

I am a parent of 2 primary school aged children. I am not a teacher. I am not involved, nor have I been involved in education except through my children's needs. I am writing about my family's experience. I am a sole parent, sole carer of two children aged 9 and 11. We are located in NSW. Since my eldest (Yr 6 2010) first attended Kindergarten, I have been asking for relevant information on my daughters progress. The school principal has continued to refuse to give me meaningful information. The information I want access to was how my child/ren performed in the class, in the school, in the State and also in the Country. Apparently it is considered poor taste to share "rankings" with the population as it "discriminates" against those at the lower end. Not my problem. My children need to be educated for a global village. They are unlikely to spend all of their working lives in Australia and I fully expect they will travel overseas and work before they settle down. They will compete for jobs with the rest of the world's workforce. Thank God for ICAS and UNSW Competitions. Only through these competitions, have my children been able to get any sense of where they are. They have consistently pulled Distinctions and High Distinctions in these exams. The school reports do not reflect the results in these competitions. The NSW public schools seem to have some kind of allergy to giving out "A's". When this system was brought in, I was assured that they would only give out one or two of these a year!!!! In the old days (and even current through TAFE NSW) an "A" is 83% or higher and reflects a very solid understanding of the subject matter. A "B" is a mark of 66% to 82% reflecting above average understanding. A "C" was 50% to 65%. Anything else was a FAIL - no pussy footing around it. My daughter and son are both working two years above their grade level in Maths, yet both their reports in June (every year) continue to state they are "working toward outcomes" - this is so misleading. They have met their aged based stage outcomes but not their academic based outcome (ie she is in Stage 3 working at Stage 4 level and will receive the report on stage 4 level not stage 3 level which is what she is in). Consequently they may only receive a "B" or a "C". The first time I received one, I thought there must have been some kind of mistake, and that they should not have been accelerated if they didn't have the foundation.

Basic Skills was 3 years ago now and was also a godsend. It highlighted some weaknesses in writing for my daughter. When I spoke to the school about it I was brushed off and told that the result was still above the average population and I should not be concerned. Two years later we had NAPLAN. Now we were seeing how the child was truly performing and better yet, how the school was performing across the board.

There is an argument that NAPLAN will cause schools to only teach for good NAPLAN results - I have to say that if this is the worst argument people can come up with, I am behind NAPLAN all the way. My eldest has just accepted a placement in a NSW Selective High School. She is ecstatic. If she had been being taught "academic" outcomes instead of wishy washy watered down curriculum, I could have saved Thousands of dollars. How? Easy - I would not have had to pay for enrichment activities on weekends and through holidays, I would not have had to pay for a coaching college to get her up to speed to sit Selective Schools exam. I would not have had to pay for all the resources I have in my home that I provided for my children to learn or the extension subject "available" through the school such as choir, dance, chess club, Japanese etc. My girl disengaged from school, by the end of Year 1. To keep her interested in learning and reignite the flame which had gone out the year before, I found it necessary to provide education opportunities for her and later my son as well. What my daughter did not know to sit the OC exam was criminal - certainly negligent. She had not been exposed to the academic outcomes expected of "talented" children. That was then, after this, I took matters into my own hands.

I do understand the bell curve and I do understand that kids that feel that their situation is hopeless will give up, however, if kids at the other end of the spectrum have to rely on misinformation disseminated through the schools, they will also give up. My son has been identified as Gifted with Learning Disabilities. He is a great kid who was Band 5 & 6 in everything but writing. In writing he was low Band 2. I found this out on the last day of Term 3, 2009. At no point until these results were given to me, had anyone in the school, teacher or principal, spoken to me (and there were many opportunities) about my son having difficulty in writing tasks. I knew he avoided the writing tasks when he could and that he had shocking handwriting but all school reports up to this point showed "Sound" as the academic achievement - as did all other parts of his outcomes from the school. I had provided the school an OT report and this had resulted in DET providing him an AlphaSmart, but this was not to leave the school grounds.

Without NAPLAN results, I would probably still be believing what the school was feeding to me in my dark corner. I can advocate for my child when I have accurate information which is meaningful.

Personally I would love more information - the more the better. The graphic chart of the results are clear and easy to read at a glance. I understand the rubric, however, I would also like to know which outcomes these meet to see what the weaknesses are and what can be remediated if required.

One of the most disappointing outcomes of the NAPLAN report my son received was the conversation with the principal. She curtly informed me there was no funding available for children in Band 2 and that assistance, if any, that he received would be from the resources that school could supply. I walked away wondering to myself what that meant, given the school had not even identified an issue.

Children with Learning Disabilities who do not have an IQ below 100 (ie average) can not access disability resources. So again, it is the parent who needs to provide for these children. There are no services to assist once a child is identified from NAPLAN results as needing assistance.

My final comments would be about the various Teacher unions and federations in this country. If these associations truly believe their members are "Teflon", I would ask that they reflect on how other industry professional organisations respond to accountability and transparency for their membership. Every other profession has to maintain these standards, yet the teacher associations seem to believe that their members are blameless and that they should not have to answer to their clients ie the parents and the children. I humbly suggest that the teacher associations fight for better resources in the workplace rather than trying to turn back education 200 years.

I repeat, THANK GOD for NAPLAN! May we as parents be able to freely locate meaningful information to empower us to make good decisions in the best interests of our children.