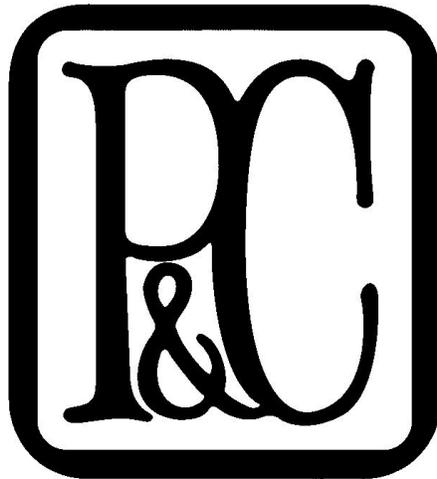


**Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations
of New South Wales**



Submission for the Inquiry into the administration and reporting of NAPLAN testing

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PREAMBLE¹

The Federation of Parents and Citizens' Association of New South Wales (P&C Federation) is committed to a free public education system which is open to all people, irrespective of culture, gender, academic ability and socio-economic class and empowers students to control their own lives and be contributing members of society.

This commitment is based on the belief that:

- All students have the capacity to learn;
- The Government has prime responsibility to provide an education system open to all, which is free and secular;
- Schools should be structured to meet the needs of individual students and should respect the knowledge those students bring to school and build on that knowledge to foster their understanding about the world.

Parents as partners in the education process, have a right and a responsibility to play an active role in the education of their children.

P&C Federation and its representatives share a responsibility of ensuring representative decision making for the benefit of all students.

Introduction

The Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of New South Wales is thankful for this opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into the administration and reporting of NAPLAN testing. The P&C supports the position of individual educational and developmental needs met by a range of differential services expressed through appropriate and well planned curricula, programs and environments conducted by sensitive and well-trained personnel in conjunction with parents and families. It is essential that School staff, parents and the Government work in partnership to ensure that the needs of each student in the Public Education system are met.

The core belief of the Federation is that the education of our youth is the most fundamental means of ensuring individual and collective success and, as a result, our greatest national resource.

¹ Preamble of Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of NSW. *2010 P&C Handbook* p 1-2

NAPLAN Inquiry

1. The conflicting claims made by the Government, educational experts and peak bodies in relation to the publication of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing.

The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing regime, when originally introduced to parents across this nation, indicated that it was a diagnostic tool. It was to be used by parents and school staff to identify strengths and areas of improvement for students. The information would be used in the development of student learning programs to support the learning needs of these students including the extension of high achieving students.

Parents currently work with their local school in the development and the range of information that is provided to them each year in relation to their child's achievement and this is a proven successful model that works for each school community. The use of the data covering the years 3, 5, 7 and 9 allows for an indication of the progress of the child through the different stages of learning. The provision of a report to the school allows for the identification of areas of deficit in the teaching programs in literacy and numeracy and provides the necessary information for targeting of concepts to be taught.

The intention of the assessment is to encourage students to continually improve in their literacy and numeracy skills. However, as with all statistical information, the NAPLAN data produced will always have children broken up into bands. Even if the results indicate an improvement in the overall literacy and numeracy level of students within the school systems, the bands will display a similar spread of the achievements as there will continue to be students performing at the national average, those performing above and those performing below.

The issue that is currently causing concern to parents is the use of the NAPLAN data to compare and contrast schools across the nation. Parents are interested in knowing the results of the assessment for their child and their child's cohorts within the school. However, the use of this data to determine a list of the schools 'from best to worst' is flawed and does not reflect the holistic achievements of a student or their school community.

It is felt that some of the information provided on the MySchool website, from which the league table type lists are developed, is superfluous while other important information is missing. The funding of schools should be included with all sources clearly identified as part of the MySchool site as the level of funding provided to a school has an impact on the resources available to support the educational experiences of each student. The inclusion of data on other subject areas, sporting achievements, CAPA, student leadership programs and support for additional needs students may reflect the development of the whole student.

Every group in relation to the publication of information has their own agenda. The Deputy Prime Minister has used the number of hits on the MySchool website to justify its continued use and appears to be using

this information to question such things as teacher performance and school viability. This narrow view of basing decisions on a snapshot of student achievements will result in the loss of many valuable programs and skilled practitioners.

The idea of an accountability system is to question performance in a constructive way and to encourage improved performance through appropriate support mechanisms if public schools are to be successful and attain their full potential

2. The implementation of possible safeguards and protocols around the public presentation of the testing and reporting data

The production of any data remains primarily of relevance to the individuals to whom it relates. Data gained from the NAPLAN testing program, on the achievement and progress of students through their school years, is important to parents. It is vital to the school, in consultation with the parents, in developing, reviewing and implementing their learning programs. Parents are provided with additional feedback on their child's progress through individual reports, face to face discussions and school data that is published in the Annual Report of the school.

