

NAPLAN Senate inquiry submission

On behalf of the Wellington Point sub branch of the Cleveland branch of the Queensland Teachers Union, we support and encourage the inquiry to continue to seek and follow the advice on all matters relating to the NAPLAN offered by the Australian Education Union and its affiliated unions. In particular the advice it receives on matters of the administering and reporting NAPLAN data.

Therefore as outlined below we fully support the 6 points outlined by the Australian Education Union. We have also added a 7th point regarding the high stakes nature of the test and considerations to mitigate this so that NAPLAN data can be used without fear or undue pressure on staff and students to support learning.

“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.

The NAPLAN results held by ACARA, both published and unpublished, must be protected from misuse.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.”

Furthermore experience has shown that many parents, regardless of NAPLAN results, do not have the resources to make a choice about moving their children. Proximity tends to be the most overwhelming factor in the choice of school for most parents. The notion that all parents have a choice to move their children to a better performing NAPLAN results school is a fallacy, but the damage that league tables can cause and have caused many schools is real and does not serve to improve students’ education. It merely berates and condemns many schools to the educational scrapheap.

“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,” such as musical, sporting, environmental, multiple intelligences, “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 years 3, 5, 7 and 9. These

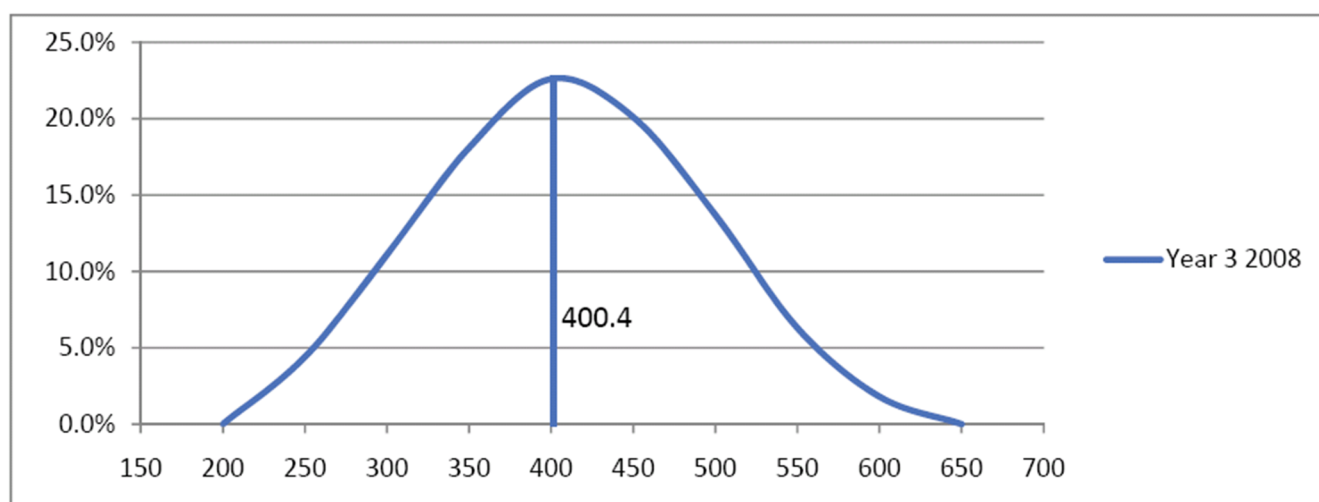
numbers suggest a precision in measuring student and school achievement that simply does not exist. The scores have widely varying margins of error according to school size and student cohort and demonstrate nothing of the span of student achievement in a school.

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

We cannot stress enough the importance the full span of student achievement compared to a single number (average score ONLY) that exists on My School currently.

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.

