



MY SCHOOL AND LEAGUE TABLES

AN AEU PROPOSAL

**Australian Education Union
120 Clarendon Street
Southbank 3006**

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Rigorous assessment and reporting is an integral part of successful teaching and learning. Parents have every right to information on their child's progress and the effectiveness of their child's school.

This information must be accurate, comprehensive and reliable – and it must support the efforts of schools to continually improve opportunities and outcomes for students.

Unfortunately the My School website has fallen well short of these standards, a problem compounded by the misleading and invalid league tables that followed within 24 hours of the site going live.

The current version of the site is flawed because it:

Facilitates the publication of league tables. Nothing has been done to prevent the creation and publication of league tables using average student NAPLAN scores available on the website. These league tables have had a damaging impact on students, the reputation of schools, and on teachers. The Education Minister, Julia Gillard has acknowledged the negative impact of league tables and how they make the job of improving student achievement harder and yet she has provided, without safeguard, all the information necessary to create them.

Misuses NAPLAN results. The NAPLAN tests were designed as a measure of individual student performance. They were never designed to be used to create average scores to rank and compare schools. The tests are not accurate enough to do this, especially given the huge error rates around small school results. In addition, using NAPLAN test data in this way on the site does not show the progress of students or the difference a school makes to students. NAPLAN was designed to help students. It now is being deployed in ways that may damage the most vulnerable students.

Uses a flawed index to produce invalid and misleading comparisons of schools. The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage fails to take into account critical factors that affect educational outcomes including:

- The background of students attending a school. Instead census data for the general community or communities that students are drawn from is used.
- Whether students come from a non-English speaking background or have special needs.
- The size of a school, its funding, resources and staffing levels.
- Whether a school has a selective entry policy or not.

As a result of this flawed index, schools that are dissimilar have their results directly compared on the site in a way that is both misleading for parents and unfair for schools and students.

For example:

- One of the richest private schools in Australia, The Kings' School at Parramatta is compared with Gundaroo Public School in a small town outside Canberra.
- Blacktown Boys High in Sydney's west is compared with Alice Springs School of the Air.
- Terrigal High School with 1300 students is compared with Cameron Downs Public School with six students on an outback property in Queensland.

As the Federal Government's own research found, parents are not interested in comparing their school with one in different circumstances in a completely different part of Australia.

Fails to deliver vital information parents need. The site is incomplete. It does not include vital information on the funding and resources available to schools. As Ms Gillard told parliament: *"Only by understanding the total amount of funds at the disposal of individual schools is it possible to understand the relationship between resourcing and educational outcomes."* The site also does not include a plain English explanation of the NAPLAN results of a school. The Government's own research in 2009 found parents struggled to comprehend the NAPLAN results and *"for many the data was too detailed and they would give up before taking the time required to work out how to read this chart"*.

Negative Impacts

An AEU survey of over 1,000 principals across Australia confirmed the warnings of parents, teachers and principals about the consequences of allowing league tables to be published. It also highlighted the deep concerns about the accuracy and validity of the current version of My School and the negative impact it will have on teaching and learning.

The survey found that the publication of league tables within 24 hours of My School going live had a profound effect on hundreds of school communities. Principals reported that parents and students felt stigmatized and that they had been labeled as failures as a result. They said the task of educating students had been made much more difficult as a result.

The impact on teachers was also significant with many upset that their efforts in schools, which in many cases serve the most disadvantaged students, had been ignored or dismissed and they too had been branded failures.

Among those principals whose schools were listed in the bottom section of a league table, 78 per cent said it would have a negative impact on students. An even greater number said the league tables would have a negative impact on the school's reputation (84 per cent) and on staff (87 per cent).

There was also an overwhelming view that My School presented an inaccurate picture of school performance and created misleading and invalid comparisons between schools. Of the principals surveyed:

- 88 per cent said the website did not present an accurate picture of school performance.
- 61 per cent said the public comparison of test scores on the site will lead to greater teaching to the test. Over 80 per cent of those principals said that would be to the detriment of other areas of the curriculum.
- 90 per cent of principals said they were concerned nothing had been done to prevent the publication of league tables using test scores from My School.
- 88 per cent said it was wrong to launch the My School website without details of the total income and resources available to a school.
- 89 per cent said that all the schools that their school was compared to on the site were not similar to their own.
- 52 per cent said they believed the index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA) value they were given was inaccurate.

The AEU Approach

The AEU believes that it is possible to achieve the goals of greater accountability and reporting without harming students and school communities and without damaging the quality of education delivered in our schools.

The changes suggested in this proposal are designed to ensure that My School provides accurate and meaningful information to parents in a way that will have a positive impact on the provision of education in Australia.

1. Stop the misuse of student data and the creation of league tables

The current situation where commercial operators can use averaged NAPLAN results to create damaging and misleading league tables is unacceptable. Students and school communities must be protected from these league tables.

The NAPLAN results held by ACARA, both published and unpublished, must be protected from misuse. This can be achieved through the consistent application of existing copyright, trade practices and FOI laws.

2. Ensure full financial disclosure

The site must include information about the total income and resources of a school to allow for the meaningful analysis of the relationship between resources and outcomes. The information on the site cannot just be per-student recurrent expenditure, allowing schools to hide the extent of their wealth and income-raising capacity.

3. Introduce an index that works

A properly constructed and comprehensive index of community socio-educational advantage can encourage a better understanding of the levels of disadvantage and student needs in each school. A revised index that better reflects the socio-economic status of students enrolled in a school along with factors which impact on educational outcomes should be created in full consultation with school teachers and principals.

