Education Council

NAPLAN Reporting Review

Prepared for COAG Education Council

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ACRONYMS

ACARA	Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACPPA	Australian Catholic Primary Principals' Association
ACSSO	Australian Council of State School Organisations
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AEU	Australian Education Union
AHISA	Association of Heads of Independent Schools Australia
APC	Australian Parents Council
APPA	Australian Primary Principals' Association
ASPA	Australian Secondary Principals' Association
CaSPA	Catholic Secondary Principals' Association
CIS	Centre for Independent Studies
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CSPA	Catholic School Parents Australia
CSPV	Catholic School Parents Victoria
ELA	English Language Arts
EQAO	Education Quality and Accountability Office (Ontario)
ERO	Education Review Office (New Zealand)
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education (United Kingdom)
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
IEU	Independent Education Union of Australia
ILSTE	Institute for Learning Sciences and Teacher Education, Australian Catholic University
ISCA	Independent Schools Council of Australia
ISQ	Independent Schools Queensland
IST	Independent Schools Tasmania
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program -- Literacy and Numeracy
NCEC	National Catholic Education Commission
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (United Kingdom)
PAT	Progressive Achievement Tests
PSLE	Primary School Leaving Examination (Singapore)
QCEC	Queensland Catholic Education Commission
RAAD	Reporting and Analysing Achievement Data tool (Northern Territory)
TAS	Territory-wide Assessment System (Hong Kong)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The NAPLAN Reporting Review was commissioned by the Education Council of COAG and has been framed by four Terms of Reference:

1. Perceptions of NAPLAN and *My School* data, including the potential for misinterpretation or misuse of data;
2. How *My School* and NAPLAN reporting contribute to understanding of student progress and achievement;
3. How schools use achievement data, including NAPLAN, to inform teaching; and
4. How *My School* and NAPLAN data are reported to students and parents.

PROCESS

This Review began with an analysis of publicly available school-level reporting in comparable English-speaking jurisdictions. Jurisdictions were chosen to provide maximum variation in possible approaches (Chapter 1). Focus group interviews were conducted with more than 200 school leaders, teachers, parents and students in a purposive sample of 10 high-gain schools (Chapter 2). Thirty-three public submissions were received, and interviews were conducted with more than 70 stakeholders representing 23 school system, sector, union and parent stakeholder groups (Chapter 3). Findings and recommendations are discussed in Chapter 4 and summarised below.

FINDINGS

In the list of Findings below, Terms of Reference 2, 3 and 4 are considered before Term of Reference 1. The purpose of this re-ordering is to provide findings about patterns of use of NAPLAN and *My School* by schools, systems and sectors, parents and students, before returning to broader perceptions about whether these patterns of use reflect an appropriate balance between the right to high quality information and the possibility of misunderstanding or misuse of data.

Understanding student progress and achievement

1. Australian governments and school systems rely on NAPLAN to make judgements about school and school system performance, but some have reservations about unintended consequences of NAPLAN testing and the publication of NAPLAN data.
2. School sector and system data analytics platforms are widely used in understanding student progress and achievement, but schools do not use *My School* data displays for this purpose.
3. NAPLAN provides important but incomplete information on school quality.
4. Data displays that focus on gain in student achievement were preferred to those that used ICSEA-based calculations to compare statistically similar schools.

Using achievement data to inform teaching

5. Schools triangulate NAPLAN data with a wide range of other assessments including large-scale nationally normed and standardised tests.

Reporting NAPLAN data to parents and students

6. The *My School* website provides more comprehensive and detailed school-level performance data displays than any of the international jurisdictions considered in this Review, but less information than is provided in Australian system and sector data analytics platforms.
7. School-level NAPLAN results are widely but not universally available from sources other than *My School*.
8. Schools make limited use of school-level NAPLAN data in communication with families and prefer timelier and more contextual data when discussing individual student achievement.
9. Parents generally do not place a high priority on NAPLAN results when choosing a school, but many believe that transparency and accountability require publication of these results.
10. *My School* and NAPLAN would be strengthened by a public communication program that clarified the purposes and proper uses of the data and the website.
11. Students would benefit from age-appropriate explanations of their NAPLAN results.

Perceptions of NAPLAN and *My School*

12. There is no settled view of the purposes or proper uses of NAPLAN and the *My School* website. Further clarification and communication of these issues would be welcomed.
13. Many stakeholders were concerned that publishing school-level NAPLAN data had made the tests "high stakes", and that any negative consequences flowed from publication of NAPLAN data rather than the collection of data or provision of data to schools and school systems.
14. Colour-coding of NAPLAN results was regarded as useful by many focus group participants, but stakeholders had concerns about the use of current ICSEA comparisons as a basis for the similar school calculations that underpin the colour-coding. A technical review of ICSEA would be well regarded.
15. Measures of student achievement and gain may be sufficient information for public accountability and transparency purposes.
16. Some, but not all, of the recent Australian league tables have drawn their NAPLAN data from publicly available sources other than *My School*.
17. Concerns about the impact of NAPLAN on teaching and learning programs were reported but estimates of the severity of this impact varied among stakeholders and data sources.
18. Concerns about the impact of NAPLAN on wellbeing of teachers and students were reported but estimates of the severity of this impact varied among stakeholders and data sources.

19. There is widespread interest in the development of on-line, formative assessments based on learning progressions.
20. Some stakeholders advocated for a national accountability system based on sample testing, but this is inconsistent with school systems' and sectors' current use of population NAPLAN data in their data analytics, school review systems and school board reports.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the number of NAPLAN displays on *My School* be reduced.
2. That the focus of NAPLAN displays on *My School* should be student gain, not statistically similar school comparisons.
3. That a technical review of ICSEA be undertaken.
4. That the national priority initiatives on learning progressions and formative assessment tools be pursued, in order to improve the timeliness and diagnostic quality of assessments available to schools.
5. That school systems publish school-level NAPLAN data in ways that reduce the likelihood that third-party NAPLAN-based school league tables will be produced.
6. That in order to reduce the risk of misuse of NAPLAN data, clear guidance be provided to schools, the public and students about the purposes and proper uses of NAPLAN and *My School*.

INTRODUCTION

This Review, commissioned by the Education Council of the Council of Australian Governments in September 2018, has four Terms of Reference:

1. Perceptions of NAPLAN and *My School* data, including the potential for misinterpretation or misuse of data;
2. How *My School* and NAPLAN reporting contribute to understanding of student progress and achievement;
3. How schools use achievement data, including NAPLAN, to inform teaching; and
4. How *My School* and NAPLAN data are reported to students and parents.

The Review has undertaken four phases of data collection

Environmental scan

The environmental scan explored local and international representations of student achievement data. The focus was on school-level summaries of achievement in the primary and lower-secondary years, available on public websites. International jurisdictions chosen were those with predominately English-language education systems in countries with similar or better national student achievement. In countries with many internal education jurisdictions, a maximum variation sample was chosen.

Sample school community consultation with teachers, school leaders, parents and students

School community consultation was undertaken with school visits late in 2018 and early in 2019. Phase 2 involved a purposive sample of 10 schools selected in collaboration with the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority. Schools in the sample have at least average national NAPLAN achievement and have shown greater growth in achievement than schools with similar starting points or statistically similar schools. The sample represents a range of school jurisdictions, locations, demographic characteristics and phases of schooling. In each school, face-to-face focus group interviews withheld with school leaders, teachers, parents and students.

Public submissions

Written submissions were sought over a six-week period beginning in February 2019. An Issues Paper was released to guide and structure written submissions to the Review. Thirty-three written submissions were received. People and organisations making written submissions are identified in Appendix 1. A link to the Issues Paper is provided in Appendix 3.

Key stakeholder consultation

Face-to-face individual consultations were conducted with national peak bodies and school system and sector authorities during March and April 2019. Twenty-three stakeholder groups were consulted. Seventy-three stakeholder representatives attended these meetings, almost all of which were face-to-face meetings. Appendix 2 identifies groups attending stakeholder consultation meetings.

CHAPTER 1: ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

MY SCHOOL AND NAPLAN ACHIEVEMENT REPORTING

MY SCHOOL

The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) was introduced in 2008, replacing a series of separate state and territory assessments. Since 2010, NAPLAN has been the responsibility of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). With regard to assessment, ACARA's legislative functions are to:

- develop and administer national assessments; and
- collect, manage and analyse student assessment data and other data relating to schools and comparative school performance; and
- facilitate information sharing arrangements between Australian government bodies in relation to the collection, management and analysis of school data; and
- publish information relating to school education, including information relating to comparative school performance.[1]

In January 2010 ACARA launched the *My School* website, containing school-by-school summaries of 2008 and 2009 NAPLAN data in reading, writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation and numeracy at Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. The *My School* website initially provided comparisons with statistically similar schools, with measures of achievement gain added in 2011. The initial version of *My School* also provided a range of school demographic information, augmented by Information on school finance and capital expenditure in 2011.

The 2018 version of the *My School* website provided five school-level analyses of achievement and impact. These include:

- Number: average achievement for each assessment domain, over time;
- Bands: the percentage of students in each achievement band;
- Graphs: average scores for each assessment domain, over time;
- Student gain: average change in results for students who have taken successive NAPLAN tests in the same school; and
- Similar schools: average scores for each assessment domain and each calendar year in schools with a similar ICSEA value to the selected school.

For 2019, an additional display has been developed:

- Participation: Student participation in NAPLAN displayed in a table.

[1] https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2008A00136

Each of these analyses allows users to make comparisons between statistically similar schools or all Australian students. Statistical similarity of schools is calculated using an index constructed for the purpose, the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage. In addition, the student gain page allows comparisons between the selected school and students with the same starting scores.

The *My School* website provides colour-coding of NAPLAN results for average scores "substantially above", "above", "close to", "below" or "substantially below" schools with similar students or all Australian schools. Statistical confidence intervals are also provided, where appropriate, to limit the possibility of over-interpretation of small differences in the data.

SCHOOL SYSTEM NAPLAN DATA PRESENTATIONS

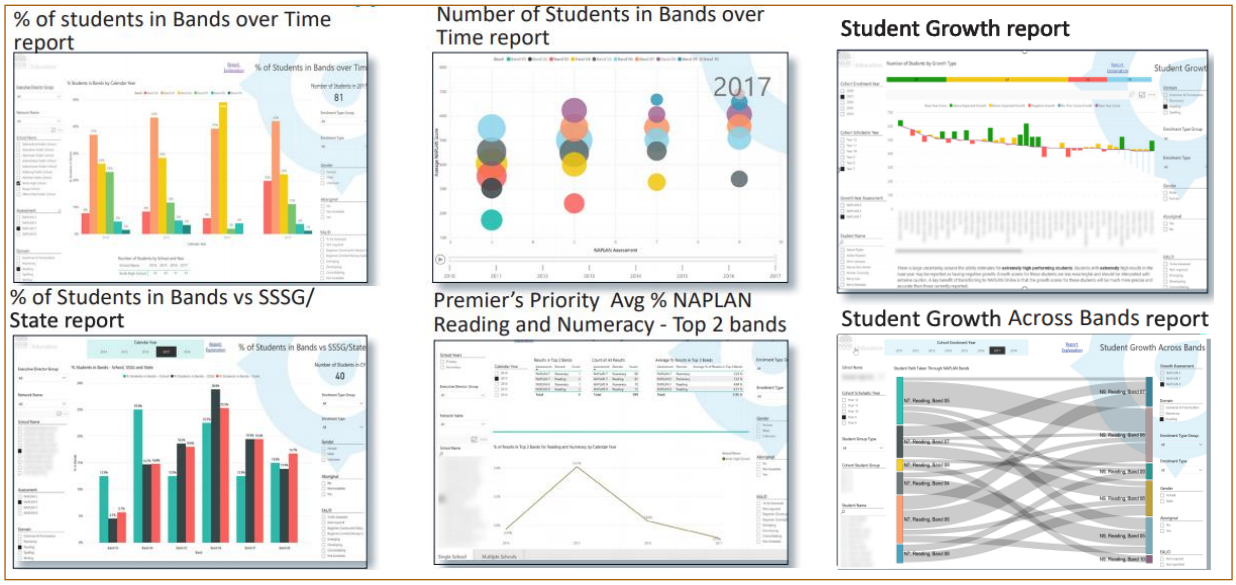
In addition to the NAPLAN data displays available to the public through the *My School* website, Australian school systems and sectors have invested substantially in data analytics platforms to support their schools. More than a dozen such platforms have been identified.[2] To take one example of these data analytics platforms, the NAPLAN component of Scout provides online, graphics-intensive information on school performance, student performance and NAPLAN item-level performance.[3]

The school performance component of Scout includes the following displays (see Figure 1):

- NAPLAN scores over time;
- equity groups report;
- number and percentage of students in achievement bands over time;
- percentage of students in Bands versus a statistically similar school group and the whole state;
- percentage of students in the top two bands in reading and numeracy; and
- student growth in scores and across bands.

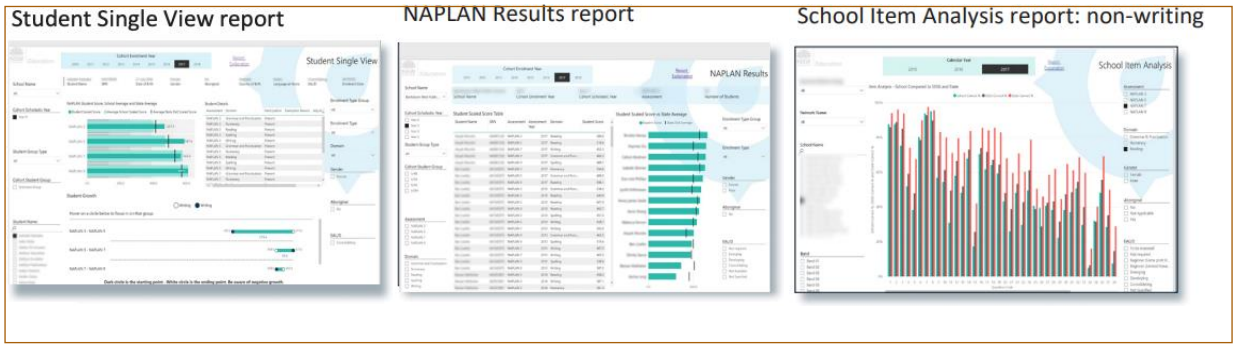
[2] See the section "Assessment tools and data analytics", beginning page 78.
[3] https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/educational-data/scout/media/documents/qrg-non-doe-smart-to-scout.pdf

Figure 1. Scout school performance displays



In addition to this school-level data, Scout enables schools to explore individual students' NAPLAN performance across the tests and years, as well as student and cohort performance at the individual NAPLAN item level (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Scout individual student and item displays



INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL-LEVEL ACHIEVEMENT REPORTING

Not all comparable jurisdictions have whole-population testing in the primary and lower-secondary years. Some have jurisdiction- or nation-wide assessments but choose not to publish school-level data or use sample tests for accountability purposes. Most of the school systems comparable in size to the Australian state and national systems do, however, publish some kind of school-level student achievement data, often accompanied by value-added, student gain or similar-schools estimates of school-level impact on student achievement.

International comparisons in this Review are focused on countries with predominantly English-language medium schools and broadly comparable or better performance. In two of the larger federations, the United States and Canada, there are many jurisdictions: 50 US states and ten Canadian provinces plus more than 20 territories across both countries. Between the US and Canada, both of which manage schools though local school boards and districts, there are tens of thousands of local school districts. Some of these are as large as the most populous Australian states. In order to show the range of school-level achievement reporting practices across these many jurisdictions maximum variation sampling has been used. Jurisdictions described include the largest Canadian province, Ontario, three US states (Tennessee, California and Arizona) and largest US school district, New York City.

Beyond North America, school-level achievement reporting practices are described for Singapore, Hong Kong and the United Kingdom.

New Zealand is included in the summary tables, but not the discussion, because it no longer has a whole-population national assessment system for students below school leaving age. The National Monitoring of Student Achievement program, a set of sample studies involving "several thousand children each year on different areas of the curriculum" will replace population testing, but details of the program have not yet been released.[4] Currently, the Education Review Office publishes the only compulsory school-level reporting for primary and lower-secondary schools in New Zealand.[5] These school reports do not include student achievement data. The ERO reviews follow a school self-assessment and result in a 3-4 page public report, which provides demographic information, a review of progress against priorities and a summary rating on a four-level verbal scale: "Needs development", "Developing", "Well placed" and "Strong". The only public reporting of school-level achievement data in New Zealand is at the end of secondary schooling, where National Certificate of Educational Achievement league tables are published by the *New Zealand Herald*.[6]

[4] https://education.govt.nz/news/national-standards-removed/
[5] https://www.ero.govt.nz/review-reports/
[6] https://insights.nzherald.co.nz/article/ncea-table-2018/

SINGAPORE

In Singapore, *The Straits Times* produced academic achievement rankings of secondary schools for two decades, using Ministry of Education data. The rankings were abolished in 2012 following a Ministry of Education decision to broaden the goals of schooling.[7]

School performance information continues to be available on a searchable Ministry of Education website.[8] For secondary schools, this includes Primary School Leaving Examination aggregate scores for students entering the school each year in each academic stream (Figure 3). Lower, upper and median scores for each stream in the school are reported. From 2021 numerical scores will be replaced by band scores on an eight-level achievement scale.[9] Currently, third party websites such as *The Asian Parent Singapore* produces annual secondary school league tables based on PSLE cut-off scores.[10]

Figure 3. Singapore Primary School Leaving Examination intake scores

PSLE Aggregate Score
Aggregate range of 2017 Primary 6 students posted to 2018 Secondary 1

	Non-Affiliation			Affiliation		
	Lower	Upper	*Median	Lower	Upper	*Median
Express	211	240	217		None-posted	
Normal Academic	167	198	175		None-posted	
Normal Technical	105	155	139		None-posted	

HONG KONG

Hong Kong has a Territory-wide Assessment System with tests at the end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 (equivalent to Years 3, 6 and 9). Territory-wide results are released each year, reporting the percentage of students achieving basic competency in Chinese language, English language and mathematics.[11] School-level TAS results are not released to the public. Access to school-level data is restricted and the policy is that "comparisons on the performances among schools should not be made".[12] In Since 2018, in order to make the Key Stage 1 assessments "a low-stakes assessment without the need for drilling", sample rather than whole-population test have been used with no student or school names collected in the sampling process.[13]

In the absence of rankings based on school achievement, other rankings have emerged in Hong Kong. Book of School, for example, creates rankings based on how competitive entry is to

[7] http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_512_2005-01-03.html
[8] https://beta.moe.gov.sg/schools/school-finder/
[9] https://www.moe.gov.sg/microsites/psle/PSLE%20Scoring/psle-scoring.html
[10] https://sg.theasianparent.com/psle-results-2018
[11] https://www.bca.hkeaa.edu.hk/web/TSA/en/PriTsaReport.html
[12] https://www.bca.hkeaa.edu.hk/web/TSA/en/PriFaq.html
[13] https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201810/23/P2018102300398.htm

kindergartens and primary schools, and on secondary school leaving results and university placement. Non-academic rating components include success in sport and music competitions, teacher quality and school physical facilities.[14] Book of School secondary school rankings for the top two schools in 2018 appear in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Hong Kong: Book of School secondary school rankings

Ranking	Name	Academic 40%	Sport 15%	音樂 15%	Teacher 15%	Campus 15%	score this year	score avg.	position
1	拔萃女書院 Diocesan Girls' School	10.0	10.0	9.5	9.0	8.0	9.50	9.75	0
2	拔萃男書院 Diocesan Boys' School 九龍城	9.0	10.0	10.0	8.0	10.0	9.29	9.28	0

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The United State of America has a long history of public display of school-level achievement data. Under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, all US states were required to give basic skills assessments to all students annually in grades 3-8. In addition, they were required to display student achievement data in annual report cards on schools and school districts.[15]

In 2015, this legislation was replaced by the *Every Student Succeeds Act*, which continued to require universal assessment but left the details of school and district-level reporting to individual states.[16] Under these more recent rules, a variety of school-level report cards have been developed by states and school districts.

Some of the report cards are highly stylised and dependent on graphic, letter- or number-grades intended to summarise school performance. At the other end of the spectrum are report cards that provide detailed and data-intensive displays of achievement, gain and comparisons with statistically similar schools.

In addition to government sanctioned websites, school-level performance data is available on a number of third-party websites that rank schools or allocate numerical or letter grades. Typically, these use compound indicators, adding scores from multiple tests or combining test scores with measures of student growth, equity, diversity or teacher quality.

The sections below describe state or school district report cards selected to show the range of data displays as well as a selection of third-party school-rating websites.

---

14 https://www.bookofschool.com/school/controller/schoolSearch?reporttype=secondaryranking&schoolcategory=2

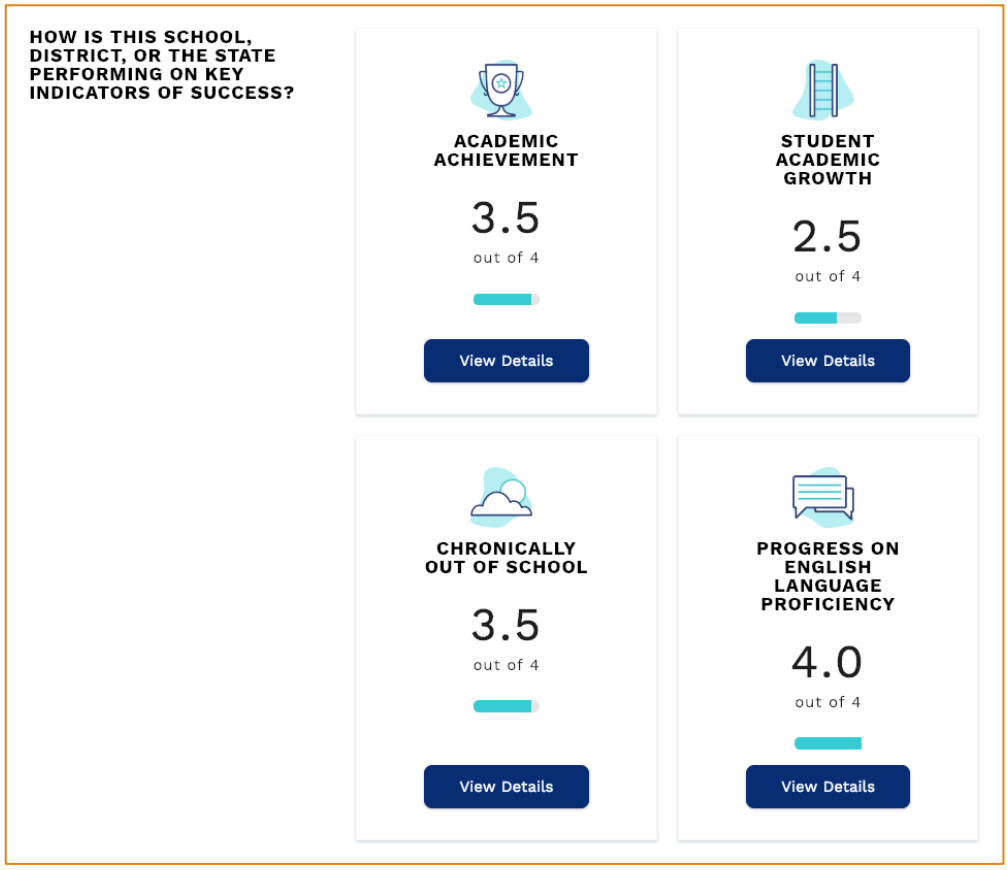
15 https://www2.ed.gov/nclb/accountability/schools/accountability.html

16 https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn

Tennessee School Report Card

The Tennessee Department of Education report card rates each school using summative numerical indicators.[17] Elementary and middle schools have four indicators: academic achievement, student academic growth, chronically out of school and progress on English language proficiency. High schools add a further two indicators: ready to graduate and graduation rate. Figure 5 provides a sample report card for an elementary school.