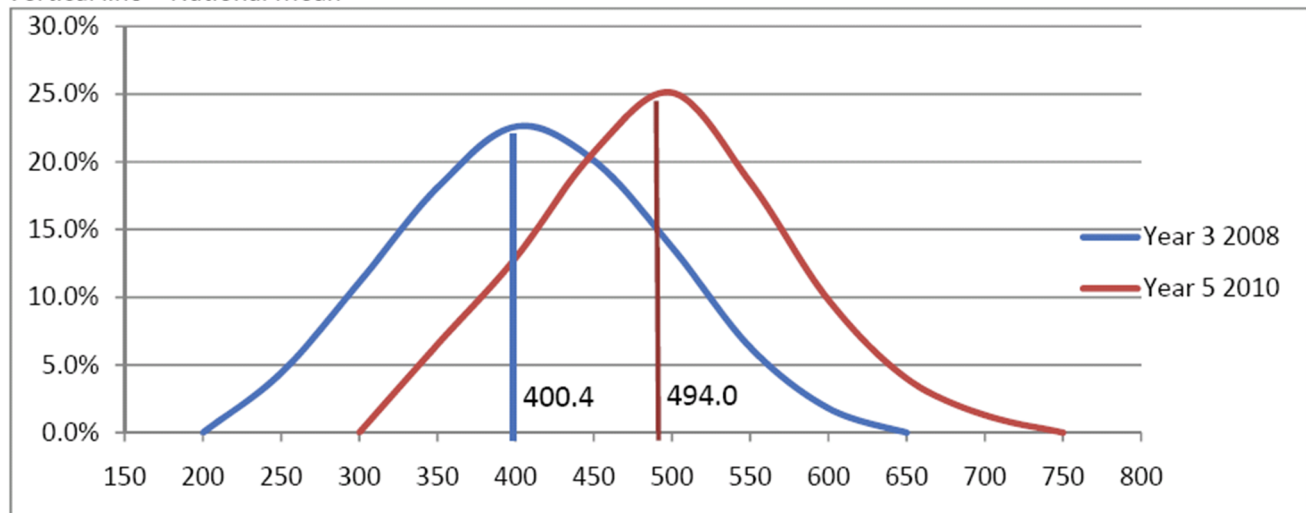
Each graph would also show the national average and the percentage of students above the average and the percentage below.

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.”

If a comparison of schools was made available under the models above then we would stress the importance of information to the viewer of the data such that comparing schools is complex and should be considered in conjunction with all other available information. This should again stress the need for rigorous analysis by the viewer when comparing schools and not be a means to simplistically rank or compare schools. Points 2 and 3 of this submission must be considered at this point.

“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 and numeracy results,” written by or in consultation with the school. “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.”

7. High stakes nature of the NAPLAN needs to change

We would certainly encourage the reporting and administering of the NAPLAN to move away from the high

stakes pressure testing that it has become. The time spent on preparing students for this test, analysing results and setting narrow targets has become counter productive. That is to say, the time spent preparing and administering the NAPLAN has taken away valuable teaching and learning time that is better spent on supporting student learning. The NAPLAN should be a snapshot and used to help develop better curricula that support student learning, not a high stakes test linked to success or failure of a school.

The high stakes nature of the NAPLAN has also served, in many schools, to narrow curriculum offerings. In reporting of NAPLAN data a whole picture must be given and schools should feel support to continue valuable programs such as the arts, environmental education, sports, etc. We would reiterate point 3 of this submission: If the high stakes nature continues a narrowing of focus on literacy and numeracy outcomes from the NAPLAN will inevitably become the focus of many schools.

Funding should not be tied to these results with low performing states receiving less of the money. As teachers we offer support in the classroom where it is needed with time and resources. This model needs to be at the core of funding in education, not high performing NAPLAN states.

At all costs information should be linked to the notion that Australia, in the international arena, performs admirably and continue to promote these good results. The notion that there is some sort of crisis in the education systems of Australia must have this international perspective added. Recent PISA results place Australia within the top 10 nations of the OECD in the last 3 results.

It has been a tragedy that PLAY is becoming lost in the early years curriculum in Queensland. Again as a result of the high stakes nature of NAPLAN testing a philosophy of education that focuses on the natural inquiry of the mind (Play-based curriculum) is being traded, changed and sometimes cut out altogether for a more formalised curriculum model. This has been as a direct result of many schools looking at ways to improve their NAPLAN results. The philosophy of play-based curriculum has been proven and, ironically, has shown improved outcomes on standardised testing such as NAPLAN, but the high stakes nature has, and we feel will continue to, move many schools into a formalised curriculum model where results can be scored and analysed according to NAPLAN standards.