

WHY DO WE OPPOSE SCHOOL LEAGUE TABLES?

- League tables represent a gross misuse of the NAPLAN data. The tests were never designed to be used to compare schools and experts say the results are not accurate enough to be used in such a way. An estimated 80% of schools fall within the margin of error, which is as large as 25%. Test results tend to vary *within* a school more than they do *between* schools. Queensland students are unfairly penalised because their Year 7 students are a year younger. In most cases high schools are ranked according to the results of year 7 students who have been at the school for little more than one term.
- League tables encourage schools to focus on improving the results in annual external tests at the expense of other important curriculum areas such as the humanities, the arts, the sciences, physical education and technology. Minister Barr has publicly stated that he is not concerned at the narrowing of the curriculum caused by a focus on literacy & numeracy; will a direction to focus on the test be next?
- League tables ignore all the other important programs that schools provide, such as pastoral care, community building and the fostering of human relationships. They dehumanise education and divert attention away from anything that cannot be readily measured.
- Undue pressure on schools and teachers brought about by high-stakes testing encourages narrow teaching practices such as “teaching to the test” and rote learning, a disproportionate focus on improving the results of “bubble kids” (those close to the benchmark), fraudulent behaviour, data manipulation, ‘gaming’ and outright cheating. High-stakes testing regimes in the US and UK have produced hundreds of examples of each of these.
- The ‘naming and shaming’ of schools unfairly stigmatises and demoralises teachers and students whose circumstances are often unique and challenging.

- The Federal Government does not require the publication of such information to address areas of need. Schools and state and territory governments have had this information for years and it has been readily available to parents.
- League tables are said to facilitate school choice, yet the act of moving schools has been shown to have a negligible effect on student outcomes.

Some Important Questions to Consider

You may be seeing the negative effects of league tables already, but even if such effects are not immediately evident or profound in your school at this time, teachers need to seriously consider what this means for our profession.

Why, when Australia's public expenditure on education is among the lowest of the OECD nations, is the Federal Government shifting all responsibility for any perceived deficiencies on to teachers in our schools?

Given the Federal Government's apparent attachment to ideas that come from the US education system, is it considering a model recently introduced in New York where the employment status of teachers is determined by the performance of their students in standardised tests? Will we follow New York in the direction of teacher report cards? And are there plans to link student results to teacher salaries?

When teachers and schools are pitted against each other, what happens to the collegiality that is so vital in our profession?

How many so-called 'failing' schools will be closed and how many principals sacked, in line with comments made by the Prime Minister? What does this mean for public schooling and the right of every Australian child to an education?

Is accountability going too far? Will people be attracted to a profession in which success is so narrowly defined, and one in which the stakes are so much higher than the salary?

Will we allow politicians to take us down this road or will we act now to force governments to protect students, teachers, schools and communities by preventing the publication of crude and damaging league tables by third parties?

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