



[Image from *Herald Sun* 28 November 2009]

Victorian Example Shows Dangers of Comparative School Reporting

"Our Failing Schools" screamed the front page of Melbourne's Herald Sun on Saturday as the first release of comparative school information had exactly the effect the union had warned about.

The paper's damaging and misleading coverage followed the decision by the Victorian Government to put online information about each public school in the state, including NAPLAN scores, the results of teacher assessments and retention rates. (No information has been published on private schools yet) Each school is compared to the state median and against schools judged to be similar based on factors including the socio-economic background of students, the number of non-English speaking background students and the size and location of a school.

The overall results showed 1200 schools performing broadly similar to others, 130 schools performing "worse than expected" and more than 150 schools are doing "better than expected".

AEU federal president Angelo Gavrielatos said the branding of schools as "failing" by the Herald Sun as a result highlighted the dangers of this type of comparative school reporting.

He warned the situation would be much worse after the Federal Government goes live with its comparative information in January.

"This is exactly what we have been warning about," Mr. Gavrielatos said.

"The Victorian site does not rank schools on the website by test scores and has not named the schools it says are doing worse than expected but we still have this terrible claim by the media as a result that government schools across Victoria are failing.

"It is a slur on the reputation of teachers and schools in Victoria who are working hard, often in difficult circumstances, to educate their students."

"We have repeatedly warned of the negative side-effects of publishing this type of data but governments refuse to listen."

Mr Gavrielatos said the Federal Government was planning to go much further than Victoria with its schools website which is expected to go live in January.

"The My Schools website will show the NAPLAN scores of every public school. It will be possible to directly compare a school's average score with the national average, with other schools categorized as "similar" and to find the test scores of every school in a local area.

"If nothing is done to protect this data it will be available for the media to take and create league tables naming and shaming schools who they judge to be failing.

"Parents, teachers and principals have asked the Education Minister Julia Gillard to stop schools being named and shamed in league tables but so far she refuses to act."