Figure 5. Tennessee: elementary school report card



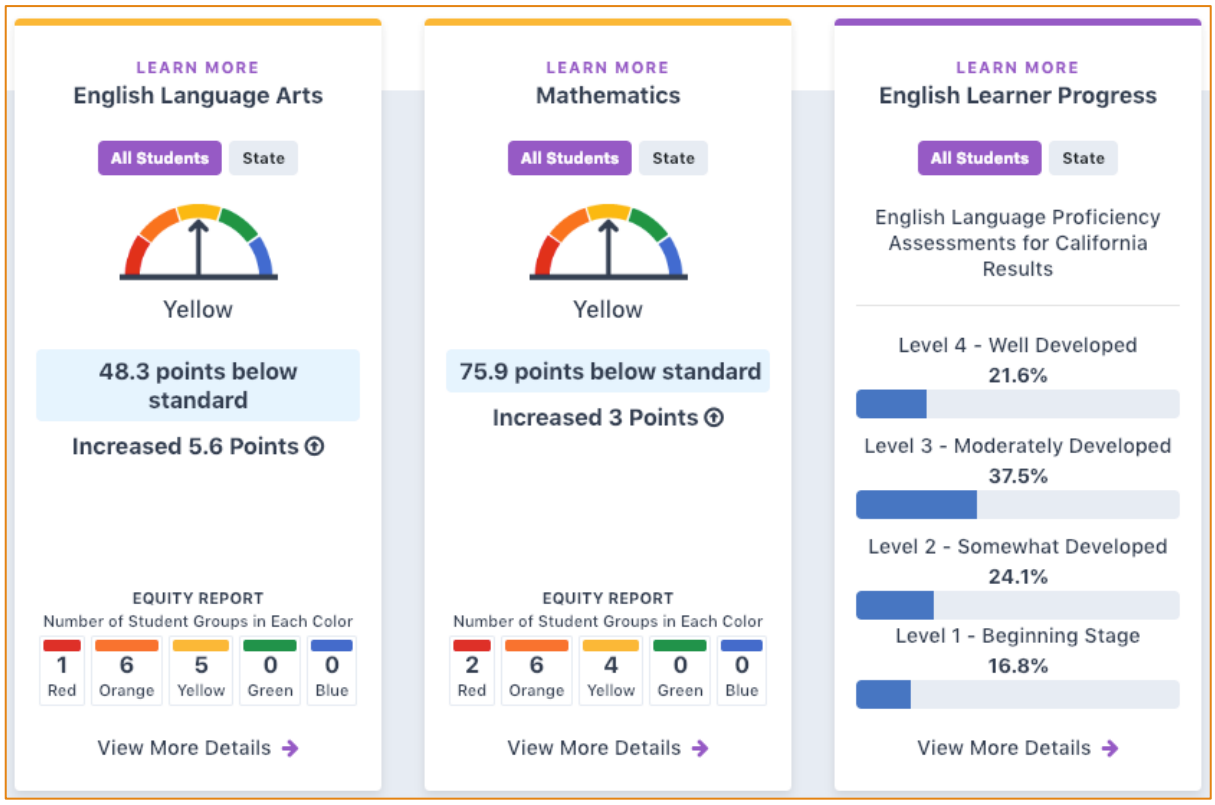
Further detail is available on the Tennessee Report Card website regarding academic achievement, including the proportion of students who met the state's performance benchmarks and students' academic growth using a value-added calculation. These benchmark and growth performances are also disaggregated by specific student race, socio-economic status, language background and disabilities groups. The underlying test scores that lead to these numerical indicators and value-added calculations are not available through the public website.

[17] https://reportcard.tnk12.gov/

California School Dashboard

The California School Dashboard[18] provides a set of performance indicators in English language arts, mathematics, chronic absenteeism and suspension (Figure 6). The academic achievement indicators are an average of all students' distance from the expected grade-level standard, showing by how much the average student exceeds the standard, or how much improvement the student would need to reach the grade-level standard.[19] Distance from the expected standard is represented by a fire-hazard graphic. Quantitative data accompanying the graphic indicate the number of test scale points above or below standard, as well as change from the previous year's score. The graphics indicate how many equity groups are in each quintile of the performance levels. The underlying student achievement data are not available on the dashboard website.

Figure 6. California School Dashboard

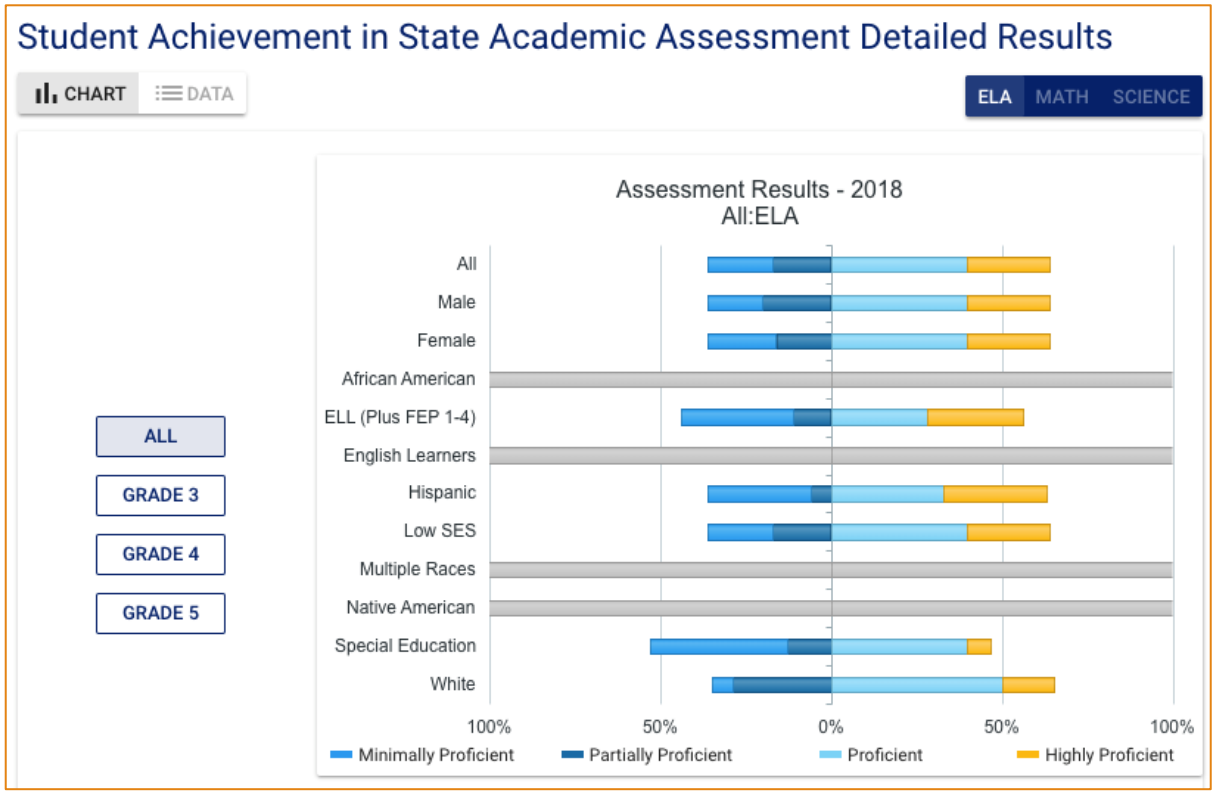


[18] https://www.caschooldashboard.org/
[19] https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/cm/acadindcal.asp

Arizona School Report Card

The school report cards produced by the Arizona Department of Education provide data on student achievement in every school as well as a letter grade to summarise performance of every school.[20] The achievement data are available in chart or table form for each grade and for English language arts (ELA), mathematics and science. Data displayed in each case include the proportion of students in each proficiency band, for all students and in each equity group (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Arizona School Report Card: academic results



In addition, the Arizona system calculates a number of "proficiency points" for each school.[21] The index includes points for achievement, growth and readiness for future learning as well as bonus points for the proportion of special education enrolment and high performance in a science assessment. Figure 8 provides an example of bonus points for a school with an A letter grade.

[20] https://azreportcards.azed.gov/
[21] https://azreportcards.azed.gov/static/A-FSummary

Figure 8. Arizona School Report Card

A-F Summary: 2018

K-8 Model

	K-8 Points Earned	K-8 Points Eligible
Proficiency	25.73	30
Growth	49.5	50
EL Growth and Proficiency		
Acceleration Readiness	10	10
Bonus Points*	3.5	5**
Total Points	88.73	
Percentage	98.59	

K-8 Model Cut Scores

A	B	C	D	F
84.67-100%	72.39-84.66%	60.11-72.38%	47.83-60.10%	< 47.82%

Letter Grade: A

New York City School Performance dashboard

The New York City Department of Education publishes a School Performance Dashboard for each of its schools.[22] The dashboard includes demographic data, scores on a quality review survey, percentile rankings in English language arts and mathematics and a measure of impact (given student intake characteristics) versus unadjusted performance (Figure 9). A wide range of trend data are available and can be compared with city-wide performance and performance of similar students in other schools (Figure 10). Multi-year data tables track achievement over time and are colour-coded for above and below average performance compared with city-wide and comparable students (Figure 11).

[22] https://tools.nycenet.edu/dashboard/

Figure 9. New York City: elementary school report card: impact and performance

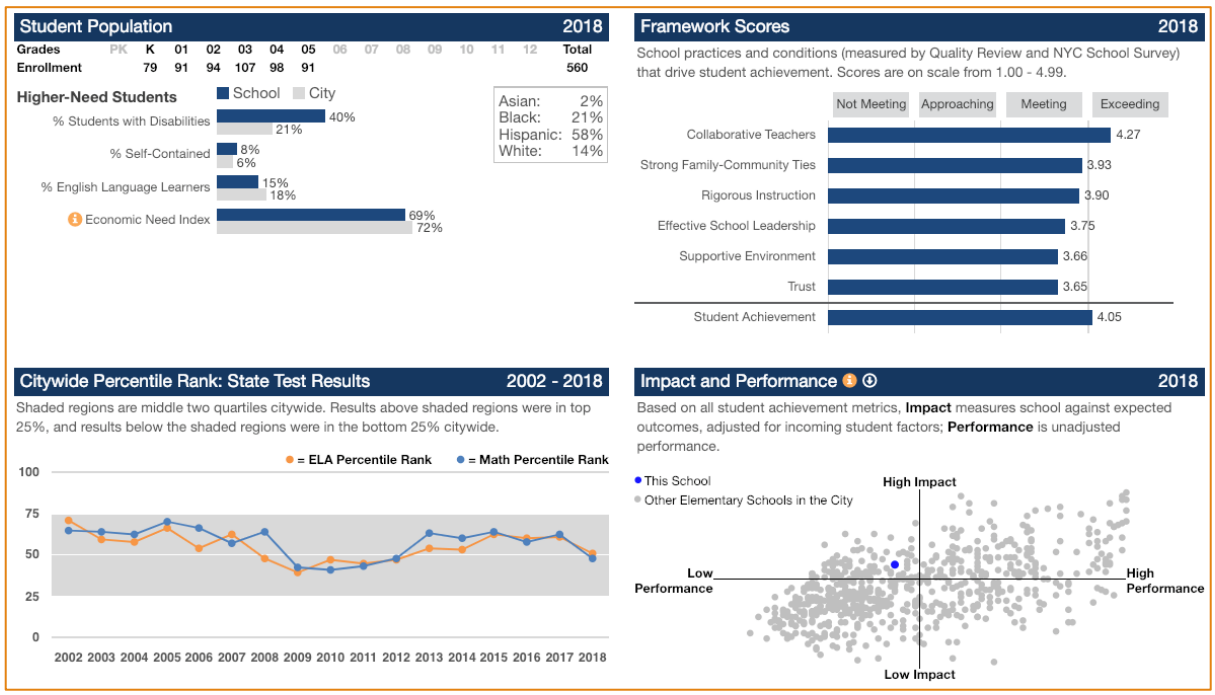


Figure 10. New York City: elementary school report card: achievement

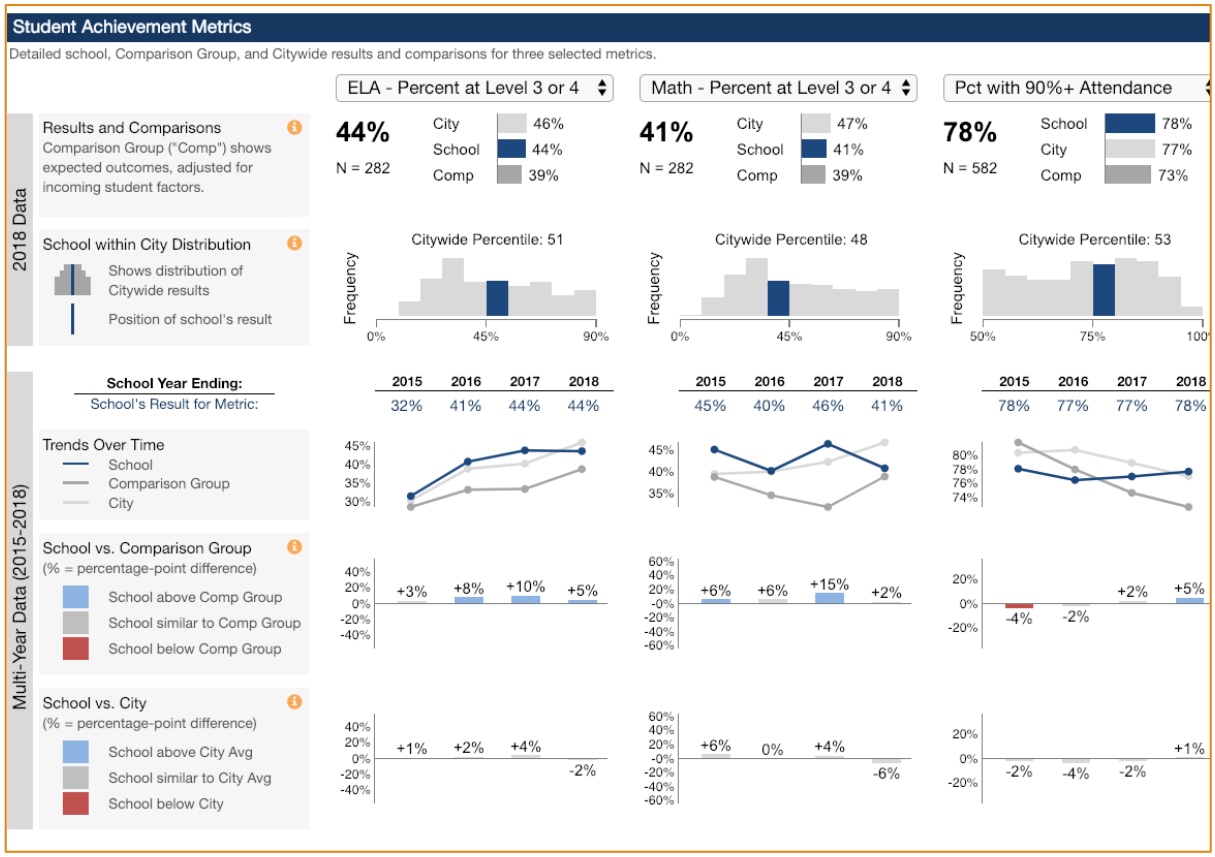


Figure 11. New York City elementary school report card: comparable school comparisons

Multi-Year Data Tables — 03M075 (ES) - P.S. 075 Emily Dickinson

➜Select View for Comparison: Differences — Far Above Average | Above Average | Below Average | Far Below Average

% = percentage-point difference

		2015	2016	2017	2018
State Tests - ELA					
ELA - Pct at Level 3 or 4					
	n	275	238	251	282
	School's Value	**32%**	**41%**	**44%**	**44%**
Difference compared to ...	Comp Group	+3%	+8%	+10%	+5%
	District	-19%	-17%	-17%	-20%
	City	+1%	+2%	+4%	-2%
ELA - Avg Proficiency					
	n	275	238	251	282
	School's Value	**2.63**	**2.74**	**2.76**	**2.75**
Difference compared to ...	Comp Group	+0.08	+0.12	+0.15	+0.06
	District	-0.32	-0.35	-0.39	-0.43
	City	+0.06	+0.02	+0.02	-0.12
Subgroups — ELA - Avg Prof (Sch Low 3rd)					
	n	71	52	57	60
	School's Value	**2.04**	**2.18**	**2.23**	**2.04**
Difference compared to ...	Comp Group	na	+0.10	+0.13	-0.04
	District	-0.38	-0.35	-0.40	-0.52
	City	-0.05	0.00	+0.05	-0.24

		2015	2016	2017	2018
State Tests - Math					
Math - Pct at Level 3 or 4					
	n	277	241	250	282
	School's Value	**45%**	**40%**	**46%**	**41%**
Difference compared to ...	Comp Group	+6%	+6%	+15%	+2%
	District	-12%	-16%	-15%	-23%
	City	+6%	0%	+4%	-6%
Math - Avg Proficiency					
	n	277	241	250	282
	School's Value	**2.83**	**2.80**	**2.86**	**2.76**
Difference compared to ...	Comp Group	+0.08	+0.14	+0.26	+0.06
	District	-0.37	-0.45	-0.46	-0.49
	City	+0.04	0.00	+0.02	-0.16
Subgroups — Math - Avg Prof (Sch Low 3rd)					
	n	65	51	53	57
	School's Value	**2.08**	**2.11**	**2.14**	**2.06**
Difference compared to ...	Comp Group	na	+0.07	+0.13	+0.05
	District	-0.49	-0.51	-0.53	-0.47
	City	-0.09	-0.05	-0.03	-0.16

		2015	2016	2017	2018
Next-Level Readiness					
MS Adj Core Course Pass Rates					
	n	91	96	71	76
	School's Value	**93%**	**97%**	**94%**	**97%**
Difference compared to ...	Comp Group	-2%	+3%	-1%	+2%
	District	-1%	0%	-1%	+2%
	City	-2%	+3%	0%	+2%
Attendance					
Pct with 90%+ Attendance					
	n	584	587	601	582
	School's Value	**78%**	**77%**	**77%**	**78%**
Difference compared to ...	Comp Group	-4%	-2%	+2%	+5%
	District	-8%	-9%	-6%	-4%
	City	-2%	-4%	-2%	+1%

trics (2015-2018)

League tables and rankings

Independent of the school report cards provided by state or school district education authorities in the United States, a variety of third-party organisations provide school rankings and league tables based on publicly available student achievement data. Three examples are provided below, all referring to the school described in Figure 9, an elementary school on the Upper West Side of Manhattan.

SchoolDigger[23], provides state and city numerical rankings and star ratings based on normalised and averaged test scores.[24] SchoolDigger rates this Manhattan school as Two Stars and ranks it 1,259th out of 2,395 New York elementary schools (Figure 12).

Niche[25] provides a letter grade report card, school district-wide rankings on quality, diversity and teacher quality, proportion of students meeeting state-wide proficiency levels in reading and mathematics and (where appropriate) college preparation.[26] Niche ranks this Upper West Side school in the top third, 721th out of 2,467 New York City elementary schools. It receives B+ grade overall and B+ for academics, A for diversity and A for teacher quality (see Figure 13). An A grade places the school in the top 10% and a B+ grade places the school in the top 30%.

[23] https://www.schooldigger.c om/
[24] https://www.schooldigger.com/aboutranking.aspx
[25] https://www.niche.com/?ref=k12
[26] https://www.niche.com/k12/rankings/methodology/

GreatSchools[27] provides a similar but more methodologically complex summary. In addition to achievement scores, GreatSchools considers student growth, within- and between-school equity of achievement, college readiness and proportion of secondary students taking advanced coureswork.[28] GreatSchools rates this school 7/10 overall with a score of 10/10 for student progress and 5/10 for equity of acheivement across social groups (see Figure 14). GreatSchools does not provide a district-wide ranking for this school.

Figure 12. SchoolDigger: New York City elementary school

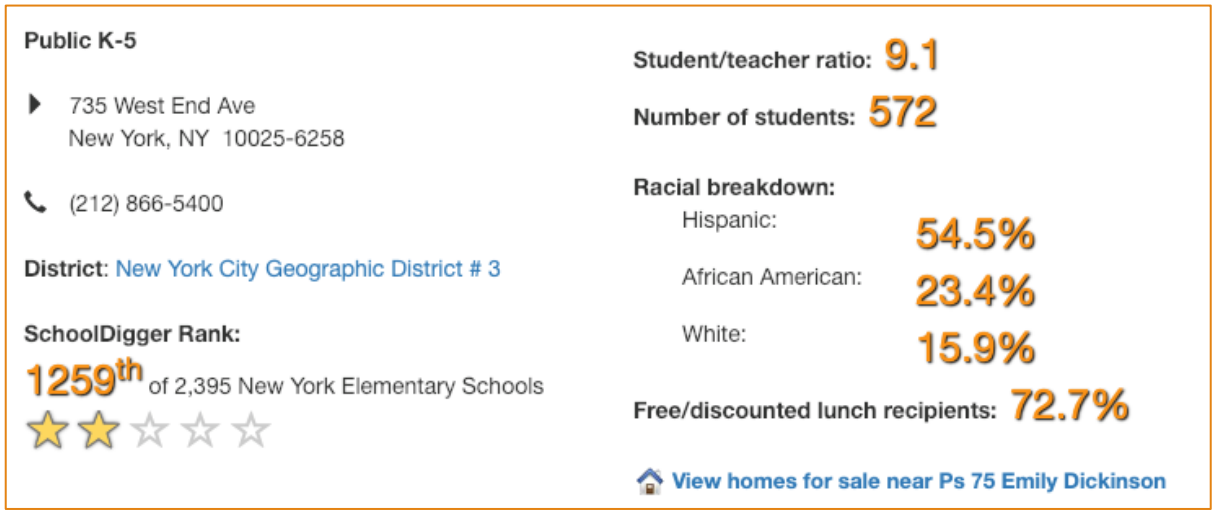
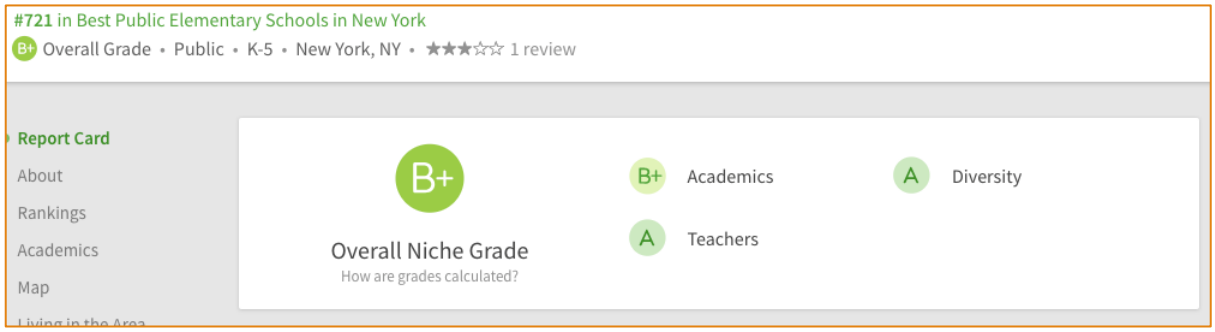
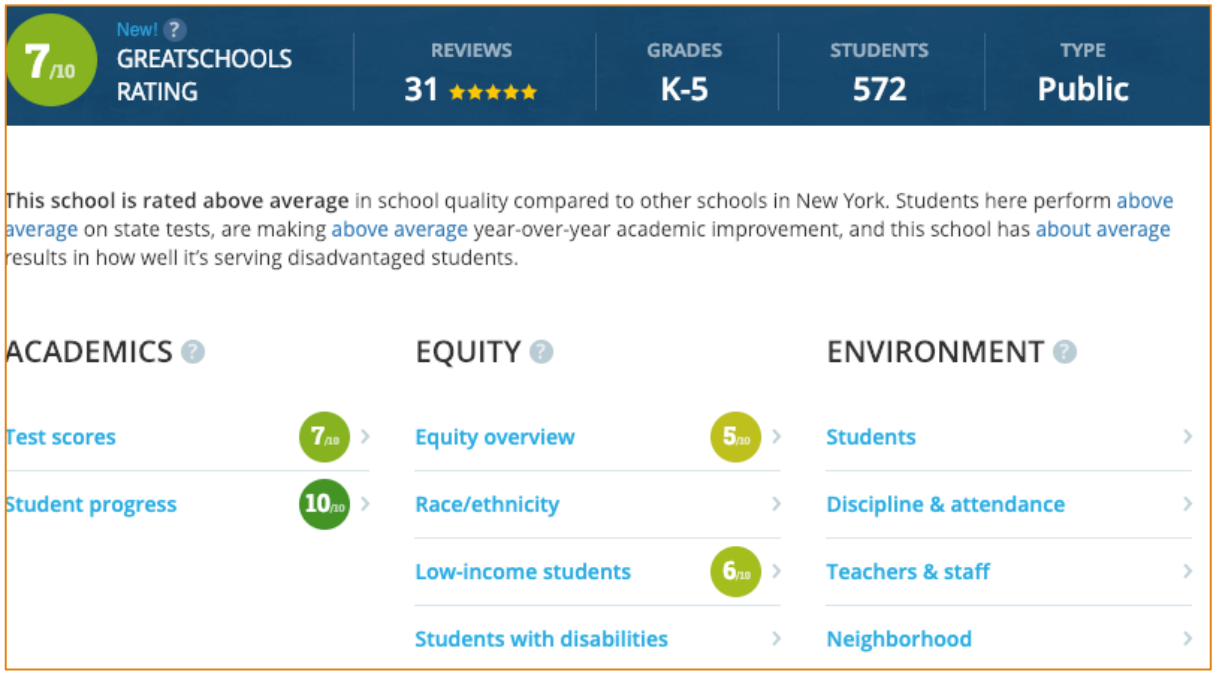


Figure 13. Niche: New York City elementary school



[27] https://www.greatschools.org/
[28] https://www.greatschools.org/gk/ratings/

Figure 14: GreatSchools: New York City elementary school



CANADA

School-level academic achievement results are published by some Canadian provincial governments, including two of the four large provinces (Ontario[29] and Alberta[30]) and several of the smaller provinces (Prince Edward Island[31] and New Brunswick[32]). British Columbia publishes school-level grade-promotion, student enrolment and student satisfaction data, but not provincial test data[33]. Year 3, 4 and 6 provincial assessments have been suspended in Nova Scotia.[34] There are no whole-cohort national assessments in Canada.

