

As a concerned parent of two small children just beginning their educational journeys, I was appalled to learn about the negative issues that can be related to NAPLAN testing. I believe that testing can be appropriate when the results are used to benefit the learning and teaching of students, but I fail to see how it is appropriate for the Australian Government to use a child's personal and PRIVATE educational results for teacher and school accountability purposes. Since the recent NAPLAN tests, I have been doing a lot of personal reading in regard to this topic, and I am struggling to find the benefits of adopting such an educational system (i.e. standardised testing/league tables/accountability) within Australia. The research conducted in relation to past UK and USA experiences of this approach has revealed many associated negative consequences: a narrowing of the curriculum; teaching to the test; league table publication in the media; the creation of a competitive school market; the encouragement of rote-learning practices and the loss of creativity and problem-solving approaches within the classroom; a negative impact on the self-esteem/confidence of students, teachers, and the wider school community; school leavers who are ill-equipped to handle the demands of the world and the workplace; and even resulting social and cultural inequities.

I do not believe that over-testing children is good for their self-esteem or for their educational enthusiasm, and I do not agree with the individual educational labels that this approach can produce. Every person has many different ways in which they prefer to learn and show their learning. Many children do not respond well to a testing environment, therefore their true ability can never be shown in this manner because they are not comfortable performing on cue in this context. Therefore, it appears to be more appropriate to offer students many and varied opportunities in which they are free to express their learning skills and abilities in many different ways. Through the accumulation of all of this learning evidence, a truer indication of student learning may be revealed. The results of ONE particular test, in ONE particular moment in time, on ONE particular day cannot possibly mean much at all in the BIG scheme of things. A child having a bad day may produce a bad test result which does not give a true indication of their learning. So, how can such critical judgments and decisions about students, teachers, schools and educational funding ever be based purely on the results of one NAPLAN test?

As a Mum, I have many hopes and dreams for my children. But, for now they are just that - children. I hope for them to have a wonderful, happy, healthy childhood both personally and educationally; where they can learn about their world and gain confidence in the people they are through a vast array of creative learning experiences within a comfortable, stress-free, non-judgmental learning environment. I wish for them to be offered many and varied learning and assessment opportunities in which they are free to express their learning and abilities in many different ways. I wish for their educational results and progress to remain their private information, to be shared only with those they have chosen to share it with. This type of upbringing and education can only encourage confident, capable, inquisitive individuals who possess a great love for learning; and are enthusiastic to live and work in their future world, as the best individuals that they are capable of being.

So, I believe that we need to reassess this approach to our educational system. We cannot possibly want the devastating outcomes seen within the UK and USA for our own children. We need to ensure that league tables are NEVER published within the media, and that Australian children, families, teachers, principals and schools never suffer from the possible negative consequences of this approach. Student learning progress, test results, and other related educational information have ALWAYS BEEN readily available, direct from school sites. THERE IS NO NEED to publish league tables on a public school website to compare school results; therefore, allegedly providing parents with school choice. Parents have always had school choice, and have always had access to the information required to make their choices. THERE IS NO NEED TO PUBLISH LEAGUE TABLES WITHIN THE MEDIA.

We ALL need to make the RIGHT CHOICE now, and SAY NO TO THE PUBLISHING OF LEAGUE TABLES in Australia; for the sake of our children, our educational system, and the future of our wonderfully unique nation.