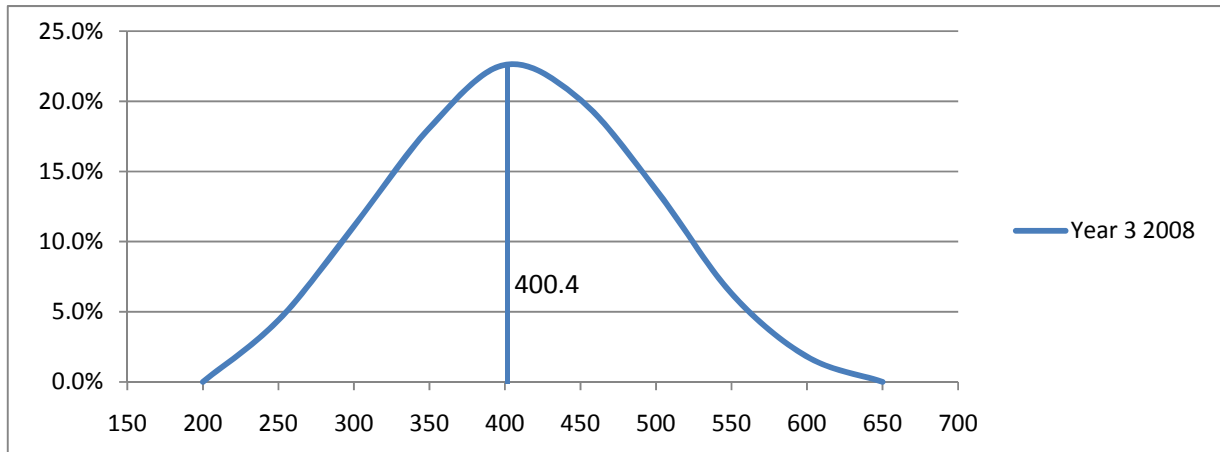
4. Improve the reporting of student performance on My School

My School currently includes an average score for students in each skill area in years 3, 5, 7 and 9. These numbers suggest a precision in measuring student and school achievement that simply does not exist. The scores have widely varying margins of error according to school size and student cohort and demonstrate nothing of the span of student achievement in a school.

The average scores should be replaced with graphs that show the full span of student achievement in literacy and numeracy in each year tested (Years 3, 5, 7 and 9).

Student achievement in reading literacy, Year 3 2008

Vertical line = National Mean



This is consistent with the individual student progress report that parents already receive.

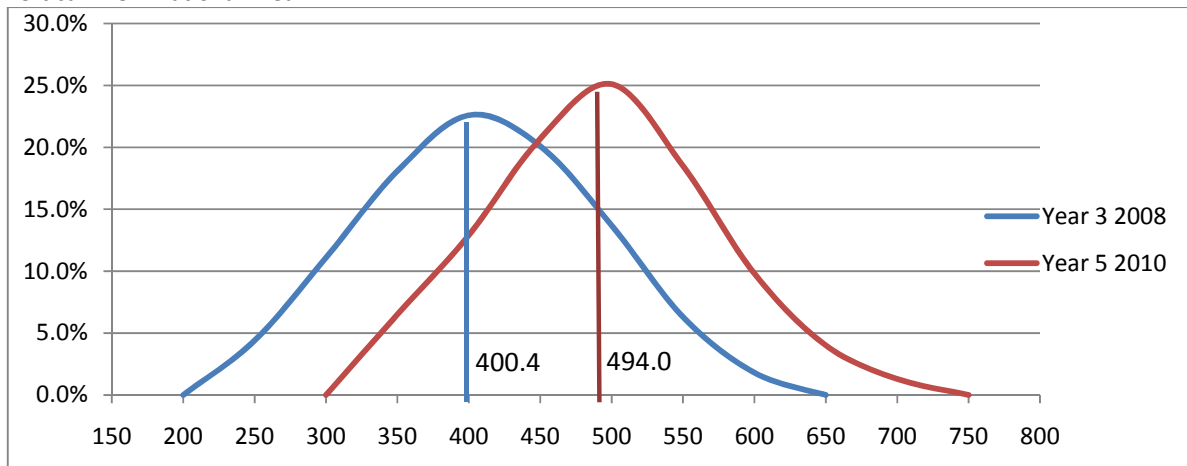
Each graph would also show the national average and the percentage of students above the average and the percentage below.

Once the results from the 2010 NAPLAN results are available it will also be possible to illustrate how successful schools have been in improving the performance of students.

This would be done by the addition of a second line on the graphs of Year 5, Year 7 and Year 9 students.

Student achievement in reading literacy, 2008 and 2010

Vertical line = National Mean



Through this type of graphic presentation and via a simple explanation on the site (see below), parents will get a richer and more meaningful picture of student performance at a school.

However, the AEU believes data for grades of less than ten students should not be reported publicly due to the high margin of error and the risk of identifying individual students.

5. Explain the results of each school

Graphs showing student achievement on each school's homepage should be accompanied by a plain English explanation of the literacy and numeracy results. The achievements of each school would be highlighted along with the areas where it is judged that improvements can be made.

As a further benefit for parents a comprehensive plain-English guide to interpreting school results and NAPLAN should be made available on the site for download.

6. Allow meaningful analysis

Parents and prospective parents have the right to know whether schools are delivering effective teaching and learning programs. The approach outlined above provides parents, teachers and policy-makers access to rich and meaningful information on all schools.