In Ontario, the most populous province, the Education Quality and Accountability Office provides a searchable repository of school reports for all publicly-funded Ontario schools. Each school report includes demographic information, results of a student attitude survey and the percentage of students at or above the provincial standard in reading, writing and mathematics.

Although the web-based report for the Toronto elementary school in Figure 15 includes some contextual information and tracks data over time, it does not compare the school with district- or province-wide standards or statistically similar schools. More detailed information, including district and provincial comparisons, the percentage of students at each level in each assessment and the results of a student survey, is available on a comprehensive downloadable PDF report.[35]

The Frazer Institute, an independent think-tank, produces annual report cards for Canadian provinces, ranking schools in the province and rating them on a 10-point scale using a set of academic indicators drawn from provincial assessment programs.[36] In recent years, the Frazer Institute has produced rankings of elementary and secondary schools in three of the four large provinces – British Colombia, Alberta and Ontario.

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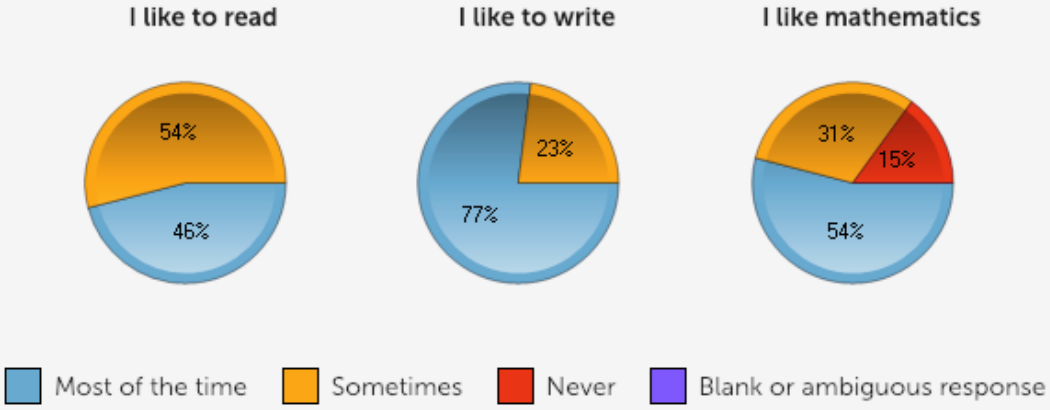
[29] http://www.eqao.com/en
[30] https://www.cbe.ab.ca/about-us/provincial-tests-and-reports/Pages/2017-2018-results.aspx
[31] https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/education-early-learning-and-culture/provincial-assessment-results
[32] https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/education/k12/content/anglophone_sector/reports_on_achievement/anglophone_north.html
[33] https://studentsuccess.gov.bc.ca/
[34] https://novascotia.ca/studentassessments/
[35] https://eqaoweb.eqao.com/eqaoweborgprofile/Download.aspx?rptType=PBS&_Mident=123056&YEAR=2018&assessmentType=6&orgType=S&nF=IsjEuDNrlSuVDWNQzV9MPfbdC5JR7N4toXwLYcnTNIw=&displayLanguage=E
[36] https://www.fraserinstitute.org/studies/school-report-cards?page=1

Figure 15. EQAO: Toronto elementary school

GRADE 6 CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION: 2017–2018

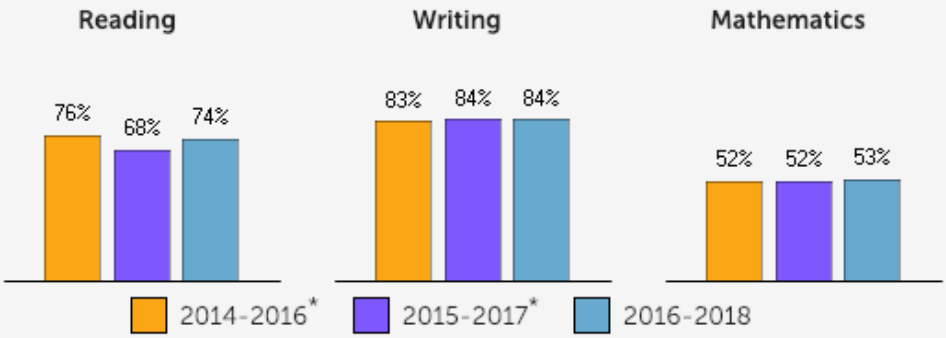
	School	Board	Province
Number of Students	13	16 444	132 766
Number of Classes	1	1 276	8 644
English Language Learners	8%	4%	11%
Students with Special Education Needs (excluding gifted)	23%	21%	22%
First Language Learned at Home Was Other Than English	46%	40%	23%
STUDENTS' TIME IN CANADA			
Born in Canada	85%	79%	87%
In Canada Less Than One Year	8%	1%	1%
In Canada One Year or More But Less Than Three	0%	4%	2%
In Canada Three Years or More	0%	15%	9%

GRADE 6 STUDENT ATTITUDES: 2017–2018



COMBINED ACHIEVEMENT RESULTS FOR 2014–2016, 2015–2017 AND 2016–2018

Percentage of All Grade 6 Students At or Above the Provincial Standard



The Frazer Institute's Report Card on Ontario's Elementary Schools, for example, uses nine academic indicators based on the provincial assessment program.[37] These include average levels of achievement in reading, writing and mathematics in the Ontario provincial assessment, gender differences in performance and percentage of students not meeting the provincial standard. Figure 16 below provides an example of a Frazer Institute report card on the same Toronto elementary school described in Figure 15. The report includes an overall grade, colour coded on a traffic-signal system, as well as the average grade level of achievement on a four-point scale.

Figure 16. Frazer Institute: Toronto elementary school

2017-18 Rank	**2210/3046**	**FI Rating** 5.1/10
Rank in the most recent five years	**n/a**	

School Information	
Gr 6 enrollment	**13**
ESL (%)	**7.7**
Special needs (%)	**23.1**
Parents' average income ($)	**n/a**
Actual rating vs. predicted based on parents' avg. inc.	**n/a**

Academic Performance	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Trend
Gr 3 avg. level: Reading	2.3	n/a	2.8	n/a	2.8	n/a
Gr 3 avg. level: Writing	2.6	n/a	2.8	n/a	2.8	n/a
Gr 3 avg. level: Math	2.4	n/a	2.6	n/a	2.2	n/a
Gr 6 avg. level: Reading	2.7	n/a	3.0	n/a	2.8	n/a
Gr 6 avg. level: Writing	2.8	n/a	3.0	n/a	2.9	n/a
Gr 6 avg. level: Math	2.6	n/a	2.6	n/a	2.3	n/a
Gender gap (level): Reading	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Gender gap (level): Math	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Tests below standard (%)	38.5	n/a	26.9	n/a	36.3	n/a
Tests not written (%)	5.9	n/a	6.1	n/a	10.5	n/a
Overall rating out of 10	**4.3**	**n/a**	**6.3**	**n/a**	**5.1**	**n/a**

[37] https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/ontario-elementary-school-rankings-2019-12659.pdf

UNITED KINGDOM

The UK Government publishes school-level student achievement data for all state-maintained primary and secondary schools in England. Neither Scotland, Wales nor Northern Ireland publish detailed school-level results for primary schools – although some data are available for both Scotland and Wales.

Scotland publishes the proportion of students achieving the Curriculum for Excellence Level relevant to their stage of schooling in decile bands for each school and test domain – for example 70%-<80% in Primary 4, in English writing.[38] Individual student scores are based on teachers' judgements. The broad bands of performance provide some indication of school-level student achievement but are not amenable to the production of school league tables. Scottish National Standardised Assessments, first introduced in 2017, are not publicly available on a school-by-school basis.[39]

In Wales, publication of school-level data at Foundation, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 has been withdrawn from 2017-18. The Welsh Government has made these changes on the grounds that publication of data has narrowed curriculum choice, encouraged competition rather than collaboration between schools and had an unnecessary impact on the workload of teachers and others without benefit for learners.[40] The school inspection system will, however continue, with public grading of schools according to the level of external support and guidance they need. The news site *Wales Online* provides a searchable colour-coded database using these grades, with schools rated green, yellow, orange or red, based on the amount of support they need.[41]

The primary school data displays for England are relatively simple, containing bar graphs and percentages of students achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics, the proportion achieving at a higher standard, average scores in reading and mathematics, and a measure of progress (growth in student score from one Key Stage test to the next) in reading, writing and mathematics. In addition, schools are rated and colour-coded for progress in each test domain (Figure 17). [42]

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[38] See the publicly searchable website: https://public.tableau.com/profile/sg.eas.learninganalysis#!/vizhome/AchievementofCurriculumforExcellenceCfELevels-Dashboard/Dashboard1

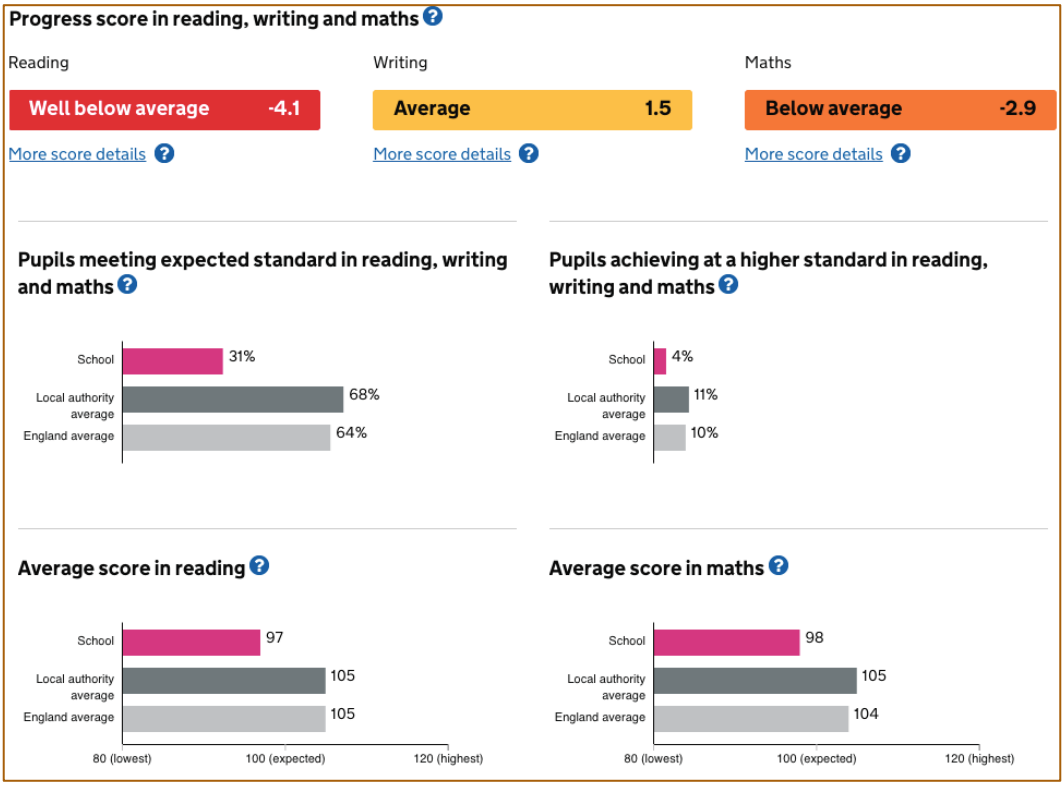
[39] https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/15550882.school-league-table-fears-quashed-as-john-swinney-rules-out-collection-of-detailed-pupil-test-data/

[40] https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-02/draft-evaluation-and-improvement-accountability-arrangements-for-wales.pdf

[41] https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/education/school-colour-codes-2019-wales-15754205

[42] https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/%20

Figure 17. England: Department for Education primary school display



Data displays for secondary school achievement have used a variety of measures over the last 25 or so years. Initially, only student achievement data were reported (the percentage of students achieving five or more good GCSEs). In 2002 a measure of school impact was added. Called "national median line value-added", this was an estimate of how much better students achieved than was predicted by their Year 6 test achievement.

In 2006, following criticism that this failed to take account of student socio-educational characteristics, the impact measure was changed to "contextual value-added". This statistically complex process based on multi-level modelling was replaced in 2011, on the basis of criticism that it was too hard for the public to understand and that it reinforced low aspirations of disadvantaged students. Contextual value-added was replaced by a new measure called "Expected Progress" – a measure of gain rather than value-added. Expected progress measured the proportion of students who achieve the expected growth, given their Key Stage 2 scores. In 2016, Expected Progress was replaced by "Progress 8", a measure of gain across eight subjects including English and mathematics, and the attainment measure was replaced by "Attainment 8".[43]

Figure 18 shows school level performance data for a secondary school in the north of England. Achievement (Attainment 8) is compared with local authority and national averages. Impact (Progress 8) is rated as Average and colour-coded amber.

[43] Leckie, G., & Goldstein, H. (2017). The evolution of school league tables in England 1992-2016: Contextual value-added, expected progress' and 'progress 8'. *British Educational Research Journal, 43*(2), 193-212. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3264

Because these school-level data are freely available on the Department for Education website they can be in arranged in league tables produced by third parties such newspapers. Figure 19 shows a simple, searchable league table provided by *The Telegraph* newspaper. It includes an achievement measure (9-4 grade %), an impact measure (Progress 8) and the school grade provided by Ofstead, the national inspection agency.

Figure 18. England: Department for Education secondary school report

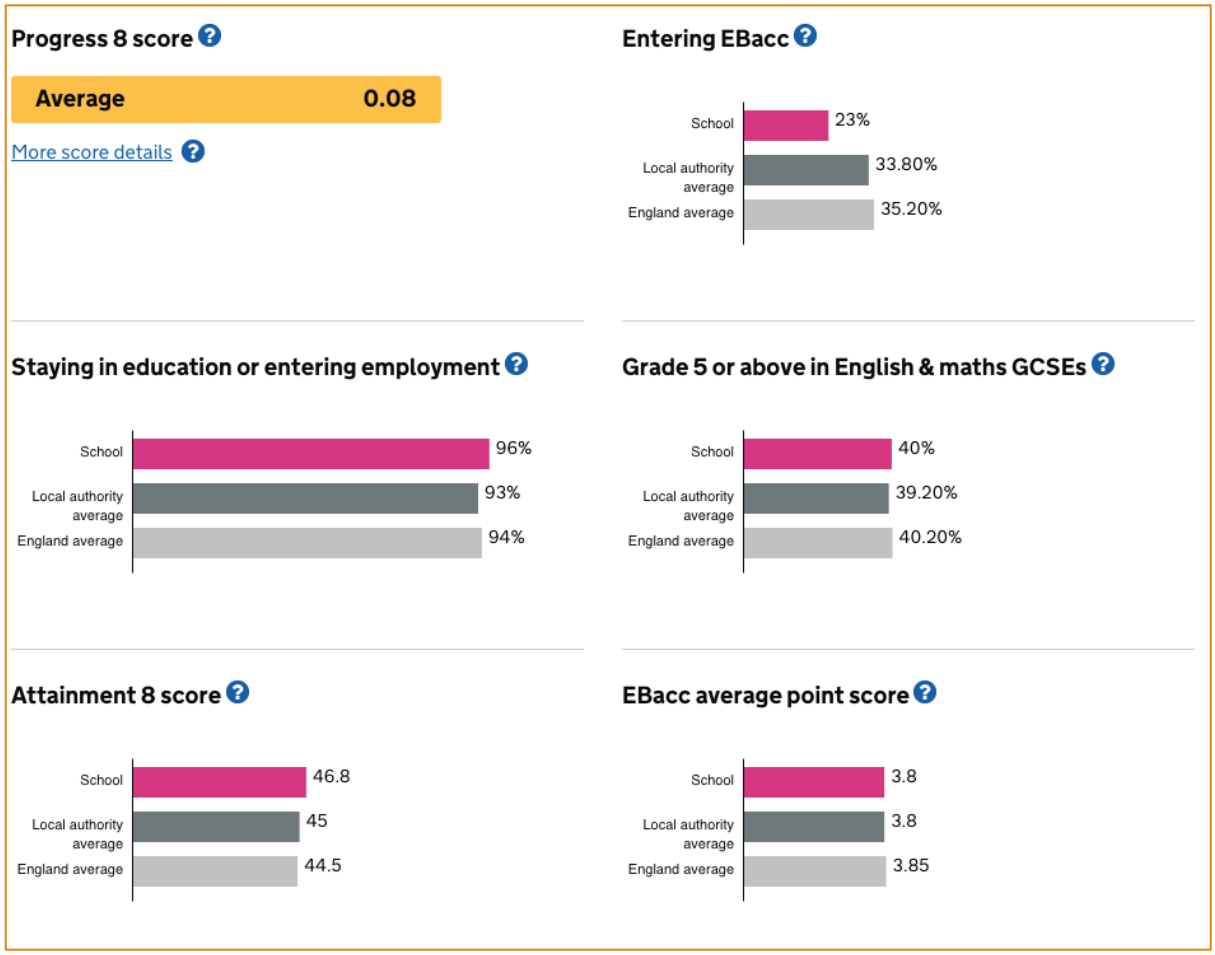


Figure 19. England: The Telegraph secondary school league table

Top 100 schools for GCSE results, 2018

School	9-4 grade (%)	Progress 8	Ofsted
Queen Elizabeth's School, Barnet, Barnet	100	1.22	Outstanding
Colchester County High School for Girls, Colchester	100	1.22	Outstanding
Nonsuch High School for Girls, Sutton	100	1.21	Good
Beaconsfield High School, Beaconsfield	100	1.21	Outstanding
Kendrick School, Reading	100	1.18	Outstanding

SUMMARY

Across the Australian and international examples canvassed in this paper there is variation on five broad dimensions: public availability of data; measures of achievement; measures of impact; performance indicators; and availability of third-party websites.

PUBLIC AVAILABILITY OF DATA

School-level student achievement data are available on publicly searchable websites in seven of the nine international jurisdictions described in this report. Public access is required by law in the United States and is available from government websites in Singapore and about half of the Canadian provinces. Public access is restricted in Hong Kong. Scotland has only recently introduced national standardised tests and does not publish school-level summaries. New Zealand has recently withdrawn its national assessment program and Wales has discontinued publication of its national assessment data.

In Australia, school-level student achievement data are available for all schools through the *My School* website. Although the Scout system used in NSW and ACT schools is not publicly available, the underlying NAPLAN data are available through *My School*. The pattern of available data is summarised in Figure 20, where an orange dot signifies that the data are publicly available in that jurisdiction and a black dot indicates that these data are available to schools through school-system data analytics platforms (with the NSW Scout system used as an example of what is available through jurisdictional systems).[44]

Figure 20. Availability of school-level student achievement data

	SG	HK	TN	CA	AZ	NYC	ON	ENG	NZ	AU	NSW
1. **DATA** Public website	●		●	●	●	●	●	●		●	

MEASURES OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Almost all of the jurisdictions considered here publish school-level proportions of students achieving state, province or territory benchmarks (Figure 21). England provides average as well as benchmark scores and Singapore provides the upper and lower score in each school as well as the median score. New Zealand does not have a national assessment program until the end of secondary schooling and Hong Kong publishes the territory-wide rather than school-level proportion reaching the benchmark.

Several jurisdictions publish comparisons of school-level data over time. The California School Dashboard and Arizona School Report Card show the increase or decrease from the previous year.

[44] The contractions in the table are SG (Singapore), HK (Hong Kong), ON (Ontario, Canada), ENG (England), CA (California), AZ (Arizona), NYC (New York City), NZ (New Zealand), AU (*My School*) and NSW (NSW/ACT Scout data analytics platform).

The Ontario EQAQ data displays show the proportion reaching a similar standard for each of the last three years. England provides school progress scores over a three-year interval and compares progress scores with local authority and national school progress scores. The most comprehensive international display of time series information is the New York City Performance dashboard. It shows the proportion of students in each school achieving the benchmark over the last the four years, as well as and colour-coded differences from similar schools, the city and the state over four years.

Most of the US jurisdictions highlight differences in performance among equity groups. The Tennessee system's detailed reports provide school-level benchmark scores disaggregated by student race, socio-economic status, language background and disability status. The California system links fire-hazard colours to the performance of students in 12 equity groups. In Arizona the proportion of students at each of four proficiency levels is shown by gender, race, language background, socio-economic status and special education status.

My School's publication of school-level achievement data is more comprehensive than any of the international jurisdictions considered here. It publishes average student achievement in numbers, percentages of students in bands, average achievement over a decade, student gain from one NAPLAN assessment to the next and compares schools with statistically similar schools using numbers and colour codes. *My School* provides the percentage of Indigenous students, the percentage with a language background other than English and the percentage of students in each quartile of socio-educational advantage but does not disaggregate achievement by the equity categories. The Scout tool available to schools in NSW and the ACT includes all of the data available in as well as a more comprehensive graphic and search capacity and links to individual student achievement.