There are different ways in which to produce the data to prevent its inappropriate use by the media and other stakeholders. Professional bodies such as the NSW Secondary Principal's Council have provided a report in which they have reproduced the rich data which is available from the NAPLAN testing in graph form, which is easy to understand. This gives a range of information but does not allow for the production of league tables. There are ways of copyrighting material to prevent its misuse.

Parents continue to support the implementation of the national testing regime and the data it provides, however, do not want the misuse of this data whether by media publications, others or through political abuse, to justify wide sweeping funding and resourcing changes.

3. The impact of NAPLAN assessment and reporting regime on:

- **The educational experience and outcomes for Australian students**

There have been reports that the NAPLAN testing and its implications are having an impact on the teaching styles of staff. Teaching staff are teaching to the NAPLAN tests to achieve better results for the school but the results are therefore skewed. With the focus firmly on the learning of the NAPLAN style of assessment, there has been a narrowing of the experiences being provided to students. This approach is impacting of the overall school year as teaching and learning is becoming a term 2 to 4 concept while term 1 is the term that school practice for the NAPLAN test. This impact is in turn providing information and statistics that are of no benefit to any of those involved in education.

There have been reports of the pressure being placed on some students by schools and parents, to achieve in the NAPLAN testing. As indications have been made that future funding can be linked to an improvement in the school achievement, the pressure has been so great that it has made some students physically ill.

There are children who have been asked not to attend school on the day of the NAPLAN testing as their results will adversely affect the schools results. For other children, who are genuinely sick and cannot attend during the period of testing, there has been pressure to attend school despite their illness. The undue pressure being placed on parents with children with additional support needs to ensure their child does not participate in the testing regime, is also unacceptable.

There is now a thriving business in tutoring and in book production aimed at training students in the NAPLAN style assessment. This type of option is financially restrictive as it is not open to all students within public schools.

The implication of all of these situations is that the NAPLAN assessment has moved towards becoming the instrument which drives poor learning experiences, rather than a diagnostic tool which assesses what has been the outcome of the rich array of educational experiences previously enjoyed by students. It is important not to exclude other areas of learning that occur in the school environment.

On a positive note, the achievement of students in Year 7 can indicate the areas of strength and weakness which can be fed back to Primary schools for consideration in their development of future student learning experiences. The results of the other grades assessment results could be used similarly.

- **The scope, innovation and quality of teaching practice**

The National funding initiative has provided additional monies to help students to learn through innovative programming, with the focus on Literacy and Numeracy. The level of the funding has been determined by the results achieved by schools in previous NAPLAN tests, and additional 'reward' money requires that the level of the academic improvement in these schools continues.

Involved in this process has been the focus on providing quality teaching in every classroom as well as resourcing technology within schools. However, to support this initiative, there needs to be a consistency of staff for schools. More money does not always equate to better performance. Unless there is a combination of reliable staff, adequate support for new and more experienced staff and appropriate resourcing of all programs, the level of anticipated progress will not be achieved. While in some areas staff are very experienced it is not always the case that they don't need additional support. We live in changing times and often these experienced teachers are overlooked as they are seen as not needing additional support. However, professional development remains a mechanism by which staff can learn, share, support, mentor and develop quality teaching practices.

There needs to be more consistency with the funding of school learning programs that currently exist. Funds are often removed from schools despite the fact that schools have shown signs of improvement through successful and innovative programming.

The Federation's basic objective is that every student, in every classroom and in every school is receiving the very best education available. If this doesn't happen the tragedy is that the students are failed, and so is the public education system as a whole.

- **The quality and value of information about student progress provided to parents and Principals**

There has been some excellent information provided to parents and Principals. NSW seems to be a leader in the work being done to provide the individual reports, the information on cohort achievement within schools and to address the implication of the national assessment data.

The value of the information provided by the testing regime is around tracking of the progress of students while identifying areas requiring remediation. For parents, this is an opportunity to view the results of a national assessment given over a number of years which identifies their child's strengths and supports remediation areas.

Principals are provided with the data on the performance of their student groups as well as education departmental follow up on strategies to include in the schools learning programs. It is the combination of the information with the additional support that provides the value for the Principal and school.

The aim of any accountability system should be to encourage the best possible outcomes for students at each and every school, and a narrowing of the gap between "best" and "worst". There is a need for other whole-of-government strategies, including programs around strengthening families and community and extensive pre-school services.

