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NSW Primary Principals' Association

Submission to the Senate

Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee

Inquiry into NAPLAN and the My School Website

AUTHORISED BY

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The NSW Primary Principals' Association (NSWPPA) is a professional association for Primary Principals of Public Schools throughout New South Wales with a membership of over 1800 Principals.

This submission reflects responses provided by members of the NSWPPA.

The NSWPPA position is that the My School Website (MSW) should not exist in a form that allows comparisons between schools. The NSWPPA is heartened by the position taken by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education, together with State Education Ministers, that 'league table' comparisons of schools are educationally indefensible.

The following recommendations acknowledge that the MSW currently does provide comparative data and seeks to moderate the negative impact of the website. The NSWPPA believes the following recommendations will enable teachers, parents and school communities to access accurate and contextual data about their school, which has an emphasis on student learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1) That a website 'Acceptable Use' page be created with a statement about the purpose and appropriate use of data – users agree to appropriate use prior to accessing the MSW.**

ACCEPTABLE USE

- Data derived from NAPLAN assessments is intended for diagnostic purposes and to guide the allocation of additional funding to support student learning.**
- Data contained on this site should not be used for comparison between schools or school systems. Such comparisons are not statistically or educationally valid.**
- Penalties exist in some jurisdictions for the misuse of this data. Such misuse includes the creation and publication of 'league tables'.**

(I accept)

(I decline)

(This is symbolic but provides an 'ethical' reference point for educational professionals and the community.)

In addition the first page of the MSW site for each school should contain only contextual information about the school. NAPLAN data should appear on a linked page, not on the front page.

Rationale: An 'Acceptable Use' page would remind all users accessing the site about the appropriate use of data. It is a form of targeted advertising to each site user every time the site is accessed. The 'Acceptable Use' page should contain a maximum of three simple statements. It serves to educate the community accessing the site about the fact that the media may misuse data in creating and publishing 'league tables'.

Having a linked data page ensures the reader considers contextual information first. The NAPLAN data link becomes one of a number of links to data about the school. This also makes it more difficult for the media to harvest and compile data to create misleading 'league tables'.

- 2) **A variety of consistent messages and information sheets be developed by ACARA for use by schools in newsletters, school community meetings, on school websites and for the purpose of informing local media.**

Rationale: An expensive media campaign is unlikely to be funded or to be cost effective. Limited education funding used for this purpose needs to be targeted at the local school community level. The aim is to provide a long-term consistent message and to shape and inform public attitudes through accurate information.

- 3) **ACARA is required to prepare and distribute a media release (including a data package). The media release and data package will be released prior to the MSW going 'live'. Data should not be in a form allowing the construction of league tables. Such a release would be in a form that protects the wellbeing of students and the reputation of school communities.**

Rationale: The media operate on tight deadlines and many may use ACARA data rather than going to the trouble of constructing league tables. Media using official data packages will be quicker to release information to the public than those collating data from the site. The intention is to ensure that 'league tables' are 'old news'. It also serves to blunt the impact of league table publication by ensuring the publication of appropriate, approved data in the first instance.

- 4) **Information on the MSW needs to be more extensive. The MSW should contain rich comprehensive data about school context. Information on the site should not be 'dumbed down' but written in plain English for an informed public. There should be a greater emphasis on growth rather than 'snapshot' results of a single student cohort.**

Rationale: The more information contained on the site the less likely the focus will be on narrow result areas. The more information contained on the site the greater the opportunity to gain an accurate contextual understanding of the students' results.

- 5) **Guidelines and statements should be established by ACARA for schools and systems that reiterate the importance of maintaining a broad curriculum in the context of NAPLAN assessments. It should be compulsory for schools to publish these guidelines and statements in school newsletters, on school websites etc. These guidelines and statements should discourage any narrowing of the curriculum as a consequence of NAPLAN and would reveal inappropriate practices including excessive time devoted to test practice.**

Rationale: School communities should be informed about appropriate use of data and administration of tests. Through guidelines, individual schools will be discouraged from actions that are not in keeping with the maintenance of a broad curriculum. This will not entirely prevent inappropriate practices but will inform school communities of any schools

that may be operating outside of guidelines. This will allow individuals and organisations to take issue with schools and systems which choose to ignore these guidelines.

