

Labor's Deception on School League Tables

Australian Labor Governments have duped parents and teachers about the introduction of school league tables. The publication of school league tables by the Hobart *Mercury* and the Brisbane *Courier-Mail* last May shows what we can expect from now on. Soon, there will be a national league table and each state and territory will have its own table.

Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard assured the public that “silly” and “simplistic” league tables would not be introduced in Australia. These assurances were backed up by State Labor Education Ministers. They have been exposed as completely false and disingenuous. Governments are providing the information that will enable league tables to be published

Tasmanian Premier, David Bartlett, claimed last October that publishing individual school results “is not about ranking schools or creating league tables” [Media Release, 31 October 2008]. Yet, this is precisely what has happened only six months after his assurance was given. The *Mercury* simply used the table of school results published on the Tasmanian Department of Education website to construct its league table. The Department's table was enthusiastically endorsed by Julia Gillard when it was introduced [*The Australian*, 1 November 2008].

Rod Welford, Queensland Education Minister until recently, said last year that the Queensland Government unequivocally rejected league tables because they are “misleading and deceptive” [*The Australian*, 13 May 2008]. Yet, the *Courier-Mail* was able to draw on school results published on the Queensland Department of Education website for its league table.

There is more to come. Victorian Education Minister, Bronwyn Pike, said last year that league tables aren't helpful because they can unfairly stigmatise schools [ABC AM, 11 August 2008] and she didn't want parents to have access to comparisons between schools [*The Age*, 17 August, 2008]. However, last month she announced that the Victorian Government will publish the results of all schools.

Other State Government Ministers said they opposed league tables, but have fallen into line behind Rudd and Gillard without even a whimper.

NSW Education Minister, Verity Firth, said that she opposed league tables [*Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 June 2009], but proceeded to amend the Education Act to allow the publication of league tables. The previous Education Minister, John Della Bosca, said last year that league tables were a “silly idea” [*The Australian*, 13 May 2008].

When Education Minister, the NSW Deputy-Premier Carmel Tebbutt refused to comply with the then Federal Education Minister, Brendan Nelson's demand that NSW publish school rankings [*Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 October 2005]. Now, her Government has rushed to submit.

South Australian Education Minister, Jane Lomax-Smith, has repeatedly stated she is opposed to league tables [*The Australian*, 13 May 2008, *The Advertiser*, 24 June 2007, 26 June 2007]. Yet, she too has caved in feebly.

ACT Education Minister, Andrew Barr, simply denied reality. Just weeks after the publication of league tables in Tasmania and Queensland he said that fears that the Federal Government's program to publish school results would lead to school league tables were unfounded [*ABC News*, 29 May 2009]. He also said he was opposed to league tables despite agreeing to provide the information that would enable league tables to be published [Media Release, 24 June 2009].

The fact is that all school results will soon be published in tables on centralized government websites both by state and nationally. These tables will provide the raw material for ranking of school results by newspapers and other organisations around Australia.

Labor Ministers cannot have it both ways. They cannot claim to be opposed to league tables while providing the information to enable their publication. They cannot wash their hands of responsibility for the introduction of league tables in Australia. They are collectively culpable.

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