Figure 21. School-level measures of student achievement

	SG	HK	TN	CA	AZ	NYC	ON	ENG	NZ	AU	NSW
2. ACHIEVEMENT											
Average	●							●		●	●
Band / benchmark	●		●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●
Over time				●	●	●	●	●		●	●
Subgroups			●	●	●	●					●

MEASURES OF IMPACT

Because there is a social gradient of achievement in every jurisdiction, with achievement varying by student ethnicity, language background and socio-economic status, school systems have long been interested in measures of impact that account for this social gradient. Three broad procedures for measuring the impact of schools on student achievement may be distinguished: value added, student gain and statistically similar groups (Figure 22).

Figure 22. School-level measures of impact

	SG	HK	TN	CA	AZ	NYC	ON	ENG	NZ	AU	NSW
3. IMPACT											
Value-added			●								
Gain					●			●		●	●
Similar schools / similar students						●				●	●

Value-added measures use statistical procedures that attempt to separate out or hold constant the impact of demographics on achievement. Tennessee has been publishing value-added scores for 20 years[45] and is the only jurisdiction among those considered here using value-added calculations to measure impact. The current Tennessee School Report Card includes a value-added score on a 0-4 scale called Student Academic Growth.

Gain scores are published in Arizona and England, where they have recently replaced value-added scores. The gain measure for primary schools in England is based on the proportion of students achieving at a higher standard than expected from one Key Stage assessment to the next. Progress 8, the secondary school measure, computes gain across eight subjects compared with students with similar starting points in Key Stage 2 assessments. Arizona uses a points-based indicator of growth from year-to-year in test scores as well as growth of students towards annual achievement targets.

Similar-student comparisons are made among the 1,700 public elementary schools in the New York City public school system. The procedure for identifying the comparison group is based on matching each student in a school with the 50 most similar students in terms of prior test results and demographics.[46] These students form a system-wide comparison group, which are then used to calculate a school comparison group. Each school is then compared with its student comparison group over time and using colour-coding to show whether average proficiency levels are far above, above, below or far below the expected score.

My School (and Scout) uses two of these three impact procedures: gain and similar schools. Student Gain shows the average change in results for students who have taken consecutive NAPLAN tests in the same school. This is a statistically simpler procedure than those used in England and Arizona, both of which have procedures for considering gain against expected levels of achievement. Statistically similar school comparisons on the *My School* website are calculated differently than the NYC comparison schools, involving comparisons with a group of 60 Australian schools with the closest ICSEA score rather than aggregating up from individual student previous scores and demographic characteristics.

[45] https://tvaas.sas.com/welcome.html?as=c
[46] https://infohub.nyced.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/201617educatorguideems11152017.pdf?sfvrsn=90000a1b_4

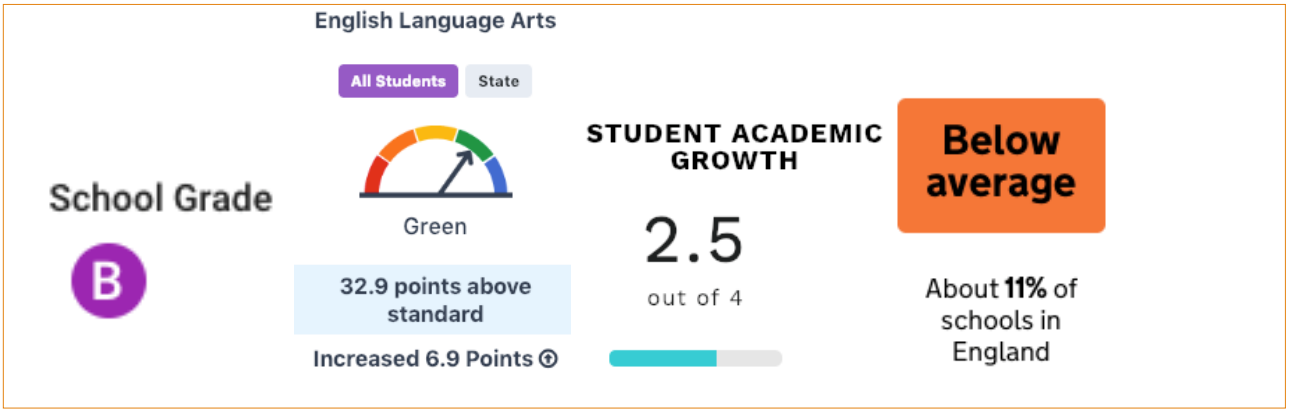
INDICATORS OF ACHIEVEMENT AND IMPACT

In addition to reporting scores for achievement and calculations of impact, some jurisdictions provide numbers, grades or ratings designed to summarise school performance (Figure 23 and Figure 24).

Figure 23. Indicators of achievement and impact

	SG	HK	TN	CA	AZ	NYC	ON	ENG	NZ	AU	NSW
4. INDICATORS											
Achievement			●		●						
Impact			●	●	●			●			

Figure 24. Performance indicator graphics



The NYC dashboard provides a great deal of information about achievement, over time and compared with schools working with similar students. The comparison data are colour-coded to assist in interpretation, but there is no overall grade or ranking to summarise school performance. The England school reports award a one of five colour-coded grades for progress ranging from red for “Well below average” to dark green for “Well above average”. In Tennessee, a point score on a 0-4 scale summarises the academic achievement and value-added school impact. The California dashboard allocates schools to one of five groups in English language arts and in mathematics, using a composite performance indicator represented by a fire hazard icon. Arizona awards an overall letter grade, based on the number of points awarded for proficiency and growth and acceleration readiness.

LEAGUE TABLES

In almost every jurisdiction considered here, irrespective of government decisions about whether or not to make school-level performance data readily available to members of the public, third party organisations have published league tables on websites (Figure 25). In some cases, jurisdictions publish data in ways that makes school comparisons easy. There is ready access to school-level achievement data on report cards in every US state as a result of the ESSA Act (2015). In the UK, 1991-2018 results and ratings for England are available as a downloadable table or searchable index from the gov.uk website. Singapore, about half of the Canadian provincial governments and Australia provide such data in easily accessible public forms. In New Zealand school league tables are published by national assessment authority on the basis of school leaving results[47], but there are no whole-population measures for earlier years of school and no league tables for primary and junior secondary years.

Figure 25. League tables

	SG	HK	TN	CA	AZ	NYC	ON	ENG	NZ	AU	NSW
5. LEAGUE TABLES	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	

In jurisdictions where data are not published, third parties fill the gap. In Canada, the Frazer Institute publishes school level academic results and summary ratings for provinces that make data easily accessible and those that do not. Hong Kong does not make-school level achievement data available, so the third-party ranking system uses proxy indicators such as competitiveness of entry to schools.

And in jurisdictions that do publish data, third-party websites such as SchoolDigger, GreatSchools and Niche produce simplified ranking and rating systems. Using different ranking strategies these league tables produce quite different results. The same Upper West Side elementary school that was rated about average by SchoolDigger and well above average by Niche (B+) and GreatSchools (7/10).

Conclusions

School-level NAPLAN data have been published in Australia for more than a decade. From the beginning, consistent with the ACARA Act, both achievement data and similar-schools based comparisons of school impact have been available.

Compared with the data available on school-level achievement in similar whole-cohort assessments in other jurisdictions, the material published on the *My School* website is comprehensive. All of the jurisdictions except New Zealand publish the proportion of students achieving benchmarks or bands and a few also publish average scores. No other jurisdiction publishes bands, averages and time series data. Most publish data about achievement over time. About half of the jurisdictions also

[47] https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/studying-in-new-zealand/secondary-school-and-ncea/find-information-about-a-school/secondary-school-statistics/

publish estimates of the impact of schools on achievement. Two of the jurisdictions described in this report use gain measures, one uses value-added and one uses a similar student index. *My School* is the only performance website that uses two estimates of impact: student gain and similar school comparisons.

This diversity of approaches to reporting reflects local circumstances and approaches to school accountability, rather than any obvious relationship between transparency and educational outcomes. Among jurisdictions with typically higher school performance than Australia, Singapore has high levels of transparency and Hong Kong has low levels of transparency. Within nations with broadly similar school achievement, such as the United Kingdom, England has high levels of transparency and Scotland and wales have low levels of school-level transparency of achievement data.

Although *My School* is the most comprehensive of the government reporting systems considered in this review, it is less comprehensive than systems that have been developed by Australian school systems in the decade since *My School* was launched.

The use of colour-coding, number or letter grades or graphics to aid interpretation is common among the jurisdictions. In many cases these are composite ratings: average, B+ or amber. *My School* uses colour coding to indicate distance from the expected score but does not summarise overall performance in a single number, grade or colour.

Finally, league tables are published almost everywhere. Among the jurisdictions considered in this environmental scan, New Zealand is the only exception; there are no primary or lower-secondary school league tables but there are league tables based on senior secondary school public examinations. Elsewhere, even in jurisdictions that do not make available school-level achievement data, third-party league tables have emerged.

CHAPTER 2: SCHOOL COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

OVERVIEW

The school community consultation phase of this review involved visits to a purposive sample of schools. To guide selection of the schools, ACARA provided a list of potential schools generated by the following selection method:

1. Three sets of student gain scores were computed for numeracy and reading for each of the year level ranges:
   - School gain;
   - School gain compared with the gain of students with the same starting point; and
   - School gain compared with the gain of schools with similar ICSEAs.
2. Schools were identified where students' mean gain exceeded the national average gain by more than one standard deviation in all three types of school gain.
3. To limit random year-to-year fluctuation, schools were eliminated if the percentage tested in the two years was lower than 70%, and the number of students tested in the two years was fewer than 15.
4. In addition, a small group of schools was identified on the basis of the largest starting score and similar-schools gains for each domain, cohort and ICSEA category.
5. If no schools in a particular state had been identified by Steps 1-4, a small group of schools with the highest starting score and similar school gains was identified.

Forty-five schools were initially identified by this procedure. A purposive sample of ten schools was than selected to represent all states and territories and all school sectors, and a range of school ICSEA scores, geographical locations, percentage of Indigenous students, percentage of students with language backgrounds other than English, and school sizes. As several schools on the first potential school list were unable to participate, an additional group of eight potential replacement schools was also identified.

Three of the schools were chosen for gains in the Year 7 to Year 9 cohort and seven were chosen for gains in the Year 3 to Year 5 cohort. Year 5-7 gains were not considered because Year 5 and Year 7 assessments are often undertaken in separate schools.

The final sample of ten schools has the following characteristics:

- Two schools from NSW and Victoria and one from each other state and territory (Figure 1).
- Six schools located in major cities, three outer regional and one inner regional (Figure 2).
- Eight government schools, one Catholic school and one independent school (Figure 3).
- Schools ranging in size from 156 to 850 students.
- ICSEA scores ranging between 943 and 1150 with a mean of 1002 (Figure 4).
- Percentage of students with language backgrounds other than English ranging from 0% to 96% (Figure 5).
- Percentage of Indigenous students ranging from 0% to 21% (Figure 6).

Characteristics of the sample schools are summarised below.

Figure 26: Sample schools, by jurisdiction

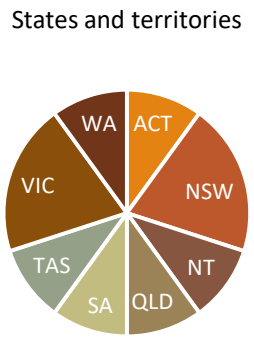


Figure 27: Sample school ICSEA scores

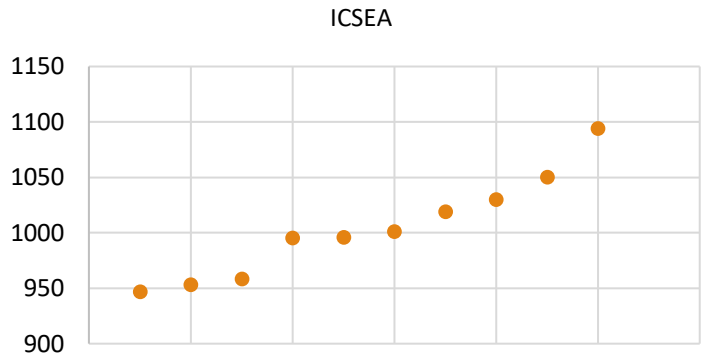


Figure 28: Sample school locations, by category

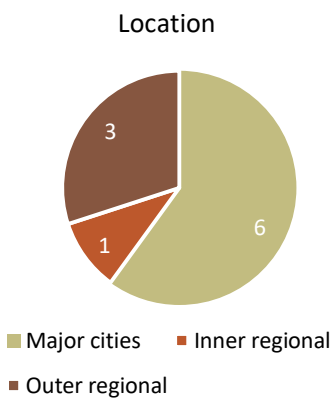


Figure 29: Percentage of Indigenous students in sample schools

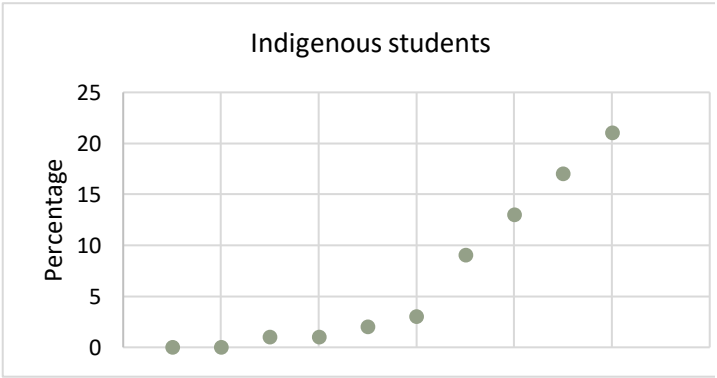


Figure 30: Sample school locations, by school sector

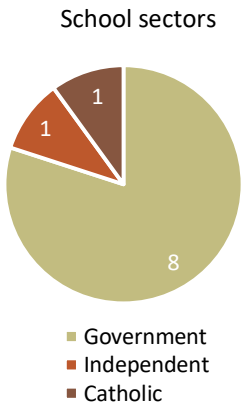
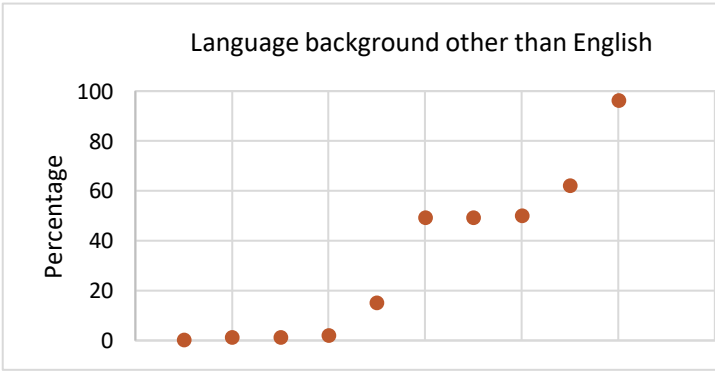


Figure 31: Percentage of students with language backgrounds other than English



METHOD

The school community consultation phase of the project was conducted in Term 4, 2018 and Term 1, 2019.

In each sample school, four to six separate focus group interviews have been conducted. At the end of each focus group, participants completed a short (1-2 page) questionnaire. The questionnaires include a set of Likert rating scales and an opportunity to write a free-form qualitative response.

Across the focus groups, participants were asked to comment on four issues regarding My School and NAPLAN:

1. The extent to which current presentation of NAPLAN data to schools and their communities supports their understanding of student progress and achievement.
2. Perceptions of NAPLAN reporting and My School data and the extent to which they meet reasonable public accountability and transparency expectations and requirements, including considering any misinterpretation and misuse of information and subsequent consequences.
3. How teachers and school leaders use NAPLAN and its results and My School data to inform teaching practice.
4. How teachers and school leaders communicate NAPLAN results and My School data to students and parents.

Qualitative field notes were taken during each focus group and supplemented by participants' write-in comments on the survey form.

Quantitative data from each school were pooled, with separate analyses undertaken for school leaders, teachers, students and parents.

Ten school visits were undertaken: six public primary schools, a Catholic primary, a public middle school, a public Kindergarten to Year 12 school and an independent Kindergarten to Year 12 school. A total of 208 school community members have participated in focus group interviews: 29 school leaders, 51 teachers, 37 parents and 91 students.

SCHOOL COMMUNITY VIEWS

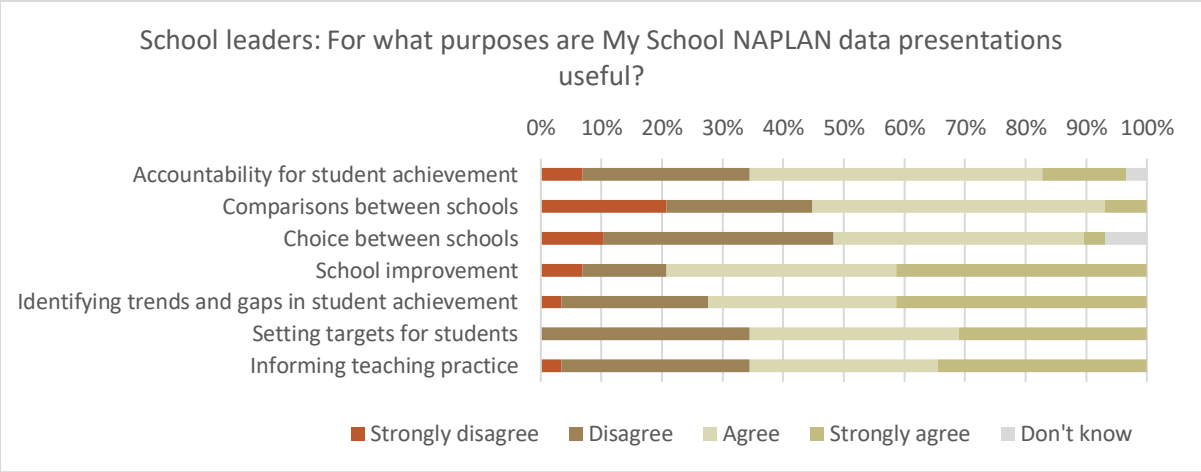
SCHOOL LEADERS

School leaders participating in the focus groups discussed a number of topics: the purposes served by the 2018 *My School* NAPLAN data presentations, the use of *My School* and other alternatives for improving learning, the value of particular *My School* presentations, the use of colour-coding and confidence intervals on the graphs and potential for negative uses of NAPLAN data.

Purposes for using *My School* NAPLAN data

The NAPLAN data available on the *My School* website serves a variety of potential purposes: accountability, comparison and choice between schools and school improvement. School leaders' responses appear in Figure 32.

Figure 32: School leaders: Purposes for *My School* NAPLAN data presentations



There was very strong support for using the *My School* NAPLAN data presentations to inform school improvement (79% agreed or strongly agreed) and strong support from school leaders for using them for accountability for student achievement (62% agreed or strongly agreed). School leaders' comments included:

> "NAPLAN is essential for school improvement and resource allocation."
>
> "NAPLAN is all we've got that compares us with the rest of the country."
>
> "We look at NAPLAN results as a staff. When (the principal) first arrived, teachers were defensive and dismissive. Now they find that it informs planning and practice. They find it motivating. We have created a culture of whole-school accountability for kids' reading achievement."

School leaders generally agreed that these data presentations were useful in identifying trends and gaps in student achievement (72% agreed or strongly agreed), informing teaching practice (66% agreed or strongly agreed) and setting targets for students (66% agreed or strongly agreed).

> "NAPLAN is used for whole-school planning. It lets us know whether we have taught things and whether children have learned them."
>
> "NAPLAN helps us target teaching. We've done extra work on spelling after poor spelling results."
>
> "Data is useful to identify common errors made, highlighting focus areas for the future."
>
> "Comparisons with like schools very helpful for setting targets for school improvement
>
> "We've triangulated NAPLAN with PAT, A-E and what they are doing in class."
>
> The data provides a useful moderation or cross-checking tool against our own in-house data sets, rather than a driver of school strategic direction.

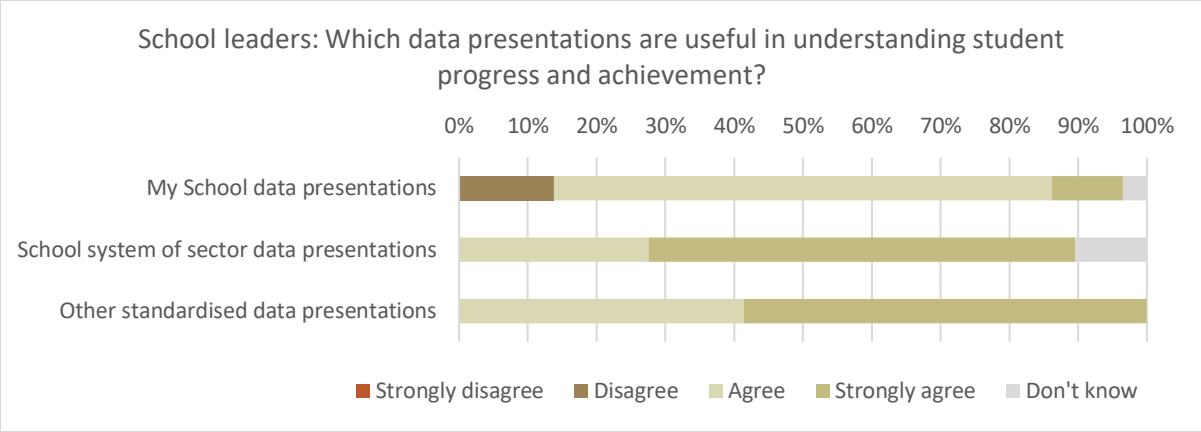
School leaders generally did not agree that the *My School* NAPLAN data presentations were useful for guiding families' choice of schools (45% agree or strongly agree) or making comparisons between schools (55% agree or strongly agree). As one school leader said:

> "The comparison between schools is the least useful, and potentially undermining, use of NAPLAN data within a schooling system."

My School and other standardised assessment dashboards

My School is the authoritative national source of information on school-level student achievement data. Internally, schools across the country have access to a variety of other dashboards and data visualisation systems which allow more fine-grained student-level data analysis and often combine achievement data with other data such as school attendance and parent, teacher and student satisfaction surveys. In addition, schools make substantial use of other standardised student achievement data. All ten of the sample schools visited have used ACER's Progressive Achievement Tests. School leaders' views on the relative usefulness of these alternatives are displayed in Figure 33.

Figure 33: School leaders: Understanding student progress and achievement



Most school leaders (72%) agreed that the *My School* NAPLAN data presentations were useful in understanding student progress and achievement and a further 10% strongly agreed. Typically, the school sector or school-based dashboard analyses on NAPLAN data were much more strongly supported (28% agreed and 62% strongly agreed). All school leaders agreed (41%) or strongly agreed (59%) that other standardised assessment data presentations such as PAT-R and PAT Maths were useful in understanding student progress and achievement.

> "OneSchool has the most useful data representations for use at a school level as we use them to look deeply at the data to inform teaching practice, identify trends (beyond NMS, MSS and Upper two bands) in regards to curriculum areas and learning needs of students. The triangulation of this data in OneSchool to A-E reporting is useful in data discussions to determine additional areas of learning to clarify teaching not identified/assessed in NAPLAN e.g. justifying opinions in analytical ways."

> "We are fortunate to work at a school where data is seen in context and used along with many other resources to inform our teaching. Our job is stressful enough and at other schools would potentially be very stressful."

> "We use the RAAD breakdown by question, looking at kids who got each one correct. We looked at that stuff in staff meetings. Looking for what the kids are missing. We are focusing on writing this year."

> "The use of Scout as a tool to assess data and to analyse student performance, in particular growth, is useful."

> "D of E school improvement dashboard is useful for tracking and monitoring student progress and identifying strategic directions – whole site improvement planning."

> "Target setting is based on PAT R and M, not NAPLAN."

