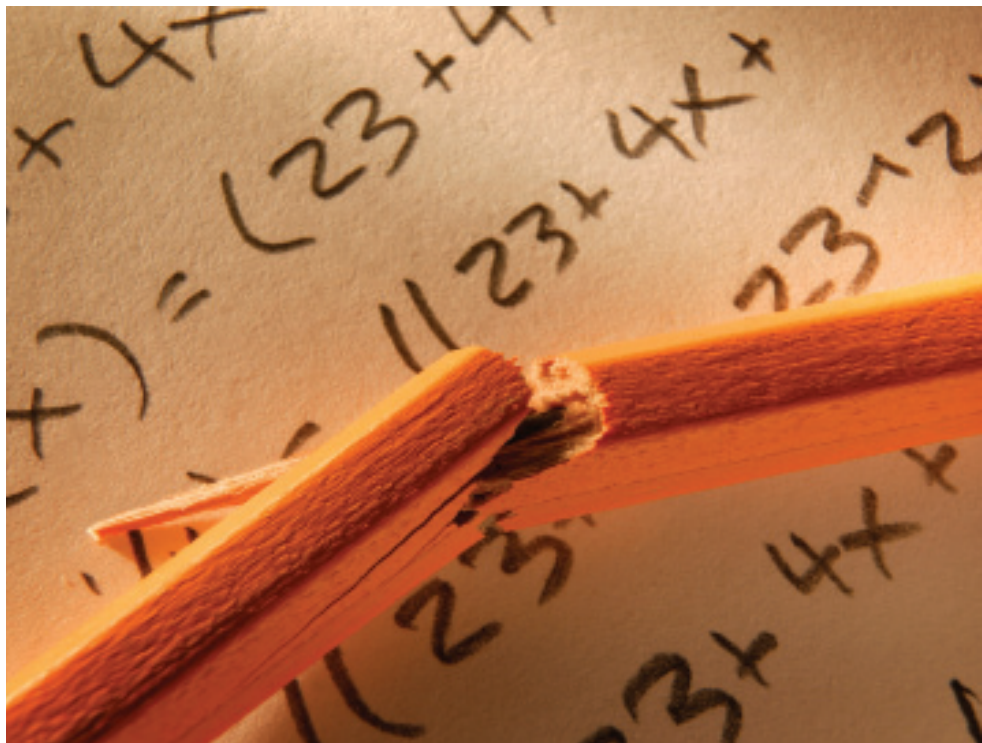


Rank injustice

Publishing NAPLAN test results paints a deceptive picture, writes columnist **Rebecca Wilson**.



The Federal Government's highly publicised and trumped-up My School website is a grand, idealistic vision that Education Minister Julia Gillard would have us believe is to change the face of education in Australia forever.

Several teachers' unions across the country believe NAPLAN will create damaging league tables that are inaccurate and misleading. Many principals say it will be impossible to attract high-calibre teachers to schools with low literacy and numeracy rates.

In other words, a big number of those closest to the coalface of the classroom say My School is wrong on many levels.

A suburb away from me is one of Australia's most successful grammar

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Rebecca Wilson
Herald Sun columnist

schools in terms of its academic results. It claims to be two thirds non-selective, allowing 66 per cent of those who can afford the fees through its doors.

Read the fine print, though, and you soon see that the one third of students it

does select have been put through gruelling academic tests that result in only the brightest students being accepted into the school.

The other two thirds, by the way, started at the school in grades 1 and 3. Guess what? They, too, were tested before being allowed to don the school uniform.

The school is famous for sifting through all its pupils in years 8 and 9 and kindly informing their parents that they really do not cut the mustard. Other alternatives should be explored, they tell them.

Naturally enough, at the end of all of this, my local grammar school consistently performs in the top 10 at the end of year 12. It will no doubt figure prominently on the NAPLAN

table, without detailing any of the finer print that earned it the rewards.

At the other end of the spectrum is the local high school in an economically disadvantaged area. No entry tests here, no sifting in years 8 and 9.

Teachers do their level best to get kids through the gate each day. Results become secondary to managing the everyday problems associated with a disadvantaged school—truancy rates, petty crime and rebellion.

NAPLAN won't allow this school an asterisk pointer to the bottom of the page that says "economically disadvantaged, under-resourced and needs more money". All you will see is the school's name at the bottom of the table, where the school and its staff are deemed to be failures by the new standards imposed on them.

There will be no mention of the teachers who run community programs to help these kids or the success stories by which teachers in desperately poor schools measure their own level of personal achievement.

Both of my sons have done these literacy and numeracy tests since grade 3. Neither of them has ever shone in either test, with both of them consistently coming up as "failures" in their numeracy skills.

What I see before me, however, are two teenagers who are top students in art, drama, history and physical education. One is off to Sydney University after earning himself a good pass in year 12.

NAPLAN won't tell you about the vast majority of students who are exactly the same as my children. It will

give you cold, hard statistics that are extremely deceiving.

Ms Gillard and co. are about to open a can of worms. Teachers and school principals should brace themselves for the fallout.

NAPLAN can only end in tears for all but the schools who work the system. They will drill their students in how to conquer those literacy and numeracy tests at the expense of concentrating on a holistic education.

The disadvantaged schools can forget about attracting teaching staff, too.

After all, being labelled a failure is not good for anyone's soul—student's or teacher's. ●

This is an edited extract of the article 'School comparisons turn the tables—in the wrong direction' published in the *Herald Sun* on 22 January 2010.

Principals misquoted

In the outpouring of anger about league tables some media coverage has misrepresented the facts.

An article in *The Daily Telegraph* was a "disgraceful distortion of an interview with two beginning principals", according to NSW Secondary Principals' Council president Jim McAlpine.

The two principals say they were misquoted in the article, 'Principals who back school league tables'.

"Their comments, in relation to the sensible use of data to inform student and school progress, have been taken entirely out of context..." wrote McAlpine in a letter to *The Daily Telegraph* editor Gary Linnell.

One of the principals, Judy Kelly from Sydney Secondary College, is "terribly disappointed" with the quotes attributed to her. In a letter to the editor she wrote: "I have never said that

I support league tables—and I do not. Your headline stating that principals back school league tables is simply wrong.

"I, like all members in the education field, agree that crude league tables have no place in our education system."

The other principal named in the article, Chad Bliss from Nyngan High School, said he clearly told the newspaper he did not support league tables but he did support diagnostic testing.

"NAPLAN is one of a whole lot of tests used to assess and improve educational outcomes. These tests provide parents with comprehensive data about the performance of their children," says Bliss. ●



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