroom observations, recording anecdotal records, results from tests, comparison of work produced against a pre determined set of criteria and discussion with students, parents and colleagues. The criterion used to measure a child's progress is provided as expected outcomes in the NSW syllabuses. The 'Best Start' Kindergarten school entry assessment material provides a developmental assessment continuum in English and Mathematics for children in Kindergarten, Year One and Two.

Using a continuum allows flexibility when measuring a child's progress and states what performance could be reasonably expected from a child within a particular stage. In fact, teachers do not require external diagnostic testing to assess a student's level of achievement. Experienced teachers can predict with a high degree of accuracy, the likely outcome of each of their students sitting a diagnostic test. Suggesting that a school's worth can be deduced by the results of a diagnostic test alone is tantamount to assessing the value of a car by the amount of kilometres it has travelled. Yes, it gives some indication of worth, but in no way provides enough information for a comprehensive picture.

International experience to National Testing & Reporting

To picture the outcome of what can happen when a school's educational worth is measured by results from diagnostic tests, one has only to look at the appalling state of the English Education System. Their test results are published in newspapers and are used to determine a school's funding. Improvement targets are issued and if a school does not meet these targets within the specified time it loses funding and in many cases the school is forced to close. Sometimes a school can only open for a few days a week as schools in low performing areas find it hard to attract and retain staff. Students in disadvantaged areas are further disadvantaged by a simplistic assessment-funding linked model.

I am also aware of one Australian family who migrated to California, USA. After two years they returned to Australia because of the lack of substance in their children's education. They were either learning testing strategies, attempting past or mock papers or sitting actual tests.

Any Related Information or Comments.

The assessment of a student, a staff member or of a school cannot be reduced to a single (or several) common diagnostic tests. A schools' value cannot be calculated on the basis of one test, nor in fact of several tests but by engaging with students, parents, staff, local education authorities, local community as well as testing data. One test given on any one day cannot give an in depth view of a student's level of achievement, let alone the worth of a school!

Whilst a diagnostic test will give a snapshot of student achievement, by itself, it is not comprehensive enough to evaluate the child's progress. Teachers, as professionals use multiple assessment tools and strategies. Just as a specialist in the medical profession uses several methods to diagnose, examine, research, discuss with colleagues, inform, support, predict and treat an individual so do we specialists in educational profession diagnose, examine, research, discuss with colleagues, inform, support and predict the progress of the students within our care.

The NAPLAN test results should not be published. They were never designed to assess a class, school or school community. They are a diagnostic tool for individual students. They were designed to form part of an evaluation of a child's progress. Each schools results are useful only to each school, to look for trends over time or possible future teaching directions. If NAPLAN results are to be published, they should include growth information from Best Start Assessment in Kindergarten, Year One and Year Two, as well as the NAPLAN tests in Years Three, Five, Seven and Nine.