

From:
Mrs Irene Anne Zimmermann

I am a school counsellor and have been working at various Primary Schools in the ACT and prior to that in Queanbeyan.

I have seen the results of system wide testing of basic skills used very effectively by schools:

1. I have seen it used to identify children who may have been overlooked, who need extra assistance in a specific area.
2. I have also seen it used to identify areas of the curriculum in a school which need improvement. For example, in one school I worked in our maths scores were generally lower than reading scores. The next year the school concentrated on inservice and support for teachers in the teaching of maths.
3. System wide testing can be valuable when children change schools, either moving schools or at transition points. It gives the receiving school a good overview of the child's skills.

I see several problems with the NAPLAN assesement and reporting regime:

1. Some children with low skills, and their teachers and parents, are caused unnecessary stress. For children who are already identified as having low skills, the test itself is very stressful. This has other consequences:
 - a) Parents and teachers are often confused about the rights of parents to refuse to have their child sit the tests and are concerned about possible negative consequences for the child or the school.
 - b) The child, who has until this point been given a careful curriculum to ensure work is at the correct level to promote learning and avoid loss of confidence, can become very stressed and discouraged by sitting the test. I have sometimes been asked to counsel students who have experienced this trauma.
 - c) Some teachers, in an attempt to alleviate the stress a child will incur during NAPLAN tests, push the child to learn more quickly than is educationally wise. This can result in the teacher, student and parent all experincing excessive stress over a school term or longer, resulting in loss of confidence for all concerned.
2. Publication of the results of NAPLAN results has had a negative impact on the two schools where I am working this year. These schools are in a low socio-economic area of the ACT. There are some higher socio-economic areas within our suburb. Both schools were listed near the bottom of both the overall result list and socio-economic adjusted list. I have observed the following consequences of publication:
 - a) Low results across the ACT has resulted in greater support for schools in the teaching of reading and this is a positive.
 - b) Teachers at both schools, already doing a great job, often with a mobile population and children with special needs are discouraged and angry. They feel that their efforts are unrecognised, even abused. This is not condusive to improved teaching.
 - c) Parents are very concerned and often assume, incorrectly, that the standard of teaching at both schools is lower than the standard of other schools in the area.
 - d) Some parents have disrupted their children's education by moving them to a school listed higher on the published list. I am not convinced that these schools are teaching the basics better than the schools which the families have left. I am concerned that it may not have been in the children's interest to have their education and social interactions disrupted.