



POSITION PAPER ON NAPLAN & ONLINE DIAGNOSTIC TOOLS

The South Australian Primary Principals Association represents 530 school leaders. It supports the adoption of high academic standards, the routine collection of evidence regarding the performance of students in key areas of the primary curriculum, and the responsible release of information about the resources available to schools and the performance of their students.

All Year 3, 5, 7 and 9 students in Australia are tested annually through the National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). The NAPLAN results are used to provide information about individual student strengths and areas for improvement and to assess and compare the performance of schools.

SAPPA supports the use of NAPLAN to provide schools and system authorities with information about the performance of Australian primary students in literacy and numeracy. However, SAPPA emphasises that NAPLAN is only one source of information about student achievement, supplemented by other quantitative measures (DECD Standards, PATR and PATM) and that the primary curriculum is designed to promote the social and emotional development of children as well as their academic attainment across *all* learning areas of the curriculum, including areas of learning that can only be qualitatively measure.

SAPPA supports the principle of transparency and accountability but does not support a testing program that is used simplistically as a tool to compare and define the performance of a school. A high stakes assessment program with a narrow curricula focus, such as NAPLAN, does not adequately assess the broad range of the primary curriculum, including the social and emotional development of student.

The research evidence from the United States and Britain clearly shows that high stakes assessment programs, such as NAPLAN, can have an unintended, negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning when low performance is heavily sanctioned. Over-reliance on NAPLAN scores as the single source of evidence regarding school and system performance has unintended, negative consequences. Hence, it is important to protect primary schools from such consequences. In particular, schools tend to narrow their curriculum around the focus of the tests, the importance of areas of the curriculum that are not assessed is diminished, higher order skills that are not able to be tested decline, large amounts of valuable instructional time are consumed by coaching and practising tests and politicians and beauracrats become overly focused on the one system of nationally comparable data.

With the growth of the testing industry in recent years, commercial publishers have flourished in the subsequent publication of material targeting parents and teachers to improve children's test results, and in the process have become self-anointed 'experts' in education. Commercial interests have taken the focus of the educational agenda to a profit making industry.

SAPPA does not support the public reporting of school results in a 'like school' format. Once the results are in the public arena, unfair and simplistic comparisons are reported. SAPPA considers 'naming and shaming' to be a primitive and potentially dangerous approach to school improvement.

SAPPA is aware that some proponents of national testing contend that coaching for the tests should be encouraged and that primary schools should make the improvement of NAPLAN assessment results their overarching goal. This view is strongly opposed by Australian primary principals. This raising-test-scores-at-all-costs-by-any-means approach will seriously degrade the quality of primary education and diminish the wider learning opportunities of the students.