

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing to you regarding the threat to remove NAPLAN results from being published. At a time when many parts of Australian society are moving to more transparency I find it ironic that teachers are resisting this move given the central role they play in crafting the moulding the minds of the next generation of leaders, artists, scientists, engineers, doctors, priests, teachers, etc.

It is natural to want to avoid the harsh blowtorch of public benchmarking but in order to fix problems in the education system you first need to know about them.

For example here are NAPLAN heat maps for Sydney (figure 2) and Brisbane (figure 1).

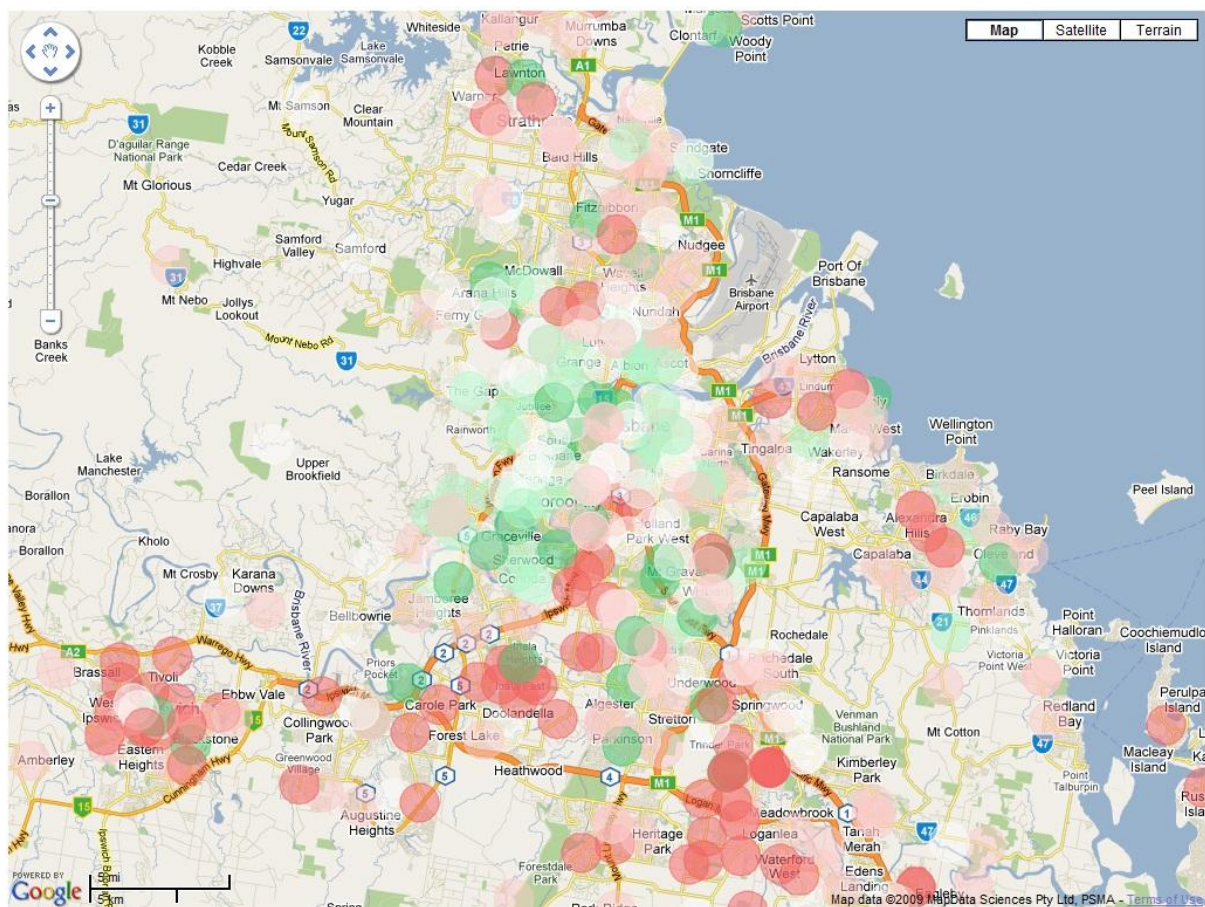


Figure 1: Brisbane NAPLAN Results

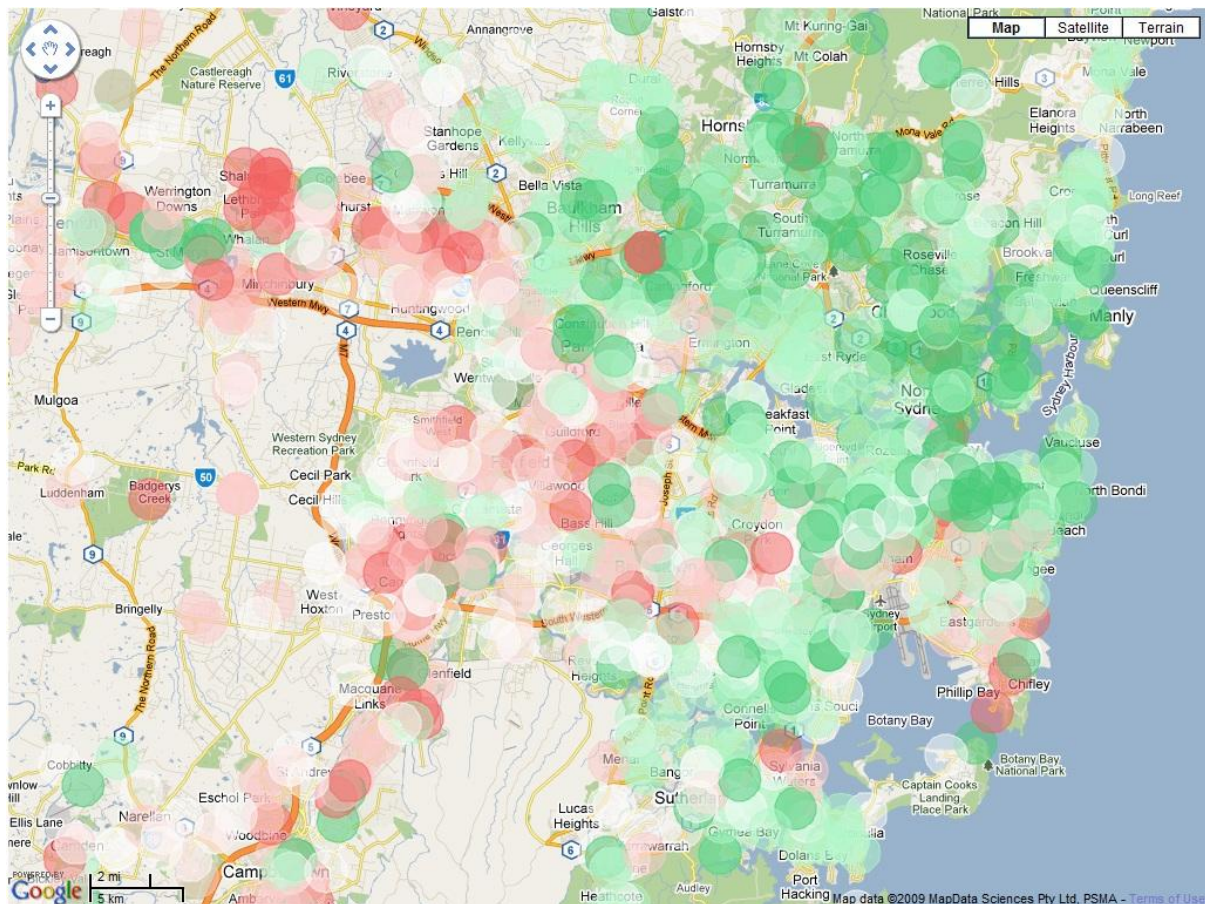


Figure 2: Sydney NAPLAN Results

So what are the implications of stopping the publishing of NAPLAN results.

- Suppression of free speech. For example the heat maps such as those shown in figures 1 and 2 were created by an independent software developer who published these pictures on his blog. His actual objective was to demonstrate new techniques in programmatically collecting data from web sites, in this case the myschool web site. If the publishing of NAPLAN results is banned does this mean that the blogs of ordinary Australians such as the one which published figures 1 & 2 will be subject to government censorship?