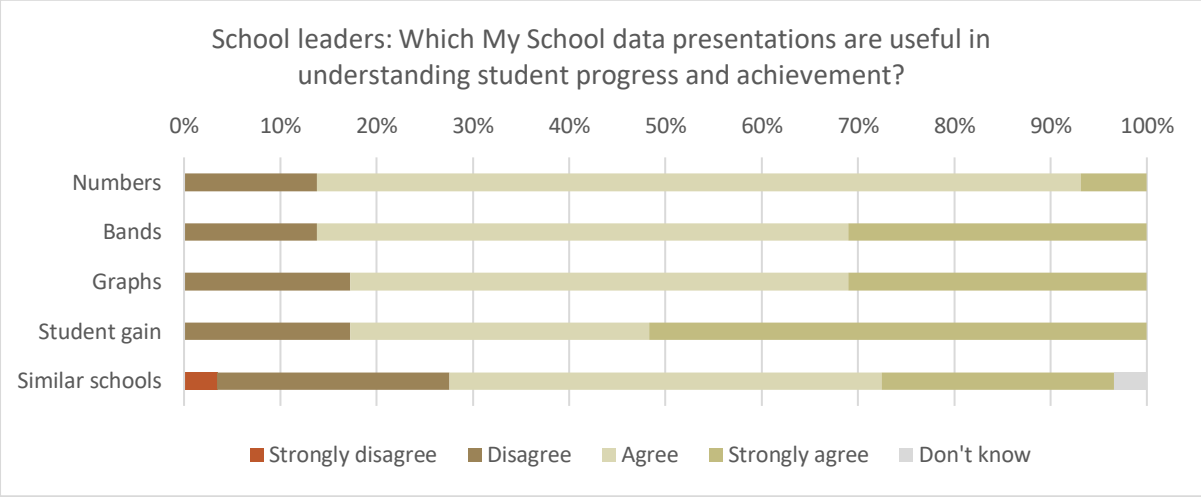
> "We don't rely heavily on NAPLAN. It usually backs up what we have seen. We use NAPLAN to triangulate with PAT and school tests."

> "We use PAT for item level analysis, grouping, and planning curriculum emphasis."

Specific *My School* NAPLAN pages

Most school leaders regarded all of *My School* NAPLAN data pages as useful (see Figure 3). More than 80% agreed or strongly agreed that the Numbers, Bands, Graphs and Student Gain pages were useful for this purpose (Figure 34). The Bands, Graphs and Student Gain pages were the most strongly supported (Bands 31% strongly agree; Graphs 31% strongly agree; Student Gain 52% strongly agree). There was less support for the Similar Schools display, with 45% agreeing that it was useful and a further 24% strongly agreeing that it was useful.

Figure 34: School leaders: *My School* data presentations



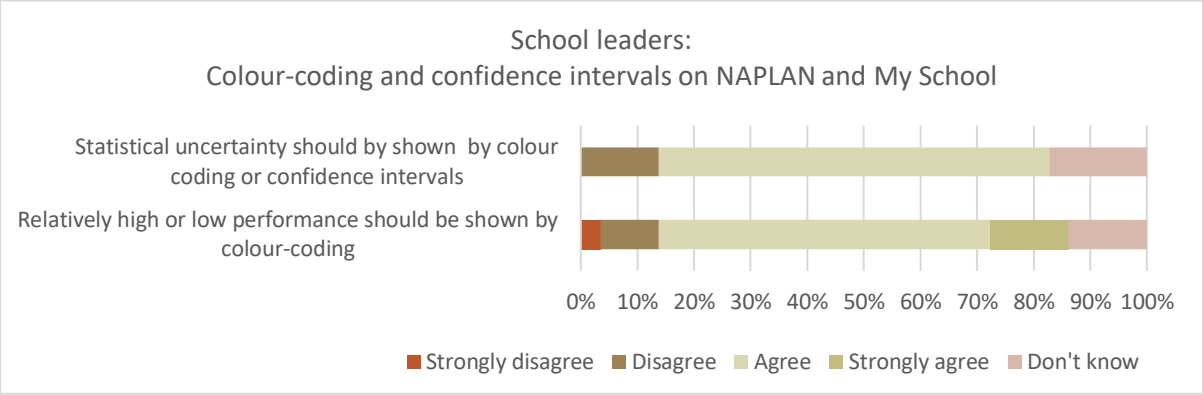
Colour-coding and representation of measurement uncertainty

Colour-coding is used on the *My School* Numbers page to compare the selected school with schools with similar students, or all Australian students. Average student achievement in the selected school is colour coded green for “substantially above”, light green “above”, white for “close to”, pink for “below” or red for “substantially below” scores in schools with similar students, or all Australian students. Similar colour-coding is used on the Graphs page and the Similar Schools page.

The measurement uncertainty contained in every estimate of average or median achievement is shown by a vertical line above and below the average to represent the margin of error at 90% confidence intervals for the selected school and schools with similar students. These confidence interval ‘whiskers’ appear on both the Graphs and Student Gain pages.

School leaders were also asked to comment on the use of colour-coding and the representation of measurement uncertainty on the graphs (see Figure 35).

Figure 35: School leaders: Colour-coding and confidence intervals



Most school leaders agreed that colour-coding of similar schools was useful (59% agreed; 14% strongly agreed), but there were some reservations about the way that the colour codes classified schools:

> "Colour coding of NAPLAN is necessary for accountability to the community. We use the data completely differently."
>
> "I like the colours because at a quick glance I can see what's happening. I don't agree that it brings schools down."
>
> "Don't much like the colours but they focus attention."

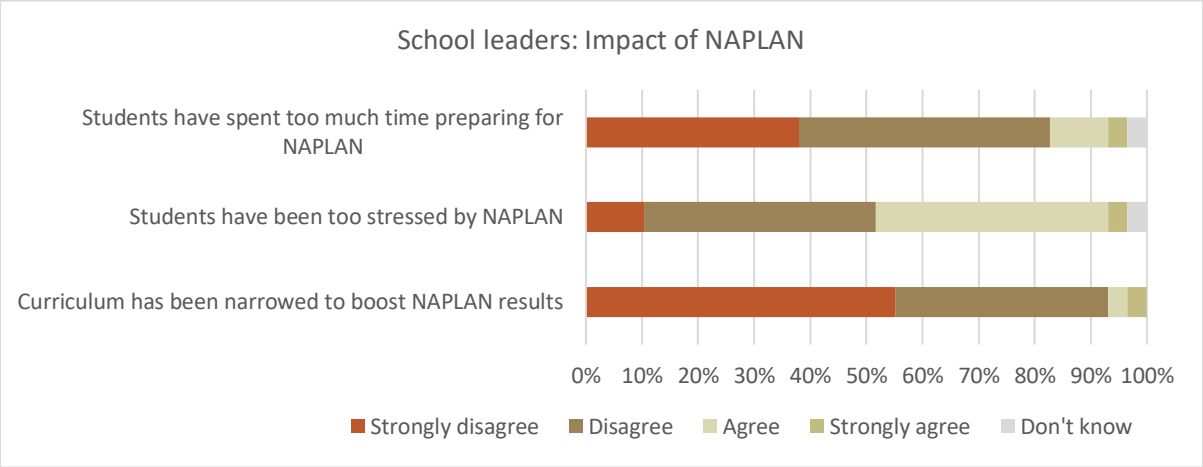
Most school leaders (69%) also agreed that confidence intervals should be used on the Graphs and Student Gain pages.

> "NAPLAN is a point in time, so confidence intervals should be shown."
>
> "There would be no loss in dropping off box plots because teachers and parents don't understand them."

Unintended or negative consequences

There has been substantial public comment over the years on the unintended or negative consequences of publishing school-level achievement data on the *My School* website, as well as other derivative presentations that appear on the internet and in newspaper league tables in some jurisdictions. It has also been argued that the pressure on schools to do well in NAPLAN may have led to narrowing the school curriculum, teaching to the test or putting students under unnecessary pressure. School leaders' views on these issues are summarised in Figure 36.

Figure 36: School leaders: Impact of NAPLAN



Few school leaders in sample schools agreed that the curriculum had been narrowed in their school in an effort to boost NAPLAN results. Almost all either disagreed (38%) or strongly disagreed (55%) that this had occurred. None of the sample school leaders agreed that there had been narrowing of the curriculum in their school, but some had heard of it happening in other schools:

> "Definitely has not led to narrowing the school curriculum. If you teach well, you will do well in NAPLAN."
>
> "We have broadened the school focus on the arts, and there is a whole-school focus on literacy. We have common processes, a literacy block, common language. The focus is on pedagogy."
>
> "No way. Not a big focus on the test. Focus is on teaching and learning then over time kids will do well on things like NAPLAN."
>
> "Staff didn't make the connection between NAPLAN and he Australian Curriculum. We're not teaching to the test, we're teaching the curriculum in a focused and methodical way. So, we're seeing improvement in both NAPLAN and PAT."

School leaders did agree, however, that their schools had focused within the curriculum on areas of weakness:

> "NAPLAN allowed us to see weaknesses, but now we look more deeply at each cohort using PAT."
>
> "No, we have focussed on writing. We've looked at the data, focused, and built the capacity of teachers."
>
> "Some reshuffling of teaching content to ensure that students have been taught all the text types."
>
> "Some classroom writing tasks that echo NAPLAN writing tasks, but these are all good bread and butter things to teach."
>
> "Higher rotation of mathematics strands, which is a good thing."
>
> "Has not led to the narrowing of the curriculum here, but I know of schools where it has."

Few school leaders in sample schools agreed that students had spent too much time preparing for NAPLAN tests. Almost all either disagreed (45%) or strongly disagreed (38%) that this had occurred. School leaders reported that there was little NAPLAN test preparation beyond familiarising students with test formats and timed tests. Some had heard of higher levels of test preparation in other schools:

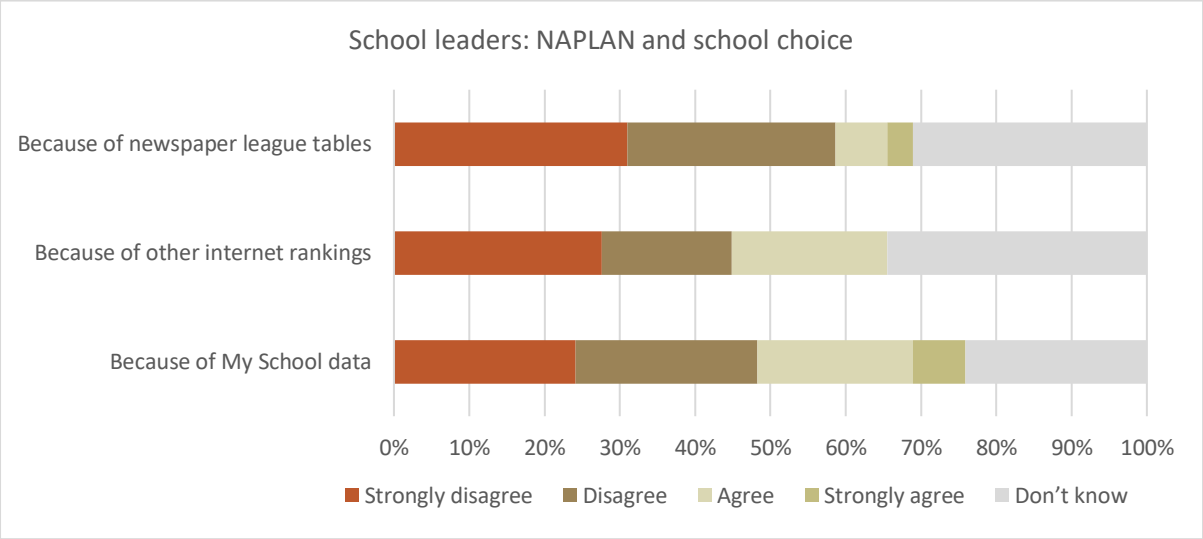
> "We do some practice, e.g. in use of timed tests which they will also encounter at secondary school and university."
>
> "We spend more time on how to read questions, test skills in Year 3. It's a few hours over all."
>
> "Preparing them for the future as learners requires teaching them how to answer multiple choice questions."
>
> "Not in this, however yes at other schools I have worked at."

About half of school leaders agreed or strongly agreed that students had been too stressed about the NAPLAN tests. Many disagreed (41%) or strongly disagreed (10%) that students had been too stressed. Where they had encountered stress, they were inclined to attribute to students' personal characteristics or parental pressure, rather than the school's practices:

> "There may be some pressure from home to do well. This is not pressure about NAPLAN specifically, but general pressure to do well."
>
> "Kids who need support are those who normally need support."
>
> "Some kids are nervous little souls."
>
> "We try to make sure kids are not stressed."
>
> "One parent was concerned last year, but with an easily stressed child."
>
> "There is some stress for kids, but many are very excited to do NAPLAN."

A further area of concern has been about potential misuse or misunderstanding of school-level NAPLAN data when families are choosing schools for their children. School leaders were asked whether they had any experience of this, either through use of *My School* NAPLAN data or secondary interpretations in other internet rankings or newspaper league tables. Their responses are summarised in Figure 37.

Figure 37: School leaders: NAPLAN and school choice



School leaders in sample schools had mixed views about the impact of NAPLAN reporting on school choice. A few school leaders (10%) thought that newspaper league tables had had an impact on families choosing or leaving their school (although 31% said that they did not know).

> "The use of *My School* to create league tables in the media is disappointing, as I feel it can be negative for schools that are seen to be low performing."

A few school leaders agreed that other internet rankings had had an impact on school choice (21% agreed). The remainder disagreed (17%), strongly disagreed (28%) or did not know (34%).

Among these sources of school-level NAPLAN data, the highest level of concern was expressed about the *My School* NAPLAN displays. More than a quarter (28%) agreed or strongly agreed that families had chosen or left the school based on *My School* NAPLAN results. The remainder disagreed (24%), strongly disagreed (24%) or did not know (24%).

> "I don't like the NAPLAN results on *My School*. Lots of families from outside the boundaries want to get in and we have real estate agents calling to find out which side of the street is within the school boundary. We want kids to do as well as they can, but don't like the negative feedback because of our high performance. We get negative comments about parents paying for coaching. One principal said to me that it's just because lots of your students are Chinese."

> "Not aware of this. *My School* is never mentioned by parents."

> "Movement away from the school tends to be about bullying, children's unhappiness. Learning has never come up in these conversations."

> "A couple of interstate parents have looked at *My School* and mentioned it in emails when they have asked for a school tour."

> "Some of our teachers have moved houses because of school catchment, and they look for other things such as music and sport that you can't see from *My School*."

> "Have had one or two parents mention NAPLAN when their child was starting Prep, and one a couple of years ago who left because of NAPLAN."
>
> "This term we have had five or six new enrolments, half of whose parents had looked at NAPLAN data and mentioned it. One parent from [a nearby town] was shopping around and moved his child here, mentioning NAPLAN. None of those who left mentioned NAPLAN in exit interviews."

How NAPLAN Results are communicated

School leaders were also asked to comment on how they communicated school-level NAPLAN results to students, parents and the wider community. Some restricted their communication of NAPLAN results to reports to school councils or information sessions:

> "We report NAPLAN results to parents in school newsletters but we don't make a big fuss."
>
> "Board Report includes NAPLAN and Scout analyses."
>
> "Communicate to the Board and school community through the operational plan, which includes reference to NAPLAN."
>
> We report on NAPLAN to the P&C, both good and bad results. They talk about gains and areas for improvement."
>
> "Have held information sessions for parents but only five came the year before last and three last year, so I have stopped doing it."

A few schools, including a public and an independent school aiming to increase student numbers were more forward in their communication:

> "Do show off a bit to staff and the school board when the results are good, but we don't put it on Facebook or in the newsletter."
>
> "We put the ACARA letter everywhere! School website, Facebook, front office."
>
> "We got an ACACA high gain letter the last two years. We put this information on Facebook and in parent newsletters. This led to some conversations with parents about how well the school has done and the hard work of the teachers."

TEACHERS

Classroom teachers were asked to comment on the same issues as their school leaders: purposes served by the current *My School* NAPLAN data presentations, the use of *My School* and other alternatives for improving learning, the value of particular *My School* presentations, the use of colour-coding and confidence intervals on the graphs and potential for negative uses of NAPLAN data. Teachers' views about the usefulness of *My School* and other data presentations were broadly consistent with those of school leaders in the sample schools, but teachers were generally a little more likely to be cautious or concerned.

Purposes for using *My School* NAPLAN data

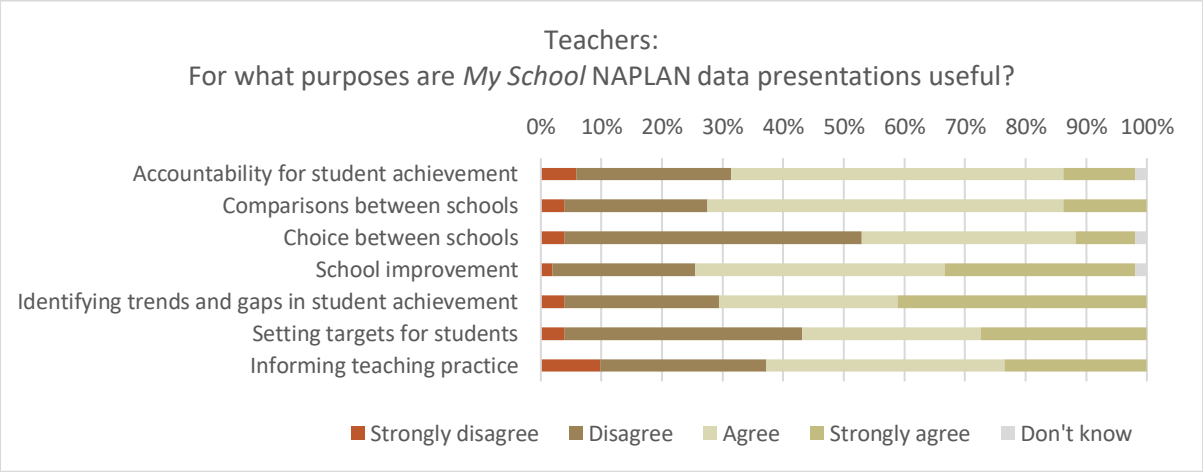
Most teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the *My School* data presentations were useful for school improvement (81% agreed or strongly agreed), Identifying trends and gaps in achievement (76% agreed or strongly agreed), making comparisons between schools (71% agreed or strongly agreed), accountability for student achievement (67% agreed or strongly agreed) and Informing teaching practice (63% agreed or strongly agreed) (see Figure 38).

> "NAPLAN has a place – to be accountable."
>
> "Yes, NAPLAN is used for target setting, particularly the number of children in the upper two bands and number moving between bands."
>
> "It assists us to work out our strategic plan and provides teachers with reasonable data to improve individual students' capacity or provide professional development for teachers."
>
> "School planning reflects NAPLAN (top two bands, percentages, milestones) We spend more time on how to read questions, test skills in Year 3. It's a few hours over all."
>
> "Have always looked at it when looking at a new school appointment."

Teachers were less likely to agree that the *My School* information was useful in setting targets for students (57% agreed or strongly agreed) or informing school choice (45% agreed or strongly agreed).

> "There needs to be standardised testing as the government needs to be held accountable and have a way of measuring student performance. The NAPLAN data does not need to be available to parents on *My School* as it promotes competition and anxiety in our students."
>
> "NAPLAN data should be made available to schools, not put on the web. Schools should not be able to compete with one another – a comment based on what I saw in another school."
>
> "School comparisons are insulting. Every teacher does a service and different levels of achievement doesn't indicate the success of a school."
>
> "The graphs that show change are far more useful for a teacher. We know where our students are and teach accordingly. I feel some parents could use comparison data to make unfair judgements about schools."
>
> "*My School* shouldn't compare schools; it should be internal to the school."

Figure 38: Teachers: Purposes for *My School* NAPLAN data presentations

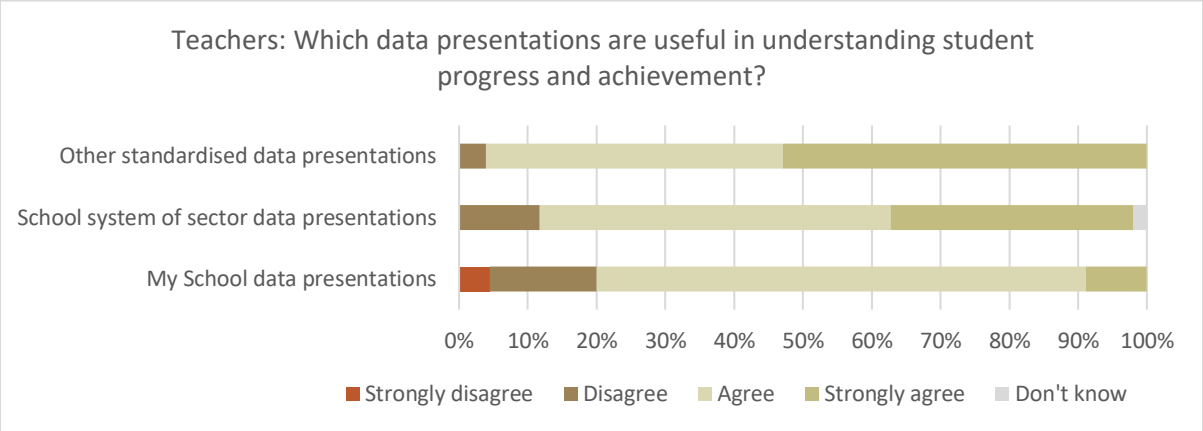


Standardised assessment dashboards

Teachers reported that they found a range of data presentations useful in understanding student progress and achievement (see Figure 39). Most found the *My School* data displays useful (*My School*: 80% agree or strongly agree); school system: (86% agree or strongly agree). Other standardised data displays such as those provided by the ACER PAT tests were almost universally regarded as useful (43% agreed; 53% strongly agreed).

> "Keen that leaders understand the data well, but I'm not likely to get that from looking at My School."
>
> "We look at Scout as a staff, but I have only looked at *My School* as a parent."
>
> "Have looked at sub-strands where we were above and below and changed teaching as a result."
>
> "There has been broad school improvement in spelling after seeing the NAPLAN results."
>
> "We use Scout in staff meetings. We have good conversations about which kids have progressed and which have not."
>
> "I don't feel NAPLAN data on *My School* is helpful to me as a teacher. However, NAPLAN data in OneSchool is used extensively."
>
> "We look at raw information from NAPLAN item by item. It's good to know what sort of things they need to know in NAPLAN for future years."
>
> "We use NAPLAN for identifying trends and gaps and priorities. Use PM benchmarks for target setting for students."
>
> "We use PAT for item level analysis, grouping, and planning curriculum emphasis."

Figure 39: Teachers: Understanding student progress and achievement?

