

APPA calls for eight safeguards for transparent schools

EMBARGOED UNTIL MIDNIGHT THURSDAY 7 MAY 2009

The Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA) today called for safeguards to be built into the Ministerial Council for Education Employment and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) recently announced plans to publish the performance of schools on national tests.

APPA President, Leonie Trimper, said that while the organisation supported greater transparency in the education system, it was concerned by the lack of safeguards in place around the release of the NAPLAN test data.

“Put simply, if there are no safeguards, we just can’t support this,” Ms Trimper said.

Ms Trimper said similar initiatives in the US and UK had led to a narrowing of the curriculum as the pressure on schools to boost their results led teachers to place too much emphasis on coaching and practising for tests at the expense of other important areas of the curriculum.

“Areas such as the Arts were nearly always casualties”, she said.

APPA does not support the public reporting of school results in a “like school” format. The so called like schools may be similar in some ways but unlike in many others.

“People must understand that the professional reputations of school principals and their staffs are at stake,” said Ms Trimper.

“Once this kind of information is put into the public domain it is very hard to retract, even if a serious mistake has been made.”

APPA has recommended eight safeguards to be implemented as part of a national comparison framework being developed by MCEETYA. APPA recommends that MCEETYA:

1. Adopts a common set of protocols that school authorities are expected to observe that will:
 - Preserve the overall balance of the primary curriculum;
 - Prevent anti-educational, unethical ‘gaming’ practices designed to inflate test results; and
 - Encourage schools to teach higher order skills and provide deep understandings about selected areas of the curriculum.
2. Stipulates a standard program of NAPLAN assessment preparation of several hours’ duration prior to the scheduled testing be adopted as the preferred practice in primary schools.
3. Commissions an independent review of NAPLAN in 2010 to establish whether the uses to which the results are being put are having a positive impact on primary schooling.
4. If it goes ahead with the comparison of like schools, makes fully transparent the methodology used to determine the school groupings with appropriate caveats prominently displayed.
5. Immediately authorise the release of technical reports describing the reliability and validity of the 2008 NAPLAN tests.
6. Resolves to set up a process whereby a school may have its results independently audited by an appropriately qualified statistician.
7. Ensures that there is an ongoing consultation process established.
8. Issues the detailed draft proposals for public comment prior to putting them into effect.

“We must have some agreed limits on time spent on test preparation, common protocols for schools to observe in relation to testing and the ability to independently audit the data on school comparisons”, Ms Trimper said.

The recommendations were endorsed by the Australian Primary Principals Association’s national executive on Friday 1 May 2009 and are included in its response to an agreement by MCEETYA to develop a system to compare the performance of schools.

“We don’t want to see schools focus on achieving strong test results at the cost of all else,” she said.

“We support greater transparency, but with transparency comes responsibility.”

“There must be safeguards in place to ensure students receive a well rounded education in our schools and that fairness prevails.”

APPA’s Position Paper is available on its website www.appa.asn.au.

APPA represents 7,200 Government, Catholic and Independent principals across the country.

Media contacts:

Leonie Trimper

President, Australian Primary Principals Association

Mobile: 0412 177 621

State / Territory Contacts:

Australian Capital Territory

Chris Hamilton

Mobile: 0413 461 914

New South Wales Primary

Geoff Scott

Mobile: 0427 451 359

Northern Territory

Michele Cody

Mobile: 0423 000 973

Queensland

Norm Hart

Mobile: 0412 123 158

South Australia

Steve Portlock

Mobile: 0407 714 456

Tasmania

Rob Banfield

Telephone: 0458 061 003

Victoria

Gabrielle Leigh

Telephone: 0419 585 530

Western Australia

Stephen Breen

Mobile: 0417 177 617

