

NAPLAN: true or false? **Breaking Out and Say No to NAPLAN***

There are many myths about NAPLAN, some supported by mis-information and propaganda. In this fact sheet, *Breaking Out* and *Say NO to NAPLAN* dispel a few myths and NAPLAN and provide guidance for parents about how it should be used and their rights to opt-out.

** With thanks to the Say No to NAPLAN coalition for the resources we've drawn upon here and for their ongoing efforts to raise awareness about the problems with NAPLAN.*

<http://www.literacyeducators.com.au/naplan/naplan-articles/>

1. NAPLAN is compulsory for all students. FALSE

Parents can remove their children from the NAPLAN tests at any level. All that is required is a letter to the school teacher/principal stating that a parent intends to withdraw their child from the test.

In fact, cases have been documented where schools have arranged for some students not to sit the test for fear they will have a negative affect on the school's results.

Participation in NAPLAN has been steadily decreasing since its inception, as more and more parents elect to remove their children.

Source: <http://www.literacyeducators.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/naplan-papers-set-2.pdf> and <https://theconversation.com/declining-naplan-participation-rates-are-likely-skewing-the-data-42821>

2. NAPLAN tests tell us 'where my child is at'. FALSE

NAPLAN tests are not useful diagnostic tests. They *do not* provide new or useful information.

If a teacher knows nothing about a student, then NAPLAN test results can show whether the student is generally at the 'expected' level, or is well behind or well ahead. *It cannot give more information than this.*

Teachers *do* know about what students can do, because they see students working every day, and they make assessments about students every day.

For parents looking for information about their child's progress, NAPLAN results are so limited that they are effectively useless; the tests are not worth the time and cost of administering them. Discussions with teachers and monitoring of their child's school work provides far more insight than a NAPLAN score.

3. NAPLAN compares my child's achievement with that of other students. FALSE

There is a large margin of error in NAPLAN tests, because of the small number of test questions. There are between 30 and 40 multiple choice questions in each section except for Writing. This example, from Margaret Wu's research paper 'Interpreting NAPLAN Results for the Layperson' shows why NAPLAN cannot be used to compare the achievement of 2 or more children as individual students.

For Year 5 numeracy, each child is tested on just 40 questions. If David obtained 25 out of 40 on the 2009 test, and Tina obtained 23 out of 40, we cannot make the definitive conclusion that David is better than Tina in numeracy in general. This is because there are many possible questions about year 5 numeracy that could be asked but there is only room on the test for a sample of 40 questions. This means from test to test an individual's score

will naturally vary. For example, if we had given David and Tina the 2008 NAPLAN Year 5 numeracy test, it is quite conceivable that David could obtain 23 out of 40, and Tina could obtain 26 out of 40, so we could arrive at the conclusion that Tina is better than David.

Source: http://www.edmeasurement.com.au/_publications/margaret/NAPLAN_for_lay_person.pdf

4. NAPLAN results can track a student's progress over several years. FALSE

Because of the margin of error in the tests, students can appear to have either leapt ahead significantly, or gone backwards over the course of two or more tests, but the margin of error means that this is not necessarily an accurate representation of a student's progress.

5. NAPLAN scores can tell us how good a teacher/school is. FALSE

Many factors affect students' test scores. The strengths or weaknesses of schools or teachers do not affect student results as much as family or community circumstances. Study after study has shown the strongest correlations between test results and factors such as parental education and family income. Every year, NAPLAN results show that Indigenous students and those from socio-economically disadvantaged families achieve poorer results.

6. NAPLAN can be used as a 'population test' to assess group achievement. TRUE

NAPLAN data can be used to compare the performance of *groups* of students, such as students with English as a first language and those from a non-English speaking background, or students in remote schools and those in urban schools, or girls and boys. But this type of monitoring could be done just as effectively using a sample of students rather than requiring 1 million students to take the test, an approach that would save tens of millions of taxpayer dollars.

7. ACARA recommends students spend significant time practicing for NAPLAN. FALSE

ACARA (the national curriculum body responsible for the NAPLAN tests) specifically states that the 'best way to get your child ready for NAPLAN is to continue to develop literacy and numeracy skills' and that 'NAPLAN tests are not tests students can "prepare" for'. Despite this, many schools and teachers feel such pressure to perform well on the tests that huge amounts of classroom instruction time are spent preparing students for the tests, to the point that many teachers have reported high levels of stress among students before the tests. Parents, too, feel this pressure - NAPLAN preparation packages have become bestsellers in Australia.

Source: <http://www.saveourschools.com.au/league-tables/principals-say-naplan-has-a-negative-impact-on-schooling>

Things to remember:

- Assessment is an important part of learning and effective assessment is an ongoing process. One day's test result is meaningless in working out a student's capabilities.
- The NAPLAN testing system is a waste of money, class time, and teacher time.
- NAPLAN results have been used in ways they are not designed for, to unfairly and inaccurately characterise schools and teachers as 'good', 'low performing' or 'unsatisfactory'.
- NAPLAN, in combination with the My School website pits teachers against teachers and schools against schools. Teachers and schools are pressured to see NAPLAN results as part of a competition, which undermines the sharing of resources to improve education for all students.
- Maintaining a regular dialogue with both your child and their teacher(s) is the best way to find out how your child is going.
- You can withdraw your child from NAPLAN!

More information:

- <http://www.literacyeducators.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/naplan-papers-set-1.pdf>
- <http://www.literacyeducators.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/naplan-papers-set-2.pdf>
- http://www.edmeasurement.com.au/_publications/margaret/NAPLAN_for_lay_person.pdf
- <http://www.saveourschools.com.au/national-issues/naplan-results-highlight-the-failure-of-governments-to-address-education-disadvantage>
- [VIDEO: Professor Margaret Wu speaking on student assessment data for accountability](#)