- It's better than nothing. While NAPLAN data is not perfect it is better than nothing. There are always going to be statistical anomalies but this is no excuse not to allow the data to be analysed and published. For example would it not be stupid to collect data on unemployment but then ban the publishing showing areas of high unemployment. On the contrary, unemployment data is often used to direct government investment in training and schemes such as those used to encourage apprenticeships. In the same way analysis of NAPLAN data can be used to target troubling trends such as disparities between states or between areas in cities.
- Problems not addressed. The heat maps (figures 1 & 2) point to a number of troubling trends which are not evident when viewing NAPLAN data using the myschool web site. Such as the poor results of Brisbane when compared to Sydney and the disparities shown within these cities. The public and the media play an important role in influencing government policy and without the analysis of NAPLAN data such as in figures 1 and 2, problem areas simply will not be addressed.

and will simply be ignored as state governments around the country have been doing for decades.

- Data will get out anyway. How long will it be before there is a black market in NAPLAN result analysis if publication is banned? It is a simple matter for someone who knows how to sort a column in M.S. Excel to lodge a freedom of information request, copy/paste/sort this in a spreadsheet and then email it to a friend, who emails fifty other friends, who emails another fifty friends, and so on. The cat is out of the bag and will not be put back in. Parents have been thirsting for this information for decades and any politician of any persuasion that tries to block publication of this data will pay dearly at the polling booth.