

Why I withdrew my child from NAPLAN

Tania Jorquera*

I withdrew my daughter from NAPLAN because the idea of making a diverse range of children sit down for a standardised test and expecting that the result would somehow symbolise something about the school or the students did not sit well with me.

* Tania is a mother of two school-aged children. She has previously worked in social work and childcare and is currently studying community development.

Researching NAPLAN on the net, I found various stories that confirmed not only what I already thought about the test, in terms of it being a useless method to gauge where a school sits academically, but also that in practice it was rife with schools doing whatever it took to get a high mark for their school.

My daughter goes to a very small school in the inner west that is filled with students from a diverse range of backgrounds. We often have children who start school with no English and it never ceases to amaze me how much these children learn and how quickly they do it. How can one test possibly be appropriate for a variety of children with different needs and different talents?

A test cannot tell the story of a child who has come here with no English and put their heart into learning how to read and write and who does so incredibly quickly considering learning a second language whilst at school. A test cannot tell the story of a child who does not 'shine' academically but who has the ability to calm another child who is having a hard moment in life. I am not ok with my child feeling that her value is measured by one test. Yes, I believe teachers want to and need to know where each child is at so that they know where they might need some support, but I know our teachers are doing this every day in our classrooms and the time spent on giving children practice tests for NAPLAN could be better spent on the teachers doing what they think would suit their students best.

There is something wrong with a system such as NAPLAN where it is known that schools are no longer thinking about individual children's needs but rather doing whatever it takes to get a good result from NAPLAN for the school as a whole. I have heard of children being asked to sit out as it is known that they will not do well and only bring the score down.

Our school needs to have a good reputation out in the community so we can grow and withdrawing my child, who I know would do well on the test and potentially help our school's reputation, was not something that made me feel good. I know that there are many members of our community who go to the My School website and look at the results and make a judgement on a school based on what they see. So there is a part of me that feels guilty knowing my child would have helped our scores, but I cannot be part of a system that works that way.

If people come to our school and step in and see the love the students have for their school, the pride they have, they will find themselves charmed by our students. These students come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences and a standardised test could never be a 'snapshot' of our school.

I became more convinced that my daughter should not do NAPLAN when we sat down to talk to her about it. Upon hearing the word 'test' my daughter instantly got very anxious and was not keen on participating. She was relieved when I told her she would not have to do the test.

These are the reasons why my family boycotted the last NAPLAN test and will continue to boycott them in the future. I hope that more schools get on board the 'Say NO to NAPLAN' campaign and our resources can be better used to support our schools, our teachers and our students.