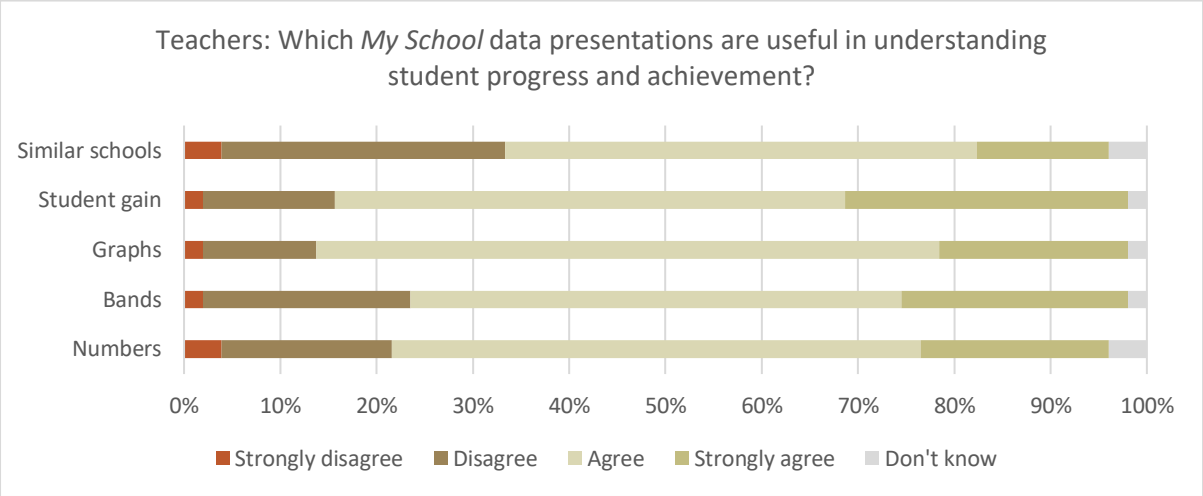


Specific *My School* NAPLAN pages

Most teachers regarded all of the *My School* data pages as useful (Figure 41). The Graphs page was the highest rated; 84% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that it was useful in understanding student progress and achievement. Student Gain (82% agreed or strongly agreed), Numbers (75% agreed or strongly agreed) and Bands (75% agreed or strongly agreed) were also widely regarded as useful. The least well-regarded data display was the Similar Schools page (49% agreed and a further 14% strongly agreed). The following comments reflect the range of teachers' views:

> "Data should represent growth or display areas that need support for a particular school and not be used to compare schools with each other."
>
> "Shouldn't be making school choice decisions solely on NAPLAN."
>
> "I like the accountability and school improvement aspects of *My School*."
>
> "Everyone's entitled to this information, so that they can compare apples with apples."
>
> "So much money spent on schools you might as well make it accountable."
>
> "I have looked at NAPLAN as a parent, as a staff member and as a job seeker writing to go where good things are happening."

Figure 40: Teachers: *My School* data presentations



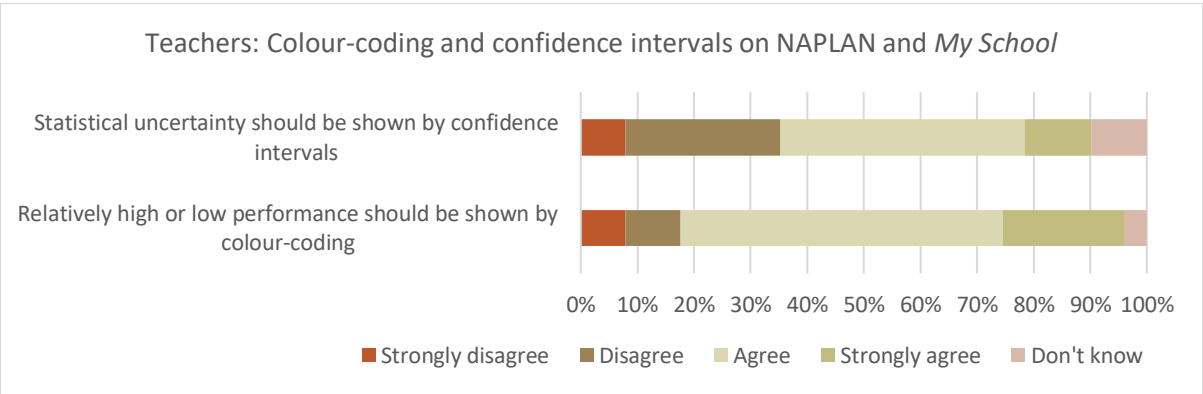
Colour-coding and representation of measurement uncertainty

As was the case with their school leaders, classroom teachers were generally supportive of colour-coding to show relative performance of school, with 78% agreeing or strongly agreeing that this was useful (Figure 41). As one teacher commented:

> "Parents in our community would find the colour coding easy to understand – they can access whole school info without having to analyse it."
>
> "Colour-coding highlights the data, helps people to read the graphs. For example, it draws attention to our Year 5 spelling."
>
> "On *My School*, colour coding makes the graphs easier to read. They are helpful because it tells us where we need to improve."

Teachers were more cautious about the use confidence intervals in the representation of measurement uncertainty. Although 55% agreed or strongly agreed, many either disagreed or did not know. Some reported that they "take no notice" of confidence intervals and "would be happy to see them deleted."

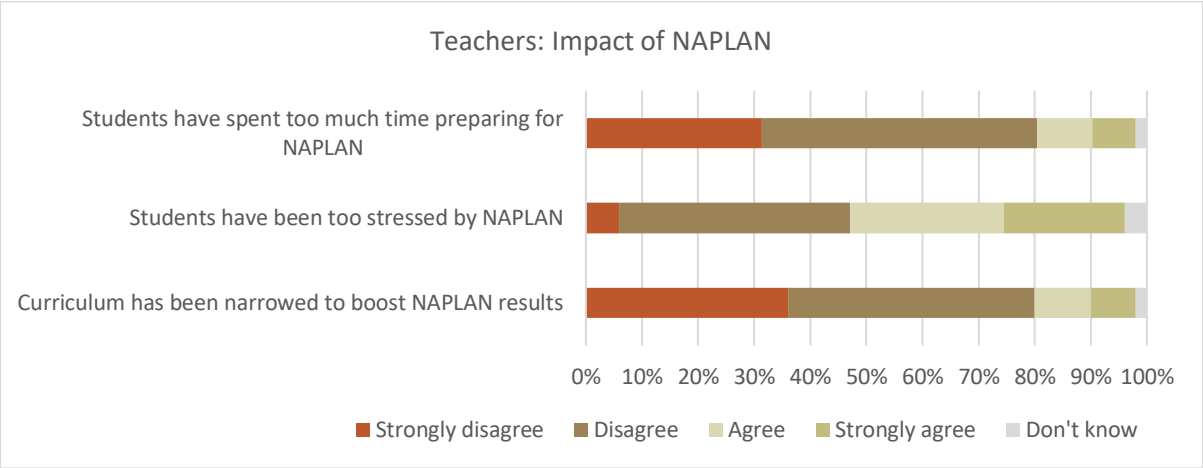
Figure 41: Teachers: Colour-coding and confidence intervals



Unintended or negative consequences

Teachers' views about unintended or negative consequences of publishing school-level comparative NAPLAN data were broadly consistent with those of their school leaders (see Figure 42). Most teachers disagreed that the school had narrowed the curriculum to boost NAPLAN results (disagreed 44% and strongly disagreed 36%). More often, they argued that NAPLAN results help them focus, rather than narrow the curriculum, because "we still need to teach everything."

Figure 42: Teachers: Impact of NAPLAN



Although teachers generally rejected narrowing the curriculum in their own school, there were some who disagreed. As one put it:

> "NAPLAN drives teaching in first term. There's pressure to get results. It's driven by admin staff, not negatively but it is a priority: literacy in the morning, numeracy in the afternoon."

More often, teachers commented that narrowing the curriculum was occurring in other schools. As several teachers put it:

> "Not at all in this school but have heard it said about other schools."

> "When I was teaching in (a school in another state) every lesson and every assessment had to reflect NAPLAN."

> "Have been in a school that was really centred on NAPLAN. Once it went on *My School* there was pressure for principals to perform, continual meetings on NAPLAN, and it led to NAPLAN-focussed teaching."

> "We don't teach to the test. I have friends in other schools that were practicing for the NAPLAN writing test."

Almost all teachers disagreed (49%) or strongly disagreed (31%) that too much time had been spent preparing for NAPLAN tests. Teachers made comments such as:

> "For year 3 it is their first timed test, so they need a bit of practice at that."

> "Students have spent too much time? Not in this school, however 'yes' at other schools I have worked at."

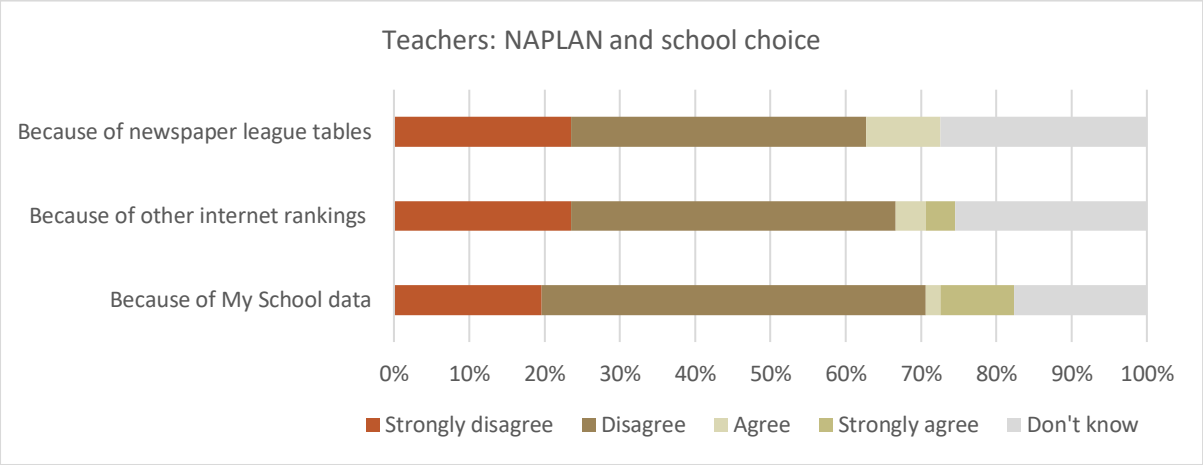
Teachers were evenly split between agreeing or disagreeing that students had been too stressed by NAPLAN. Among the 49% who agreed, 22% strongly agreed; among the 47% who disagreed, only a few strongly disagreed (6%). Teachers who were not concerned about too much stress mentioned that students "need exposure to test conditions", argued that "there's no pressure on teachers or kids here" or looked beyond the school suggesting that "There's a beat up on social media about student stress." As teachers put it:

> "We just tell them to try their best."
>
> "We tell the kids that NAPLAN is just another day. Not the be-end-all."
>
> "We've had a few kids that were in tears the day before NAPLAN. It didn't come from us. We don't make a fuss about NAPLAN."
>
> "Yes, several children have been quite stressed. Parents make a lot of it. Usually it is particular parents who think children will be stressed, or the anxious disposition of the child. The teachers' role is to downplay it with parents."
>
> "My kids looked forward to NAPLAN."

Teachers had little evidence of an impact of NAPLAN on school choice (Figure 43), but there was some variation among schools. A majority (51%) disagreed that *My School* NAPLAN data had an impact on families choosing or leaving the school, strongly disagreed (a further 20%) or did not know (18%). Almost all of those among the few who agreed or strongly agreed came from a single school. Responses were broadly similar for the impact on school choice in their school of other internet rankings (67% disagree or strongly disagree) or newspaper league tables (63% disagree or strongly disagree).

> "In terms of shaping parents' views of the school social media beats this stuff hands down."
>
> "No experience of this school or in the community more generally of schools being chosen on the basis on NAPLAN results."
>
> "Have never heard anyone talking about NAPLAN in the context of school choice."
>
> "Have heard in the media about parents using NAPLAN to choose schools but have never seen it. I have heard parents talk about (Year 12) results. A couple have said that they have looked at a couple of schools when choosing high schools."

Figure 43. Teachers: NAPLAN and school choice



How NAPLAN results are communicated

Teachers reported that they sometimes discussed individual results with parents or talked students through their personal results before NAPLAN reports went home.

> "We talk individual kids through their NAPLAN report before it goes home to parents."
>
> "We dedicate some parent / teacher interview time to NAPLAN."
>
> "We look at NAPLAN results as a staff before individual results go home. We get in touch with a few parents who might be concerned by their child's results."
>
> "Teachers wrote a note to go home with children in each class, emphasising growth not just scores."

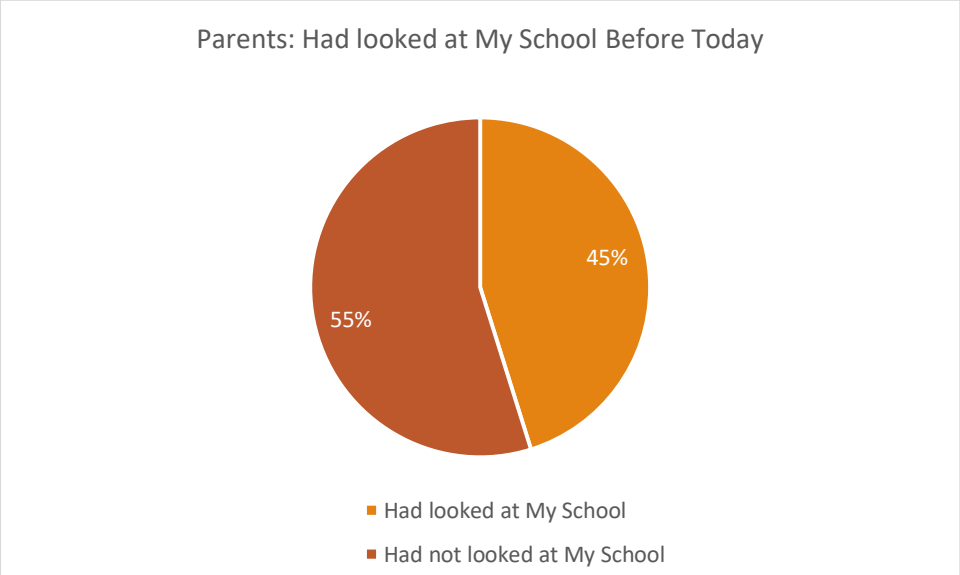
Teachers had little awareness of their schools communicating whole-school NAPLAN results to parents beyond school newsletters and reports to school boards.

> "Don't make a big deal of it."
>
> "NAPLAN results are reported to the school board."
>
> "NAPLAN results might be mentioned in the school newsletter."
>
> "NAPLAN info goes in the newsletter and a report goes to school council."

PARENTS

Parents attending the focus group interviews were asked to comment on the potential uses of NAPLAN data, their experience of any negative consequences of *My School* or other NAPLAN data displays and how their school communicated to them about NAPLAN results. Fewer than a half of parents had ever looked at *My School* before they attended the focus group (Figure 44). When their school's *My School* NAPLAN data pages were made available at the focus groups, however, they were interested to read and analyse on the data displays.

Figure 44: Proportion of parents with prior experience of *My School*

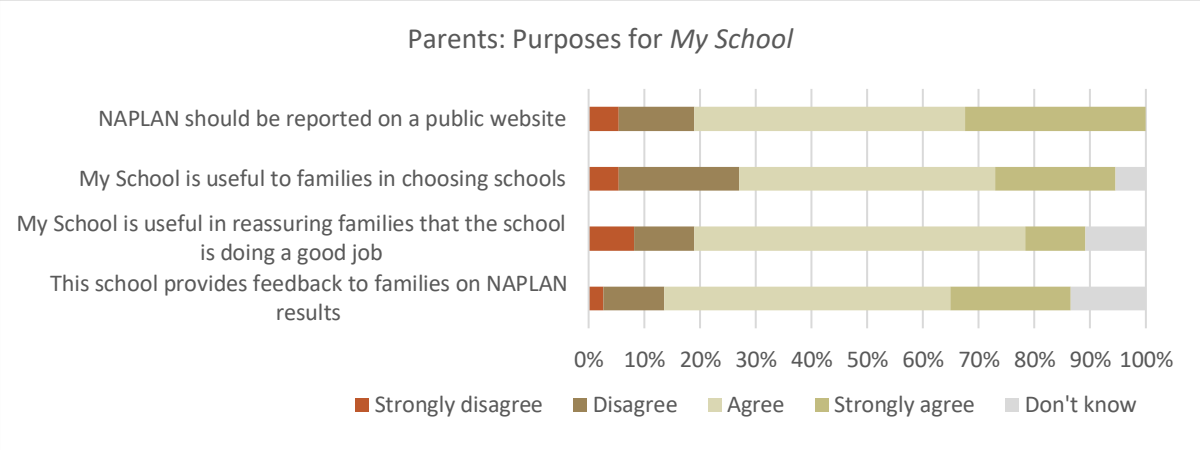


Purposes for using *My School* NAPLAN data

Most parents were supportive of school-level NAPLAN results being available on a public website, with a total of 81% who agreed or strongly agreed (Figure 45). As one parent put it: "How else would you know if there were any problems in the school?" Parents were also likely to agree that the *My School* NAPLAN data presentations were useful for the purpose of choosing schools (68% agreed or strongly agreed) and reassuring them that the school is doing a good job (70% agreed or strongly agreed).

In most school focus groups, parents reported that school NAPLAN results rarely were mentioned in the family and community conversations. In one notable exception to this general trend, parents at a very high performing school acknowledged that "People have moved here because of the rankings" and that this had meant the arrival of "a new group of people at the school." In this school, focus group participants volunteered that "Chinese and Korean parents talk about NAPLAN results."

Figure 45: Parents: NAPLAN and *My School*



Although a majority of parents regarded the use of NAPLAN data for school choice as legitimate, many were disinclined to agree that NAPLAN data had a substantial role in their school choice.

> "The information is interesting and useful but didn't play a large part in determining to choose this school for our children. It was the local school."
>
> "I have three children and have never looked up results for either our school or any other school in the years my children have done NAPLAN. NAPLAN results have never persuaded me in my choice of where I send my kids to school."
>
> "I looked up *My School* each time a child started school. It didn't make me change my mind but it did reassure me."

A few parents mentioned looking at *My School* when the family was relocating to a new area:

> "When we moved into the area, we looked at rentals based on schools' NAPLAN, their student numbers and the size of schools. We used *My School* a lot to identify good areas and then came to the schools for a visit. We used it for a first pass."
>
> "We're moving to Darwin, so I looked up *My School*, looked at the school population, the size and their NAPLAN results."

Parents who disagreed with the use of NAPLAN in choosing schools preferred to see NAPLAN as an improvement tool.

> "I use my child's NAPLAN results as a tool to track the learning growth. i.e. moving up the bands. If there are areas of concern, I approach teaching staff to see if there is a problem or not. I am aware that it is a point in time test and a child could be having a bad day. I see it as an effective tool for schools to track data across the years. They can use this data to establish the progress of the intervention programs put in place in earlier years to support the downfalls that can be seen i.e. a drop in numeracy. I am interested in how schools use the data to help students gain. I have no interest in comparing NAPLAN results from different schools as a way to choose a school because each cohort of children is different."

> "For me the interest in NAPLAN is the relative performance of my child, her strengths and weaknesses and over time her improvement. The population element of this data should be used to track the child, not to give parents the choice between schools."

> "Don't approve of choosing schools on NAPLAN because some people don't have a choice – people in rural areas and low SES areas. It would be more positive if parents in schools with low NAPLAN got involved and helped the school."

About two-thirds (68%) of the parents attending the focus groups were aware of the school providing feedback about school-level NAPLAN results, especially those parents who were members of their school boards or councils.

> "There is a leadership report to the school council. It was interesting and showed that the teachers hard work was paying off, it showed how reading has improved and now numeracy is being tackled."

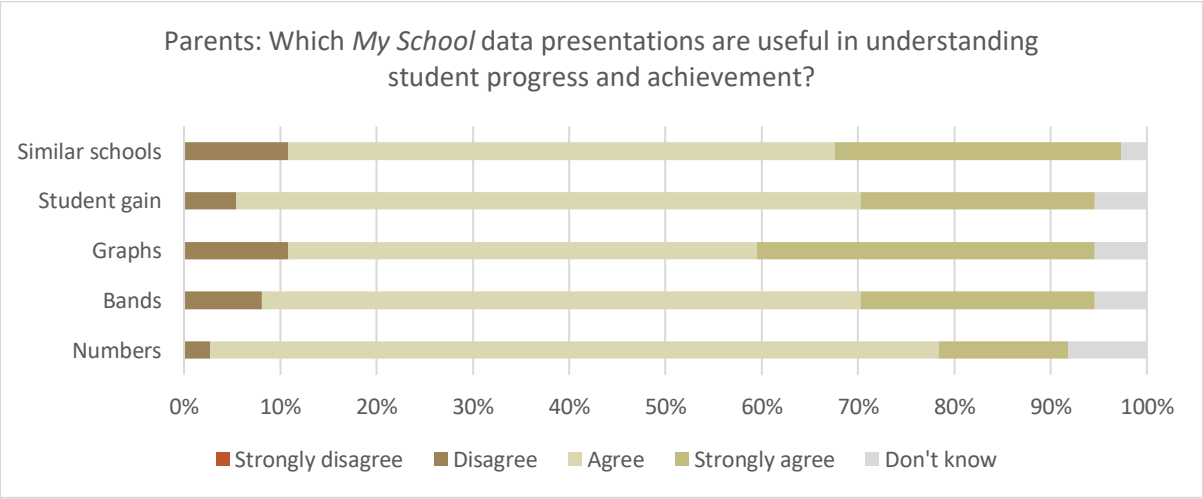
> "I believe NAPLAN is a very positive tool, but only if used effectively. At our school we have excellent staff who use the results to tailor specific teaching programs. NAPLAN is great when the results are interpreted well. Our school is great at communicating with parents."

> "The school tells us about how they have gone in NAPLAN. They reported progress in literacy and mathematics. (School leader in charge of data) presents the results to the P&C in graphs. He uses it to show how kids improve. We can see where individual students are struggling. You've got to have someone who is good at interpretation. People bag NAPLAN but as long as it is interpreted, it is good. We get that in the school council."

Specific My School NAPLAN pages

Fewer than a half of the parents attending the focus group interviews had previously looked at the *My School* website, but after they had had a close look in the context of the focus group interviews, they almost always agreed that the *My School* NAPLAN pages were useful or very useful (Figure 46).

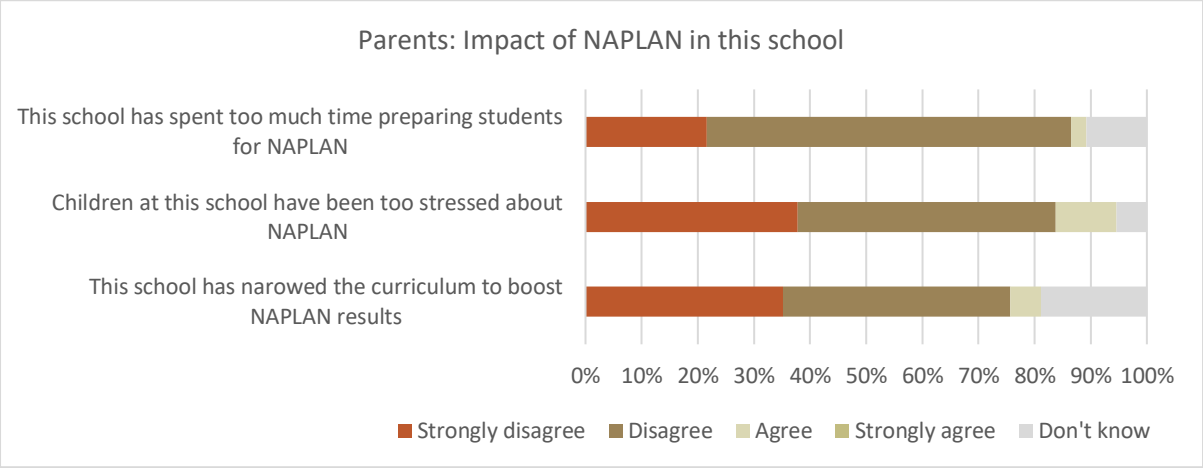
Figure 46: Parents: *My School* data presentations



Unintended or negative consequences

There was little evidence that parents were aware of unintended or negative consequences of NAPLAN testing such as narrowing the curriculum, focussing on test preparation or unnecessarily stressing children (Figure 47).

Figure 47: Parents: Impact of NAPLAN



Very few parents reported that their children had been too stressed by NAPLAN (46% disagreed; 38% strongly disagreed).

> "NAPLAN can be stressful, but the tests help parents to see what can be done with their children's learning."
>
> "Have heard that children get stressed but have not experienced it."
>
> "(A parent) was a bit stressed about opening the NAPLAN result for her daughter for the first time, in Year 3."

