

The effectiveness of the National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy.

QoN – Senator Penny Wright

Question 4 - Submissions from ACARA and the Department have stressed that over-preparation for NAPLAN testing is not desirable, but groups like the P and C Federation have said “classroom teaching is hijacked from term one, through to the test dates to ensure school rankings are improved”. Would holding the tests earlier in the year remove that temptation for excessive preparation, while simultaneously allowing results to be returned earlier to teachers when there is still time in the year left to address deficiencies identified?

ACARA Response

ACARA notes the results of teacher self-reporting surveys that indicate that some teachers and/or schools feel that they need to spend a lot of time prior to NAPLAN “preparing” students for the test. However, results from the Australian Primary Principals Association survey also indicate no change or reduced preparation time in some schools.

There are three broad ways of approaching NAPLAN preparation:

- Teaching literacy and numeracy as part of ongoing curriculum, but focussing on elements where students are perceived to be performing at a lower than expected level in the lead up to NAPLAN. For instance focussing on certain grammatical rules, spelling rules or mathematical concepts that students may have struggled to master.
- Making students familiar with the NAPLAN test format and test conditions.
- Excessively drilling students with NAPLAN-style tests to the detriment of other activities.

ACARA supports the first two but not the third. ACARA acknowledges that there are some cases of the third but does not agree that NAPLAN is hijacking classroom teaching from term one until the test week.

The practice of excessive drilling may be particularly likely where there is:

- limited understanding of the purpose of the tests, including a belief that high results could be achieved more readily by some version of ‘teaching to the test’ rather than through good pedagogy and a rich curriculum
- insufficient support for teachers to make good judgements about the needs of the class
- a lack of understanding of the expected level of literacy and numeracy for the class.

ACARA is confident that the vast majority of teachers and schools across Australia have the balance right.

Identifying and addressing the reasons why some schools may be engaging in inappropriate preparation for NAPLAN is likely to prove to be more useful than moving the test dates earlier in the year.

There are many issues to consider when choosing dates for national tests, and no date is likely to satisfy everyone concerned. After much consideration of issues such as term dates and curriculum planning, the second full week in May was agreed to by all state and territory education ministers as the most appropriate time.

ACARA is currently considering ways to reduce the time taken to return results to schools.