

To: Senate Inquiry into the administration and reporting of NAPLAN testing.

Firstly, I will make my comments in relating to the Inquiry's terms of reference point (a) the conflicting claims made by the government, educational experts and peak bodies in relation to the publication of the NAPLAN testing.

From the interviews of politicians in government and leaders in the Department of Education, the agreement that the publication of league tables leads to the "misuse of student performance data" has been widespread. The conflicting claims comes from a differing in opinion on whether we are powerless to prevent this happening or whether there is a responsible and accurate way to publish the data. If data is published that is not a true and accurate record of student, teacher or school performance then it should not be published. We must be able to put safe guards in place.

Secondly, from a perspective of a teacher who instructs students with reading difficulties I would like to comment on (c) the impact of the NAPLAN assessment on the educational experience and outcomes for Australian students.

It is one of the fundamentals of good education to assess the Literacy and Numeracy skills of our students, however, the NAPLAN testing is lacking in its design to cater for the needs of the low functioning readers in our schools.

Students who have reading difficulties often suffer from poor self esteem and can even be depressed as they are insightful enough to know exactly how they perform when compared to their peers and despite good instruction and effort struggle to functionally read.

When students who are selected to attend a Support Class - Reading (based on low reading scores on standardized tests) one of the critical objectives for the specialized teacher is to build the students self esteem by providing positive reinforcement and instruction that ensures a student will be open to "a positive learning" environment. In this environment, the student's skills he already has are recognized and his willingness to actively engage in instruction that is tailored to his individual needs is paramount.

I believe the design of the NAPLAN testing creates a negative educational experience for some students especially for the struggling students with learning difficulties. If the tests were designed so students with weak skills could complete the initial tasks the tests would not create such negative emotions in our students.

These comments are based on parents comments on their children with learning

difficulties sitting the tests.

Case Study 1

A Year 5 student was participating in my group of six students in the Support Class for Reading. At the commencement of the term the student was participating well in the intensive and explicit reading class. During the latter part of the term I noted observations that the student had lost some of his confidence and his "Have a go" attitude and his decoding reading skills were not as strong. When I consulted some weeks later with the teacher we identified that this problem followed the NAPLAN testing. When I asked the parent for her insight she said it was a difficult week for her son and he was "crushed " by the testing as he was aware of how little he could do on the test even though he had made good gains in the reading class. Better progression in the test questions could have reduced this problem.

Case Study 2

A Year 3 student cried as he expressed his stress in completing the NAPLAN testing.

Further to this:

It was reported that low performing students were told to stay away from school on the testing days.

Why?

Parents are mindful of their student's weakness and don't need another test to confirm this fact. They and their children have often throughout their young school life been told that they fall at the bottom of their age group. They don't need another test to tell them that. More importantly they know the harm this testing does to the students morale. Obviously, the testing will give the information required to know how many student are in the low levels of literacy but these families often see that not enough intensive and explicit teaching has or is likely to flow from this test for their child so they seek advice from teachers and school. With compassion schools should be advising for the student to sit the inappropriate testing, however, it could be with consideration for the student that it would be more responsible to consider the student not sitting this test.

The testing is inappropriate for these students as it will do harm in many instances to their weak skills for no individual gain.

The NAPLAN reading tests by design start at a functional reading skill level.

Therefore, if a student is an emerging reader or a reader with difficulties they **can't** even answer the first question. The test **doesn't reinforce any** positive learning skills for these students but can harm many of the skills I am developing in these students at the time of testing.

If the design included a better graduation of skill level so the emerging and low level readers could complete some of the test with confidence and the experience could be more positive then its worth would be easier to acknowledge.

Linda MacLaurin BA Dip Ed Postgraduate in Special Education

Brookvale Public School

Support Class Reading Teacher