Nor had parents noticed any evidence that the school had narrowed the curriculum (41% disagreed; 35% strongly disagreed) or spent too much time preparing for NAPLAN tests (65% disagreed; 22% strongly disagreed)

> "Have heard that some schools spend too much time preparing for NAPLAN but it definitely doesn't happen here."
>
> "School should already be teaching these things; they are core learning areas."
>
> "Not a lot of practicing here, but there is in the school one of my children goes to."

STUDENTS

Students attending the focus groups interviews were asked to comment on how important they thought NAPLAN tests were, who they were important to, what had been their experience of

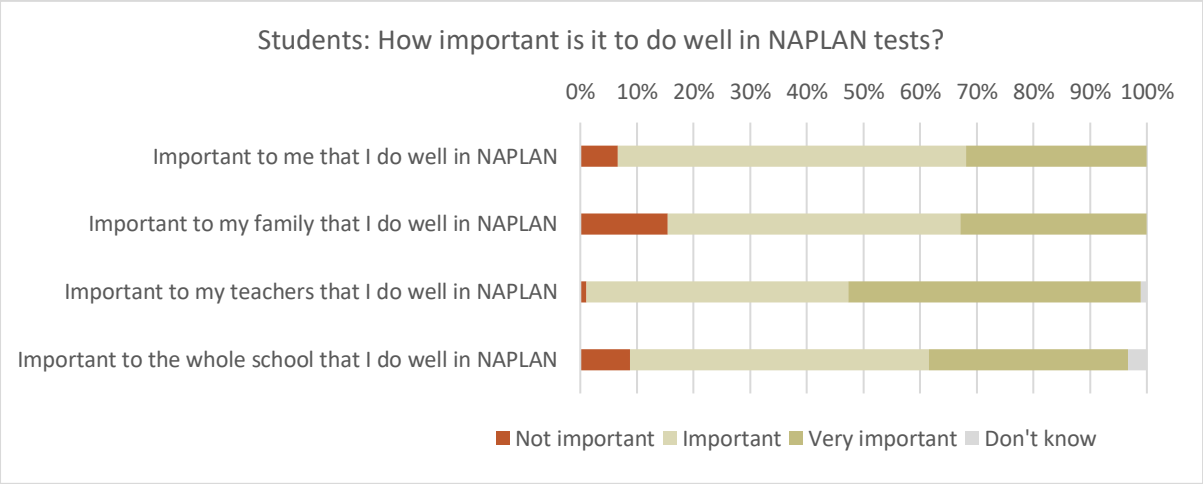
teachers' preparation for the tests they had sat, and what had been communicated to them about NAPLAN results.

Importance of NAPLAN

Almost all students thought that was important to do well in NAPLAN (Figure 48) and almost all reported that they NAPLAN was important to their teachers (46% important; 52% very important):

> "Important to teachers because they want to know the level of skill we are at."
>
> "Teacher wanted us to do really well because it's the last year before high school."
>
> "Important because she (our teacher) wants us to do our best."

Figure 48: Students: How important is it to do well in NAPLAN tests?



A similar high proportion thought that doing well in NAPLAN was important to their families (52% important; 33% very important), although there were some dissenting comments in the interviews:

> "My family wanted me to get a really good score because I'm going to (a private school) next year. They were really interested."
>
> "Very important. My parents are very strict."
>
> "My mum doesn't believe in it."

Almost all students as important (62%) or very important (32%) to themselves that they do well in NAPLAN. As one student put it: "It's important for me because I like to do my best." Similarly, many thought it was important (53%) or very important (35%) to the school that they did well in NAPLAN because "It might teach the school what needs to be taught." Some older students were also aware of the impact of NAPLAN results on the school's reputation:

> "The school is rebranding, changing uniforms, marketing a lot more. More kids will come if we do well in NAPLAN." "
>
> It gives an idea where the school is at compared with others, but teachers play it down, don't really talk about it."

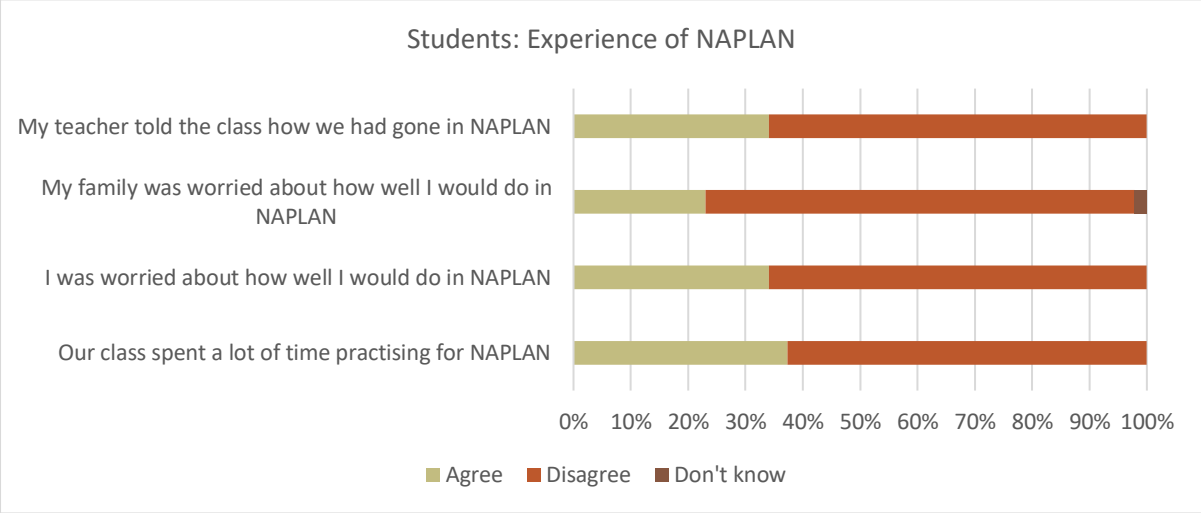
Students' Experience of NAPLAN

Students were also asked to comment on their experience of preparation for the NAPLAN tests, stress and teachers' feedback on results (Figure 49).

There was little evidence among those students selected by their schools for the focus groups of negative or unintended consequences. About one-third (37%) agreed that their class spent a lot of time practicing for NAPLAN. More often, they reported one or two lessons of test preparation:

> "We did a few questions from the last year's test. It was about two pages of questions."
>
> "We practised a few times. The teacher had a timer."
>
> "One practice test in writing and one in maths. None in reading."
>
> "We had one practice using the computer."

Figure 49: Students' experience of NAPLAN



About one-quarter of students (23%) acknowledged that their parents were worried about how well they would do in NAPLAN. As one student put it, families "are interested but not stressed." Students were more likely to worry personally that they would do well (34% agreed). One-third of the students (34%) agreed that teachers had provided feedback on class or school NAPLAN results:

> "Really brief, like an acknowledgement, and only about writing."
>
> "Teachers talked about it on the day and went over the questions afterwards."

SUMMARY

UNDERSTANDING OF STUDENT PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENT

Most teachers and school leaders in the sample schools agreed that the *My School* NAPLAN pages were useful in school improvement (85% of school leaders and 81% of teachers agreed that *My School* pages were useful for this purpose). They also agreed that the displays were useful for accountability (69% of school leaders and 67% of teachers), identifying trends and gaps in achievement (74% school leaders and 76% of teachers) and informing teaching practice (69% of school leaders and 64% of teachers).

Their views differed on the usefulness of these displays for setting targets for students (69% of school leaders and 58% of teachers agreed) and making comparisons between schools (58% of school leaders and 71% of teachers agreed). Those teachers and school leaders who rejected the use of *My School* for comparisons argued that that there is more to a school's success than NAPLAN or that comparisons may undermine schools.

Neither school leaders nor teachers thought that the *My School* NAPLAN displays were useful for informing school choice (46% of school leaders and 44% of teachers).

Fewer than half of parents (45%) involved in the focus groups had previously looked at the *My School* NAPLAN data displays. Most (84%), however, were supportive of school-level NAPLAN results being available on a public website. Most of the parents (68%) agreed that the data displays were useful in choosing schools and reassuring them that the school is doing a good job (74% agreed).

USING ACHIEVEMENT DATA TO INFORM TEACHING

School-level data displays of NAPLAN have developed substantially in the decade since *My School* was first published. Teachers and school leaders now have access to sophisticated school-sector and commercial test dashboards in addition to the *My School* data displays.

In every one of the sample schools, teachers and school leaders displayed a deep understanding of their students' achievement data and showed that they actively used it for school improvement purposes: identifying trends and gaps, setting targets for students and informing teaching practice.

All school leaders and almost all teachers (96%) agreed that standardised test dashboards such as those provided for the ACER PAT tests are useful in understanding student progress and achievement. Slightly fewer people agreed that their school system dashboards are useful for this purpose (school leaders 88%; teachers 89%). Most school leaders (84%) and teachers (80%) agreed that the *My School* NAPLAN pages were useful for understanding student progress and achievement.

Asked to consider which of the *My School* NAPLAN pages are useful in understanding student progress and achievement, most school leaders (>85%) and teachers (>75%) agreed that the Numbers, Bands, Graphs and Student Gain pages were useful. Neither school leaders nor teachers thought that the Similar Schools page was as useful in understanding student progress and achievement (school leaders, 71% agreed; teachers, 62% agreed). Most parents (>85%) agreed that all of the *My School* NAPLAN data pages were useful for this purpose.

REPORTING NAPLAN DATA TO STUDENTS AND PARENTS

For all of the public commentary about NAPLAN, the results of the tests had a relatively low profile in the sample schools. A third of the students in focus groups (32%) recalled their teachers providing any feedback on class or school NAPLAN results. Those who could, recalled their teacher going over the questions after the test or acknowledging good performance when the results were ready to be sent home to parents.

Teachers reported that they sometimes spoke to individual students about results, but they "don't make a big deal of it." Most parents (68%) recalled the school providing feedback through newsletters or school board reports.

School leaders reported communicating NAPLAN results through school newsletters and reports to school councils. In a few cases, very good NAPLAN results or the ACARA high gain letter were posted on school Facebook sites.

PERCEPTIONS OF *MY SCHOOL* AND NAPLAN REPORTING

Although most parents reported that the *My School* NAPLAN displays could be useful for choosing schools, few of those consulted in the focus groups thought that *My School* was often used for this purpose. Other factors such as proximity, community feedback and school culture were much more important to focus group parents.

Few school leaders had evidence that NAPLAN had an impact on school choice in their current school. About one fifth (19%) of school leaders were aware of parents having chosen or left their school on the basis on *My School* NAPLAN reporting or other internet rankings. None were aware that newspaper league tables had an impact on choice in their schools.

Few teachers were aware that NAPLAN reporting had an impact on school choice in their school. None agreed that parents had chosen or left the school on the basis of *My School* data or internet rankings, but (4%) agreed that newspaper league tables had led parents to choose or leave their current school.

The use of colour-coding to show whether a school's NAPLAN results were higher or lower than expected is designed to make the graphs easier to interpret but was also thought to open up the possibility of naming and shaming lower achieving schools. Notwithstanding this, 77% of school leaders and 80% of teachers and agreed that colour-coding for achievement and growth should continue. As one school leader put it: "I don't like the colours, but they focus attention."

Among the potential negative or unintended consequences of NAPLAN, three were discussed in the focus groups: stress for children; teaching to the test and narrowing the school curriculum. Most school leaders (92%), teachers (77%) and parents (74%) disagreed that the curriculum had been narrowed, although they sometimes suggested that it was happening at schools other than their own. Most also disagreed that too much time was spent on test preparation (school leaders 81%; teachers 78%; parents 88%). Most parents (88%) were disinclined to agree that students were too stressed, but about half of the teachers (53%) and a third of school leaders (38%) agreed that students were too stressed by NAPLAN.

CHAPTER 3: SUBMISSIONS AND STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

OVERVIEW

The third and fourth phases of data collection for this Review were conducted in March and April 2019.

The opportunity to make written submissions to the Review was advertised in February 2019. An Issues Paper was provided to stimulate and structure submissions. Thirty-four written submissions were received. More than half of these were from school system or sector authorities; the remainder included submissions from research and advocacy groups, parents' associations, unions, principals' associations and individuals.

In addition, the reviewer met with 23 national stakeholder groups in March and April 2019. These included school system and sector authorities, unions, and stakeholders representing the views of parents and school principals in government, independent and Catholic schools. A total of 73 stakeholder representatives attended these meetings.

The discussion of stakeholder views and submissions that follows is structured around the questions posed in the Issues Paper.

PERCEPTIONS OF *MY SCHOOL* AND NAPLAN REPORTING

THE RIGHT TO HIGH QUALITY INFORMATION AND THE POSSIBILITY OF MISUSE

The balance between the right to know and possibility of misuse was the most vigorously contested issue in the Review. Stakeholder views are reported by organisational type in the discussion below.

School sectors and systems

Submissions from government education authorities typically did not contest the balance between the right to high quality information and the risks of misinterpretation or misuse in current representations of school-level NAPLAN data on the *My School* website.

The Australian Government's submission, for example, noted that "Education Ministers have committed to the principles of accountability and transparency", that "*My School* has been reviewed several times and overall, parents and the community support NAPLAN data being on *My School*", and that the Australian Government Department of Education and Training "supports the on-going publication of *My School*, including the presentation of school level NAPLAN data" (p. 2). Similar views were reflected in many of the stakeholder meetings with state and territory government school systems.

Among government authorities, Queensland and the ACT were more cautious about the balance between transparency and the unintended negative consequences of the representation of NAPLAN data on *My School*. The Queensland Government had commissioned a major review of NAPLAN in the Queensland context in 2018.[48] On the basis of this review, the Queensland government concluded that:

> "Accountability is an important aspect of our education system and Queensland supports continuation of a national mechanism to ensure appropriate monitoring of progress at the system level. The Queensland Government acknowledges that NAPLAN has provided assistance in tracking literacy and numeracy outcomes over time. However, the negative effects identified by the review are such that new and better ways of monitoring progress are required. Though it will take time and national agreement, it is time for NAPLAN to evolve" (p. 4).[49]

The "negative effects" reported in the Queensland review included diverting teaching time to test preparation; narrowing the curriculum and teaching to the test; impacts on the wellbeing of students and teachers; and a focus on shifting students at the edge of one band to the next band to improve aggregate results. The Queensland submission affirmed a commitment to ensure that "any reporting on NAPLAN reflects its limited role and does not lead to negative consequences such as impacts on wellbeing" (p. 2).

The second jurisdiction to express reservations about the balance between transparency and the risk of negative consequences was the ACT. Their submission argued that although "the *My School* website does provide some high-quality information, there remains an unacceptably high potential for misinterpretation and/or misuse" (p. 2). The particular risk identified in the ACT submission concerned school choice:

> 'The concept of choice operating [on *My School*] assumes that education is a service for which there is a free market. However, for a very significant proportion of the population, there is little or no choice available, as the cost of non-government education is such that this group of people is precluded from taking advantage of non-government education.' (p. 2).

This competition, the ACT submission argued, is "against the public interest due to the negative impact on public schooling … [and] the contribution that this competition makes to social and economic division in Australia" (p. 2).

Among non-government school sectors and systems, there were high levels of support for publication of school-level NAPLAN data but consistent reservations about the use of NAPLAN data for school comparisons.

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[48] https://qed.qld.gov.au/programs-initiatives/education/naplan-2018-review
[49] https://qed.qld.gov.au/programsinitiatives/education/Documents/naplan-2018-qld-gov-response.pdf

Submissions were received from several authorities in the Catholic education sector. The Townsville Catholic Education Diocese reported that "the current version of the *My School* website provides an appropriate balance between the right to high quality information and the possibility of misinterpretation or misuse." The submission argued that all statistical information and graphical representations are "susceptible to misinterpretation" but that the comparisons available in the current version of *My School* "are better contextualised than in previous versions of the website" (p. 1).

The Queensland Catholic Education Commission affirmed that "NAPLAN provides useful feedback about student, school and system performance" but "does not provide a complete picture of a school community or a child's learning." The submission identified a series of advantages of the publication of NAPLAN data on *My School*, including accountability of reporting on a nationally consistent basis, information about achievement over time, visibility of school progress and achievements and capacity for like-school comparisons and assistance in parental choice. Against these benefits, the submission drew attention to significant risks of misinterpretation, over-reliance on a narrow source of achievement information, publication of league tables, student stress and narrowing of the school curriculum. For these reasons, the QCEC submission called for "further refinements and communications regarding context, collection and purpose of NAPLAN data on the *My School* website" (p. 3).

The National Catholic Education Commission's submission "supports a national co-ordinated approach to measuring student performance which benefits schools and provides valid, reliable and contextualised feedback for parents and families", but was "concerned that NAPLAN is undermined by the making of simplistic comparisons … and the use of NAPLAN results to market schools" (p. 2). Of particular concern was the fairness of similar-school comparisons made using ICSEA. In the context of the stakeholder interviews one of the senior officials from the NCEC commented that "there is more to be done but what we have done should not be abandoned." There was no in-principle objection to the release of school-level NAPLAN data, "so long as it is done fairly."

Similar concerns about the fairness of school comparisons were raised by the independent school sector. Independent Schools Queensland, for example, "recognises the importance of transparency and accountability" but "does not support school or system comparisons" (p.4). Independent Schools Tasmania reported that "schools, parents and the wider community should have access to many elements of the current NAPLAN data" but had reservations about "the current comparison tools presented between 'similar schools'" (p.4). The national independent school body ISCA reported that their sector "recognises the importance of transparency and accountability" (p. 2) but was concerned that "*My School* has become a tool for rating schools in the community and media" (p. 3).[50]

[50] School league tables were published early in 2019 in The Courier Mail and Adelaide Advertiser, but state government websites rather than *My School* appear to be the source of the data. Tables published by the Canberra Times do appear to have drawn data directly from My School.

Parents' and principals' associations

Among the parents' associations, the Australian Parents Council was a strong supporter of the current approach to presentation of school-level NAPLAN data of the *My School* website. Recognising the possibility of misuse of the data in league tables, their submission noted that "APC supports the access to and publication of NAPLAN data provided that it is done under strict and agreed guidelines" (p. 2). Their submission argued that "it is better to manage the use of the data than to deprive parents of information about their child's school" (p. 2).

Catholic School Parents Australia's submission acknowledged that "a key use of the *My School* data is a check on a child's school for overall performance and a comparison with other schools" (p. 1). The submission from one of CSPA's state-based affiliates was more equivocal about the question of balance. Catholic School Parents Victoria noted that NAPLAN "has provided some transparency" and "provided a catalyst for parents to have higher expectations of our teachers and of schools to do something about it" (p. 6). They note, however, that the use of the *My School* website to compare schools "has in many ways created a skewed view in how parents interpret the quality of a school and the progress of student learning" (p. 6).

The Australian Council of State School Organisations did not provide a formal submission but in the context of stakeholder consultation characterised ACSSO as "broadly supportive" of NAPLAN and *My School*, referring the reviewer to their national presidents' public statement in 2018:

> "ACSSO is a long-time advocate for fair, simple and transparent education policy, and whilst we recognise the need to always reflect on the purpose and methodology of NAPLAN and the curriculum, at some point we have to trust that such initiatives are delivered with the best of intentions by principled advocates seeking the very best, within their remit, for our nation's children."[51]

Conversations with representatives of ACSSO's state-based affiliates revealed some diversity of opinion. Written briefing notes provided by Parents and Citizens Queensland argued that "No NAPLAN data should ever be used in *My School* website." In contrast, the briefing notes provided by the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations reported that:

> ACT parents and carers have repeatedly called for NAPLAN and *My School* data to remain available, providing transparency and public accountability for public expenditure. Parents and carers consider NAPLAN and *My School* essential measures of both school and education system performance for government and the broader community.

There was a similar range of views among principals' associations contributing to the review. The national peak body for government, Catholic and independent primary school principals, the Australian Primary Principals Association, was supportive of the current presentations of NAPLAN data on the *My School* website. Their submission commented that "APPA recognises the desire of

[51] https://acaraweb.blob.core.windows.net/acaraweb/docs/default-source/assessment-and-reporting-publications/acsso-president-39-s-message-feb-2018.pdf?sfvrsn=2

governments to be transparent with data and accountable to the community" and that "the *My School* website provides a solid overview of NAPLAN data" commenting that "the colour of cells and graph diamonds, for example, provides a good indication of school progress" (p.2). Notwithstanding this broad endorsement, they commented that "*My School* is susceptible to misuse", drew attention to the role of jurisdictions in preventing data misuse and misinterpretation and questioned he value of the website's "purpose or relevance in the modern school" (p. 2).

The Association of Heads of Independent Schools Australia based their submission on a substantial survey of members. They reported that a majority (55%) of their principals do not agree that *My School* represents an appropriate balance between the right to high quality information and the risk misinterpretation or misuse and that 68% of Heads "are of the view that schools' NAPLAN data should not be published on the *My School* website." (p. 3). The key issue for AHISA principals was "misrepresentation of schools' quality of provision" through issues including narrowness of what makes for a successful education, narrowness of scope in NAPLAN data, short-term views of progress, lack of indication of Year levels where there are substantial intakes and lack of context for the school's philosophy (p. 8).

In the context of stakeholder consultations, the Catholic Secondary Principals' Association reported that NAPLAN was a valuable tool "for accountability within sectors, across sectors and for governments." Their concern was with access to the data, because "as soon as it becomes public it is used to rank schools". The Australian Secondary Principals' Association argued that "accountability should be at the local level, with principals having autonomy about what data to present." The Principals' Federation of Western Australia's submission contested whether a national assessment scheme is needed at all, given "the raft of information about student progress and achievement:" provided by schools (p. 1). Comments provided by the Australian Catholic Primary Principals Association varied across jurisdictions. Several state and territory representatives supported publication of NAPLAN data, commenting that "it is part of the culture we accept in schooling today." Others took an opposing view, arguing that "the data does not need to be published."

Unions, schools and individuals

Both of the national teachers' unions made written submissions to the review. The Australian Education Union submission supported publicly availability of information about school and student performance "to track progress at a systemic level", but argued that the construction and mode of delivery of NAPLAN tests "has repeatedly been shown to be unreliable and is presented through *My School* in such a way that it is frequently misinterpreted by parents" (p. 5). The manner of presentation of NAPLAN data on the *My School* website, the AEU argued, the makes NAPLAN "high stakes" for schools, encourages parents to judge schools on "a narrow range of measures" and leads to "distortions of teaching and learning processes." They argued that "there is no good outcome from the publication of school-level NAPLAN data (p. 4).

The Independent Education Union submission offered "in principle" support for the published purposes of NAPLAN data represented on the ACARA website but argues for mitigation or removal of a series of "negative impacts on curriculum, pedagogy, learning, student well-being and school enrolment behaviours" (pp. 3-4). The submission went on to say that there is "an irreconcilable

tension" between data that is useful for accountability and data that is useful to teachers (p. 5). The submission cited a 2019 IEU survey on NAPLAN where an "overwhelming number" of members had major concerns about NAPLAN and showed "little support" for the *My School* website. Members disagreed that NAPLAN provided an accurate evaluation of students' abilities or was useful for planning student learning (p. 10).

Research and advocacy groups

Five research and advocacy groups provided submissions to the Review: the Gonski Institute for Education at the University of New South Wales, the Grattan Institute, the Centre for Independent Studies and the Institute for Learning Sciences and Teacher Education at the Australian Catholic University and The Smith Family.

Three of these submissions supported the continued publication of NAPLAN data on *My School*, Grattan, The Smith Family and the CIS. The Grattan Institute argued that NAPLAN is "essential", "a national asset" and "a vital tool":

> 'Governments and other system leaders rely on standardised testing to understand which schools are struggling or thriving, and what interventions work well and should be expanded" (p. 1).