6) Deterrents and fines should be pursued by governments for breach of ACARA protocols relating to publication of league tables.

Rationale: This provides protection of student well being and school community reputation whilst requiring accuracy of reporting by media.

7) Clear procedures are established by ACARA for test administration across all sectors and consequences for breaches are explicitly highlighted.

Rationale: There is a need to ensure a 'level playing field' and to maintain the integrity of the test results by providing explicit details about the consequences for breaches of protocol.

8) Correct the Google text ACARA link (the text describes the MSW as ranking and comparing schools).

Rationale: Currently the text is in contradiction with the diagnostic purpose of NAPLAN.

9) Alter the site appearance to remove the emotive red colour for failure indicator and replace with a more suitable indicator.

Rationale: The website is emotive enough without the use of tradition symbols of failure.

10) The ICSEA needs to be refined immediately to ensure it is not only statistically valid and reliable, but also meaningful.

Rationale: Informed users of the MSW should observe that ICSEA groups are free of anomalies.

11) Comprehensive information about resources available to individual schools including all sources of income should be evident on the MSW.

Rationale: The capacity for individual schools to provide a quality education for all students is dependent on an appropriate level of funding from both State and Commonwealth Governments. The MSW provides additional information for governments to target resources at schools with significant needs.

12) A particular perspective to this submission comes from Principals of our smallest schools. There are 600 small schools (less than 160 enrolments) across the public education system in New South Wales. The points below reflect the main concerns of small school Principals:

1. Great concern expressed about being labelled as a poor performing school, judged on the basis of such a small sample including very needy students. Parents expressed fears that their child was impacting negatively on the school's results.
2. Great concern expressed about a decrease in enrolments because of being placed in the "red" band of NAPLAN results. In some instances parents had moved their children out of the school on the basis of this one-off test.
3. Great concern expressed about the lack of confidentiality and the identification of students when the cohort is so small.

A variety of other concerns were expressed such as: "The tests will result in a reduction of the curriculum and teaching to the test, the Maths test is a language-based test."

Comments forwarded by Principals have been disturbing regarding the effect of the My School Website on students and communities.

For example: "This year a parent actually stood up at a P & C meeting and apologised for their child because he has learning difficulties and explained how this will severely affect the results of our school. No parent should ever have to do this. Brought a few tears to the eyes of most families here. She was particularly worried about how it will reflect on me as a new Principal."

This parent obviously wishes to receive the confidential results of the test for her individual child, but she does not wish those same results to be placed on the My School website in such a small sample.

We believe that the minimum cohort size for the My School website should be increased considerably. In NSW, schools work with a minimum cohort size for reporting purposes, of 10 students.

Following are examples of comments received from small school Principals:

"Since the release of the My School website, my school and my staff have been criticised for the "red lights" which appeared against our school's name. We have a small cohort of students sitting the test, 10 in Year 5 and 10 in Year 3. With 3/10 and 4/10 in those years respectively with learning difficulties our results of course are significantly impacted. It seems the hard work of my staff across the whole school is judged by such a small sampling.

Ignored are the other great things we enrich children's learning with. We have gone from a school which several years ago won the Director General's Award for Quality Teaching to now, when it seems in the community's eyes, we are a "failing school." Our staff has been stable and the programs we offer the same. Of course we have worked for continuous improvement through careful annual school evaluations and have gone to extraordinary lengths to provide information about our school and the programs we offer. I have lost enrolments as a result and a body of parents is threatening to take more students away. It seems the media and the present state of the website has overruled our efforts."

"In Week 3, yes just one week before NAPLAN, our school enrolled a new family of 3 kids and one other un-related new student. All new students have quite obvious learning difficulties and yes, you guessed it 3 of them had to sit for NAPLAN (2 yr 5, 1 yr 3). It is most probable that all 3 of them will not even reach National Benchmarks. When we only have 9 students in Year 5, another 2 will really affect our results. It also takes our numbers over that magic, "10 students or less" rule and we now have to report bands in ASR. Not to mention how this will look on My School website. Our school has no responsibility for the achievements of these kids, however, they will be included in our results and, due to the small cohort of students, drag our results down dramatically."

"We lost our two bright sparks in Year 5 to an OC class = goodbye to green on the My School website. Parents want to know why we are 'going backwards'."