In one of her media releases it says "Ms Gillard said that this is an example of the Rudd Government using the information now available to every parent on My School to direct funding so that those schools who are struggling can be given a helping hand and so students aren't left behind". This is what parents are seeking for their children and what school should be seeking for students.

- **The quality and value of information about individual schools to parents, principals and the general community**

The value of the information provided to parents, principals and the general community on the individual schools lies with the partnership which exists between these bodies. If there is a positive relationship, there will be a consistent approach to addressing the issues which emerge from the data provided by the NAPLAN testing.

However, there is some disparity in the relationships which exist between school staff and parents. Some parents have found it difficult to talk to the Principal about the results achieved by their child and the implications of these results including to the revision of their learning plan. Conversely, some schools are forthcoming to parents about what they are doing. In these schools, the Principal/parent partnership is strong and therefore the outcome for the student is better.

Parents need to be assured that the school is working well against measures of best practice, and doing its best for their child and their community in the broader context.

It must be remembered that the amount of information given from NAPLAN testing is limited and does not provide the overall picture of the schools achievement in all subject areas as well as other aspects of the school culture.

The information provided is good for the individual schools but the outsourcing of provision of data has not been positive. The reporting of comparisons between schools and communities has not provided any additional information and thus is not conducive to improving results for students, student cohorts or schools. In fact much of the information being published is viewed as inaccurate and damaging to the school and community ethos.

4. International approaches to the publication of comparative reporting of the results ie league tables

The circumstances overseas are quite different to those in Australia. UK schools are about 90% "public" and although they are funded by government the education services are delivered by a number of different "contractors" under a number of models. These contractors include local councils and a variety of private providers, mainly faith based. There is some incentive in such a multi-provider public education system to get rid of any provider that is not up to scratch.

New Zealand, England Scotland, Ireland, Singapore Hong Kong and Australia have developed frameworks for inspection and review in contrast to the USA's almost exclusive reliance on 'high stakes' testing, sometimes referred to as 'results based accountability.' The broader frameworks reflect the findings from the significant body of school effectiveness research.

Despite these broader frameworks and public reporting related to them, it is often the various analyses of test results, including the publication of achievement tables, ranking and league tables that are used in an attempt to assure public confidence. Countries have taken differing positions on whether inspection/review reports should be made public. New Zealand, England and Scotland all require and provide public reporting of the reports.² In contrast, reports are not made publicly available in Singapore and Ireland. Mac Beath³ notes that '*the agreement by Hong Kong's Education and Manpower Bureau not to publicise school reports is already easing anxiety.*'

Many of these countries provide information for the public and in particular to the local school community through annual school reports. These reports and other access to individual school performance information are increasingly being made available through school and system websites. Guidelines, and in some cases prescription provide the basis for the content and format of these reports.

² National and International Perspectives and approach to school accountability – Executive summary

³ MacBeath, J. (2006) New Relationships for Old Inspection and Self evaluation in England and Hong Kong, International studies in Educational Administration, Journal of the Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management, V. 34, No.2, 2 - 18

In recent years attention has also turned towards support processes. De Grauwe and Naidoo⁴ notes that *'schools simply need more than information on their performance; they also need guidance on how to improve and support while attempting such improvement. When evaluation is simply limited to information, it will be of little help. When it consists mainly of informing the public school results it could actually be harmful...'*

The Federation wishes to strongly emphasize the impact that community values, political and cultural influences have within particular countries and the need to adapt practices such as the publications of testing results to each environment. This practice works well in some countries where strict guidelines are enforced including ways to improve their performance however, may not be suitable for all countries.

5. Other related matters

There is an expectation for continued improvement in the results of students and schools based on the results achieved in the NAPLAN testing. In the most recent NAPLAN testing rounds, to ensure the data was available to show that this occurred, there have been reports of threatening behaviours (bullying) from DET personnel which caused a great amount of angst in many schools. Principals and other key executive were stressed as pressure was being placed on them to allow the testing to go ahead.

The events prior to the recent NAPLAN testing have damaged partnerships between school staff, parents, School Education Group staff and even Regional staff. It will take some time to improve the situation between these various groups.

The Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of New South Wales are advocating for measures which will help make public education the very best it possibly can be, particularly for those students who are least advantaged in our society. We should be able to say that any child, no matter their family circumstances, will leave the public education system with the ability to be the best they can be.

⁴ De Grauwe, A. And Naidoo, J. (2004) *Schoolevaluation for quality improvement, ANTRIEP report presented at the Meeting of the Asian Network of Training and Research Institutions in Education Planning, 2 – 4 July, 2002, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, published in UNESCO: International Institute for Educational Planning, Paris, 2004*