

The Montagu Bay Primary School Association would like to make a submission on the future of NAPLAN testing in Australian schools, this submission was unanimously approved at a recent general meeting of our association.

We would like to make the following points

We believe that testing and assessing student performance is an important part of the teaching process.

The results of testing should be used to inform the teacher on the progress of students, the effectiveness of their teaching strategies and to give feedback to students and parents.

Test results should not be used to make odious comparisons between schools.

The school Curriculum is much more than literacy and numeracy, it includes a wide range of work and social skills, practical, thinking and problem solving skills, values education, history and society, science, the arts, physical and health education and more. To compare entire schools just on the basis of literacy and numeracy test results collected on one day from only 2 of the 8 classes in primary schools is unfair, unreasonable and poor science. We hope that future data sharing will include more rounded and relevant information about the work of schools.

A narrow focus on literacy and numeracy inevitably puts unreasonable pressure on teachers to narrow the curriculum and teach to the test, we believe this is not in the best interests of our students.

Unfortunately the narrow focus on test results in the comparison between schools will lead to cheating by teachers, schools and school systems; we have already seen this happening in some states.

There are many factors that affect student outcome, to imply that the “School” is the only or even the most important factor in determining outcomes is misleading. We know from the work of professor Peter Hill that the single most important factor in determining student outcomes is the ability of the student themselves, this accounts for around 50% of the difference, the individual class teacher in any year is the next most significant factor at around 20% , factors like the school and the principal only account for around 10% each yet the implication of comparing “school” outcomes is that by changing schools parents can instantly improve outcomes for their child, this is not only false but is frankly cruelly misleading for parents who naturally want the best outcomes for their child.

We support students attending their local school and we know that when parents and teachers work together that outcomes for students are enhanced, the whole implication of the NAPLAN testing and the rhetoric around parents “right to know” etc is setting parents against schools, this is in nobody’s interests. We certainly believe that parents have a right to honest feedback on how their child is performing at school and that parents have a right to have input into decisions that affect the welfare of their children but we are not so sure that we all have a “right to know” how well every school in the country is going on the basis of very limited test information.

As an association we support the continuation of NAPLAN testing, the results are useful to give feedback to teachers, parents and schools about student and class performance.

We know that the teachers at our school value this information along with the other test and assessment information that they gather and use. But we are very disturbed about the potential for the information to be misused by media outlets, and others, to make odious and unfair comparisons between schools. We support the view of the AEU who suggested that NAPLAN results should continue to be published online so that parents can see how the students at their school are going but we would hope that the information is less narrowly based and better reflects the broader curriculum of schools and that there is some legal mechanism such as copyrighting of the data to stop the production of “League Tables” and other unfair comparisons. These do nothing to improve the outcomes for students but have the potential for huge hurt and damage both to individuals such as students, parents, teachers and principals and also huge damage to communities, many of which are under siege due to other social problems, and the last thing they need is for them to be publicly told that the school, probably the most important institution in their community, is “Failing” when we know that is not the case for most students and families.

Yours sincerely,

Charlotte Frankcombe, Chairperson

Martin Hilliard, Public Officer

on behalf of the Montagu Bay Primary School Association and community.