They went on to argue that NAPLAN is useful for monitoring at the system level and supporting school leaders to make decisions about where to allocate their time and resources but is not the best tool for targeted teaching or stimulating improvement through competition between schools. Schools and teachers need detailed diagnostic information in order to identify what students need to learn next, or what difficulties they face. Such detailed diagnostic information, they said, goes beyond the capacity of NAPLAN to deliver, even with improved online adaptive testing. The best way to get the balance right between NAPLAN and diagnostic assessment "is not to throw out NAPLAN" but to strengthen "small data in the hands of teachers" (p. 8). Secondly, they argued, the capacity of *My School* to support parents' school choice would be increased if the quality of the data on the website were improved. Options for improvement included a broader range of quality assured judgements about teaching quality; extending NAPLAN to include students' general capabilities; and more focus in the NAPLAN displays on students' gain compared with students with the same starting scores (p. 13).

The Smith Family submission argued that access to quality data is the foundation of improving students' educational outcomes and that NAPLAN and the *My School* website have been "an important part of that foundation and to improving the performance of Australian schools and students" (p. 3). The submission suggested, however, that more can be done in several ways: by aligning NAPLAN with learning progressions and student growth, by improving transparency of test design, the quality of communication to parents and rethinking the approach to minimum standards.

The Centre for Independent Studies submission described NAPLAN as "a high-quality school, system, state and national overview of student achievement in foundational educational skills" (p. 3). The submission stressed that use of *My School* is voluntary, the website "contains numerous caveats"

and presents the data in in multiple formats, which "reduces the possibility of data misuse or misinterpretation" (p. 4).

The Gonski Institute's submission provided a detailed set of arguments for moving NAPLAN from census testing to sample testing. An appendix to the submission argued that publication of NAPLAN data on *My School* had led to a variety of unanticipated outcomes including use of NAPLAN as a basis for admission to independent and selective schools; development of test-preparation products and coaching schools; generation of league tables; and impact on real estate values. In addition, it was argued that the use of NAPLAN data on *My School* had led to narrowing of the curriculum and teaching to the test and had an impact on students' and teachers' wellbeing.

The Institute for Learning Sciences and Teacher Education's submission provided a comprehensive critique of NAPLAN and *My School*. It argued that NAPLAN reporting on *My School* does not provide an appropriate balance between high quality information and the possibility of misinterpretation of misuse. It contested the quality of the tests as "out of step with international tests of literacy and numeracy" (p. 4); argued that *My School* has made NAPLAN "high stakes"; expressed concern about statistical or technical issues in interpretation of *My School* data pages; and cited the publication of league tables as misuse of the data.

STATISTICALLY SIMILAR SCHOOL COMPARISONS

A range of views were expressed about the quality of the explanatory material on similar schools. The CIS said that the explanatory material is "both easy to understand and sound from a statistical perspective" (p. 6). Notes provided by ACSSO included the ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Association's comment that "Council considers that 'statistically similar schools' is well understood and allows for reasonable comparison between like schools". The ISQ submission noted that although there are questions about the validity of using ICSEA for comparisons, "the availability of explanatory material on the *My School* website is adequate for those seeking further clarification" (p. 5).

The Australian Parents Council, on the other hand, said that statistically similar schools were "not well explained for parents" and the information that is available on *My School* "is difficult to find" (p. 2). Catholic School Parents Australia's submission noted that there is "no general understanding of what a 'like school' is for parents" (p. 2). The ISCA submission acknowledged that while *My School* includes explanatory materials regarding similar schools, "it is debateable whether users can locate these or whether they find the materials useful" (p. 4).

Many of the Catholic and independent school sector submissions contested the appropriateness of making school comparisons, but their concerns were not with the quality of the explanations used on *My School* but the statistical basis of the comparisons or the usefulness of comparisons of any kind. ISCA, for example, contested the appropriateness of statistically similar school groupings, noting difference in context, size, demography and geographical location among schools with similar ICSEA values (p. 4).

Principals' associations all expressed concerns about the appropriateness of school comparisons. Almost all (90%) of principals responding to the AHISA survey reported that the ICSEA-based determination of statistically similar schools does not support fair comparisons for schools (p. 12). Respondents to the AHISA survey took issue with technical issues underlying ICSEA, including self-reported data and the categorisation of parents' occupational levels. In addition, they argued that ICSEA does not capture the characteristics parent wish to compare, such as cultural context, geographical location or whether the schools are single-sex or boarding schools.

The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria's submission focused of technical issues around statistically similar school comparisons. Their primary concern was that the colour-coding of results on *My School* was based on ICSEA scores and that the ICSEA methodology failed to take account differences in the main language spoken at home. A detailed technical paper provided in the submission showed that students from some language and cultural backgrounds performed better than expected and some performed worse than expected (pp. 4-7). Without adjusting for these differences, CECV argued, ICSEA based similar school comparisons would consistently under- or over-estimate school performance (pp. 11-18). Comparisons based on student gain in schools "are also distorted by student cultural/language background" but the effect size of student cultural/language background on student gain (after adjusting for starting score) is usually much smaller than its effect on student mean NAPLAN scores." For this reason, CECV recommended that *My School* places "much greater emphasis on student gain data than school mean NAPLAN scores and school ICSEA values" (p. 19).

Somewhat similar concerns were raised in the ACT Government submission, which drew attention to several ways in which ICSEA-based similar school comparisons may not be fair. At a jurisdiction-wide level, the ACT argued that there a systematic "upward bias" in ICSEA scores as a result of the over representation of degree qualifications, or higher, among families in the ACT. Secondly, the ACT submission expressed concern about inclusion of academically selective schools in ICSEA-based comparisons because "performances of schools with a similar ICSEA to a selective school can have results that vary very substantially" (p. 3).

ILSTE raised two further concerns about calculation of ICSEA, that parent education and employment were self-reported and the absence of variables that contributed to educational outcomes: student gender, language background and proportion of students with a disability in a school (p. 7). QCEC also argued that that explanatory material around statistically similar schools could be improved, especially with regard to student disability and language background (p. 4).

In the context of its broad objections to school comparisons based on NAPLAN, the AEU argued that the omission of financial information from comparisons "has the effect of obscuring the huge impact that funding and finance have on performance" (p. 10).

INFORMATION INCLUDED ON *MY SCHOOL*

This question from the Issues Paper drew two kinds of responses, comments about the language and graphics currently on *My School* and comments about the amount of information that should be provided. Views on the suitability of language and graphics varied. The CIS submission rated the

language on *My School* as "easy to understand" and benefited from the use of colour coding to aid interpretation (p. 5). Similarly, the QCEC submission reported that NAPLAN data reported on *My School* are "generally considered to be user-friendly and clearly formatted with graphics that are informative and well designed" (p. 3).

In contrast, ISCA noted that although the information on *My School* is hyperlinked to fact sheets, "the language is not user-friendly and presumes prior knowledge, for example, of statistical comparison" (p. 4). Principals responding to the AHISA survey reported that parents had most difficulty understanding the Similar Schools display and Student Gain pages and least difficulty understanding the Bands and Numbers displays on *My School* (p. 9). Other submissions identified the range of potential audiences as a problem:

> "Meeting the needs of a wide range of audiences has meant that the site lacks a clear pathway for users to access information. Some of the detailed and technical information is, for example, difficult to locate, with interpretation requiring a high level of data literacy" (AISSA, p. 2).

In terms of content, many stakeholders commented that there was too much emphasis on NAPLAN on the *My School* website. One option for change was to reduce the number of NAPLAN displays available. Most commonly, school systems and sectors would be satisfied if *My School* displays were reduced to achievement and student progress (currently represented in the Numbers and Student Gain displays). Data in the remaining displays (Bands, Graphs and Similar Schools) are available in school system dashboards, and are of less interest to parents than achievement and progress. An alternative, or supplementary, suggestion made by several senior school system officials and echoed in submissions was that a broader range of information should be made available over time, such as achievement in the arts or critical and creative thinking.

The AEU submission was critical of the amount and quality of technical information on the *My School* website. Their submission noted the absence of information on NAPLAN test grading criteria, failure to disclose technical information on test equating procedures, and down-playing of the statistical error band in the Numbers NAPLAN page (p. 8). The submission particularly objected to the characterisation of schools using colour codes, when the data on which it is based includes a broad band of possible mean scores with a 95% confidence interval (p. 10).

Other submissions suggested additional content be added to *My School*, including reporting on outcomes for different demographic groups and for students with a disability (ILSTE, p. 6).

TRANSITION TO NAPLAN ONLINE

Many submissions expressed concern about the whether fair comparisons were possible as schools transition to NAPLAN Online. The ISCA submission, for example, supported NAPLAN Online's move to adaptive testing because it would increase the diagnostic value of NAPLAN but expressed concern about the appropriateness of school comparisons based on schools using either paper or online testing in 2018. Similarly, AISSA suggested that in the transition period, "statistical comparability of

both modes must be treated with sensitivity" (AISSA, p. 2) and reported survey evidence of low levels of confidence that paper and online test scores could be compared (p. 12-13).

The AEU submission took a more definitive position, confirming that the union was opposed to the publication of the 2018 data, arguing that "the bi-modal nature of the data collection in 2018 breaks the longitudinal data series ...and no data for 2018 should be published publicly" (p. 12).

Since submissions were received, however, the decision has been taken to publish the 2018 data on *My School*, managing the issue of comparison of results across test modes by using a dotted line on the Student Gain and Graphs displays and removing the Bands display for schools that completed NAPLAN Online.

UNDERSTANDING STUDENT PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENT

NAPLAN, *MY SCHOOL* AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Judging by the effort that school systems have made to develop data dashboards to assist schools to interrogate their NAPLAN data and the degree to which NAPLAN targets have been included in schools' annual plans and reports, school systems make a great deal of use of NAPLAN progress and achievement data in their school improvement strategies. In the independent sector, too, schools are reported as finding "NAPLAN student progress and achievement data useful to inform their school improvement strategies" (ISCA, p. 6).

NAPLAN was, however, typically seen as "part of the bigger picture", useful in high level planning rather than direct support for teaching. As one school system submission commented, "…data is only useful for long-term planning … to identify broad strengths and weaknesses" (Townsville Catholic Education Diocese, p. 4). Schools reported that they look to NAPLAN for "trends in the cohort data" rather than "a focus on individual student performance" (confidential submission, p. 2). In this context, NAPLAN is often used "in conjunction with other information the school holds" (ACT, p. 4) and was seen as just one of many sources of data available to schools.

Principals and parents' groups often commented on the limitations of NAPLAN, characterising it as "one source of some useful information which is added to everything else a school might collect", "a snapshot of achievement", "a small part of the overall picture of a student's learning journey", "just one piece of the puzzle", or "a moment in time". As one school system senior officer put it, "it matters, but it is not the only thing that matters."

A little more than one-third of principals responding to the AHISA survey reported that they used the *My School* displays to compare their school's result with other schools' results. Among these users, the student gain by students with similar starting scores and student gain by schools with similar students were regarded as most useful (p. 15). More than half of AHISA principals reported using NAPLAN results in discussions with school boards, most often focusing on achievement in other independent schools in the area and student gain in all Australian schools (p. 15). This was

confirmed by one of the school system officials in the ISCA consultation meeeting, who said that NAPLAN results were "used at all the governors' meetings I go to."

The AEU submission expressed concerns about the use of NAPLAN in school improvement strategies on the basis that higher NAPLAN scores were not necessarily a measure of success, especially if they were achieved by ignoring "the scope and depth of the curriculum" in favour of "drills and activities aimed at improving test performance" (p. 12).

WHOLE-POPULATION ASSESSMENT AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

All of the government and Catholic school systems currently use whole-population NAPLAN data in their data analytics dashboards and school improvement strategies. They also use whole population data to identify issues for sub-populations, an essential equity measure that would not be available from sample testing.[52]

Several of the school system authorities expressed concern about public reporting of school-level data rather than collection of whole-population data on which school-level data are calculated. The ACT government submission argued that data for school improvement was necessary but did not need to be made available on *My School* (p.4). Similarly, the Queensland submission drew attention to the joint statement on NAPLAN released by the Queensland Department of Education and the Queensland Teachers Union which acknowledged that "schools – through direct contact and their school websites – are best placed to provide up-to-date information about their context, their students, their wider community and the enriching learning experiences they offer to students and staff".[53]

This kind of concern about school-level reporting was echoed by several state independent school authorities. AISSA acknowledged that NAPLAN population testing is "a valid and reliable research base for governments, schools and the wider community" but argued that "comparative reporting does not enhance this research base nor improve outcomes for students" (p. 3). Similarly, a confidential submission from this sector commented that "whole population data is useful but [we] feel that it should only be made available to government representatives, sectors and their representatives" (p. 6).

Among the Catholic school jurisdictions providing submissions, the QCEC submission indicated that their school authorities use whole-population assessment for school improvement purposes, but they would support further consideration of the balance between cohort and sample testing. Similarly, Independent Schools Queensland noted that:

> Whole-population assessment can support schools to benchmark student and cohort progress and inform school improvement agendas, however ISQ encourages debate about

[52] This issue has recently been highlighted by Andy Hargreaves in his appearance before the Scottish National Standardised Assessments Inquiry (p. 5).
https://www.parliament.scot/S5_Education/Meeting%20Papers/20190130ES_Meeting_papers.pdf
[53] https://www.qtu.asn.au/js-data

> the value of moving to sample, rather than whole cohort testing in literacy and numeracy, to reduce the perception of NAPLAN as a high-stakes competitive testing regime (p. 6).

Some principals' associations were in favour of replacing NAPLAN with sample tests and others were not. Those who were in favour of population testing were often concerned about publication of school-level data. As a spokesman for one of the secondary principals' associations explained:

> "NAPLAN has a lot of valuable data. It should be continued. It is a great tool for accountability within sectors, across sectors and for government accountability. Principals do not contest the need for accountability. The issue is who has access to the data. As soon as it becomes public it is used to rank schools."

AHISA principals were divided over whether whole population assessment was necessary to meet school systems' and governments' need for information to support school improvement, with about half (51%) agreeing that whole-population assessment was necessary. Fewer than half (35%) agreed that sample testing would be sufficient for this purpose.

The diversity of opinion among principals was echoed among parents' associations. Catholic School Parents Australia suggested that a suite of assessments made available to schools through ACARA, from which a sample of schools' results could be examined for state and national accountability purposes. Several of the state affiliates of ACSSO were in favour of moving to sample testing, but APC's view was that:

> "Most parents understand the value of whole-population assessment data and expect that it would drive changes in teaching and pedagogy to achieve growth for the students in their school, and at a system level" (p. 3).

Continued collection of whole-population data was supported by three of the research and advocacy groups that provided submissions. The Grattan Institute submission opposed any move to replace NAPLAN with a national sample test. They argued that although teacher-generated data are essential for targeted teaching, assessment for accountability should be kept separate from assessment for teaching and learning, and that assessment for accountability requires whole-population assessment (pp. 3-4). The Smith Family submission supported continuation of whole-population data on the grounds that access to quality data is the foundation of improving students' educational outcomes (p. 3). The CIS submission argued that there would be no transparency of outcomes at the school level without population testing and that systems, schools and governments would no longer be accountable for school-level performance (p. 7). The ILSTE submission supported a move to sample testing as a sufficient "health check" of system performance but noted that "if NAPLAN becomes a sample test, other mechanisms will need to be considered to enable ongoing monitoring of school performance" (p. 12).

Both of the unions advocated for replacement of census tests by sample tests. The AEU submission argued that the NAPLAN results currently collected are unsuitable for anything other than state, national and demographic group trends, "and it is therefore unnecessary to test the entire school populations" (p. 12). The AEU's preference is to move towards the approaches to assessment

championed in the Gonski *Through Growth to Achievement* report.[54] Similarly, the IEU reported that two-thirds of their members supported a move to sample testing and overwhelmingly favoured the development of formative assessment tasks, available online as a method of assessing students against national benchmarks (p. 11).

USING ACHIEVEMENT DATA TO INFORM TEACHING

NAPLAN, *MY SCHOOL* AND TEACHING

Many submissions distinguished between the use of NAPLAN data to inform teaching and the use of *My School* to access data for this purpose. The WA Education Department's submission, for example, confirmed that:

> NAPLAN data is used by schools to identify trends in student achievement, measure individual growth and identify areas that need a greater focus …[but] … teachers and schools tend to access information regarding NAPLAN provided on the Department's local system, rather than information from the *My School* website. (p. 3)

Similar comments were made by independent and Catholic school authorities. ISCA, for example, balanced the observation that "independent schools find the NAPLAN student progress and achievement data useful" with the observation that "access to detailed analytical packages provides more nuanced information and the opportunity to triangulate results with other assessments" (p. 8). The Queensland Catholic Education Commission confirmed that teachers "do not generally use the *My School* website but rather access NAPLAN data through system data monitoring tools" (p. 5). About two-thirds of AHISA principals agreed that NAPLAN data are useful to inform class-level strategies or wider school improvement. Most also reported using it in triangulation with other internal or externally benchmarked assessments (p. 18). Beneath this broad agreement the AHISA survey reported a range of views about the value of NAPLAN. One principal reported that NAPLAN had been "incredibly useful", allowing the school to "identify serious deficiencies in our learning program and to take decisive action" (p. 18). Another described NAPLAN data as "one dimensional", noting that "it doesn't make the data unimportant, just limited in scope and value" (p. 18).

The AEU submission focused on members' perception of the impact of NAPLAN on teachers and students, rather than the degree to which NAPLAN was used to inform teaching. According to the Union's 2018 State of Our Schools Survey, about three-quarters of members agreed that they were under more pressure to improve NAPLAN results and that NAPLAN was increasingly used to measure school performance. About two-thirds agreed that there had been increased student stress in the leadup to the test and that there had been a greater focus on preparing for the test. The result, the AEU concluded, has been to "de-skill teachers, to stifle morale of the workforce and degrade the status of the profession" (p. 14).

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[54] https://docs.education.gov.au/documents/through-growth-achievement-report-review-achieve-educational-excellence-australian-0

Schools use a wide variety of standardised and local assessment instruments to inform teaching. More than a dozen assessments were identified by principals responding to the AHISA survey (p. 19) and many more than a dozen in the IEU submission (pp. 6-8). Virtually every submission or consultation meeting that discussed assessments used by schools mentioned the ACER Progressive Achievement Tests in Reading (PAT-R) and Progressive Achievement Tests in Mathematics (PAT-M), which are provided to many schools through site licences held by school sectors and systems.

Similarly, schools use a very wide range of approaches to managing NAPLAN data. According to the AHISA survey, most of their schools conduct some kind of digital analysis of NAPLAN data. The most common approaches were locally developed spreadsheet analyses (27%), software developed by public education systems (21%) and commercially available data analytics tools (20%). The remainder used software developed by the state or territory Association of Independent Schools or software developed internally or commercially to the school's specifications (p. 20). By volume, the most commonly used data analytics platform is Scout, the data and analysis platform designed by the NSW Department of Education and available to government, Catholic and independent schools in the NSW and the ACT.

In the decade since *My School* was launched, a large number of such NAPLAN data analysis packages have been developed by school systems and sectors, curriculum and assessment authorities and commercial providers. At least a dozen data analytics packages were mentioned in submissions or consultation meetings:

- SunLANDA (Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority)[55]
- OneSchool (Queensland Department of Education)[56]
- DataPAK (Independent Schools Council of Queensland)
- Scout (Department of Education, NSW)[57]
- CeD3 data warehouse (used by some Catholic school systems)[58]
- Panorama (Department of Education, Victoria)[59]
- Aspire (Department of Education, Tasmania)
- School Improvement Dashboard (Department for Education, South Australia)[60]
- NAPLAN Analysis Tool (independent and Catholic schools, South Australia)[61]
- Student Achievement Information System (Education Department, Western Australia)[62]

[55] https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/p-10/naplan/test-reporting-analysis/sunlanda
[56] https://education.qld.gov.au/parents-and-carers/school-information/oneschool-qparents
[57] https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/educational-data/scout/resource-library/schools-dashboard
[58] https://ced3.catholic.edu.au/ced3-data.html
[59] https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/improvement/Pages/panorama.aspx
[60] https://www.education.sa.gov.au/teaching/school-improvement
[61] https://www.ais.sa.edu.au/events/naplan-data-analysis-introducing-v-1-3-analytical-tool-paper-online-test-training-option-3/
[62] http://det.wa.edu.au/accountability/detcms/navigation/school-performance/school-and-student-performance-data/

- Brightpath (provided to WA schools through the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority)[63]
- eDash (Department of Education Northern Territory)
- Reporting and Analysis Achievement Data (Northern Territory Board of Studies)[64]

The ILSTE submission notes that the level of data analytics undertaken in schools is in some cases limited by access to appropriate software and school-based data literacy (p. 10). Reflecting this concern, several of the independent school sector authorities and principals' associations in smaller jurisdictions mentioned that they would support the development of a comprehensive, common national school data dashboard.[65]

TIMELINESS OF NAPLAN REPORTING

The move to NAPLAN Online was almost universally seen as the best opportunity to improve the timeliness of NAPLAN reporting, and there were few other comments on timeliness in submissions and consultations. Among organisations opposed to NAPLAN census testing, one suggested that timeliness could be improved because "a stratified sample should be able to be completed in a much timelier manner" (AEU, p. 15).

REPORTING NAPLAN DATA TO PARENTS AND STUDENTS

COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY

Individual student reports are provided to parents of all children undertaking NAPLAN tests. Many stakeholders confirmed that these results are discussed with teachers in the context of parent-teacher meetings and that NAPLAN results may be mentioned in school newsletters. Principals' associations reported that schools do not generally provide school-level NAPLAN results in detail to parents but might include a broad comment about progress or achievement in a newsletter or mention if they had been identified as an ACARA "high gain" school. The AHISA survey concluded that their schools are more likely to discuss students' NAPLAN results in response to parents' queries than at parent-teacher meetings, in writing or online on the school's intranet. School staff, according to the Queensland NAPLAN review, indicated that NAPLAN offered little or no value in informing parents about their child's progress. Both the QCEC and ISCA submissions noted, however, that their schools were more likely to report NAPLAN data in a locally contextualised way than to reference the *My School* website in their communication.

My School is by no means the only public source of school-level NAPLAN data in Australian states and territories. The broadest public availability of school-level NAPLAN data is in Queensland, where NAPLAN outcomes for public, Catholic and independent schools are available online from the

[63] https://www.brightpath.com.au/

[64] https://education.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/542898/2017-NTBOS-Annual-Report.pdf

[65] The QCEC submission provides a list of analyses that could be provided by a new national data analytics tool (p. 6)

Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority website.[66] In several jurisdictions, the government school system provides a searchable website that includes school-level summaries of NAPLAN data. In Western Australia, Schools Online provides average NAPLAN scores and the proportion of students at, above and below the National Minimum Standard for all schools.[67] In the Northern Territory a searchable database[68] provides links to schools' Annual Performance Report to the School Community which include NAPLAN achievement tables.[69]

More commonly, annual reports containing NAPLAN data are available on school websites. In South Australia, for example, annual school reports on government schools' websites use a standardised format including proportions of students achieving NAPLAN proficiency levels, the proportion of students in three NAPLAN progress bands and the proportion achieving in the upper two bands.[70] In the ACT, annual school board reports on government school websites include a table of NAPLAN mean scores and an annual action plan detailing progress against NAPLAN targets.[71] In Victorian public schools, annual implementation plans on government school websites include quantitative NAPLAN improvement targets but do not include tables of annual NAPLAN results.[72] In NSW, annual reports appear on government school websites but do not publish NAPLAN results in a common format.[73] In Tasmania alone, among all of the government schools systems, individual school-level NAPLAN data do not appear to be available to parents or others through school or system websites, except through the *My School* website.

The quality of communication materials and approaches designed for parents and the wider community was raised in several submissions. The Smith Family, for example, noted that it was difficult for parents to use NAPLAN information understand their children's progress. They also noted that, given the level of discussion of NAPLAN in the community, "there is also a need for a wider group of stakeholders to be better informed on NAPLAN" (p. 6). Quality of communications was also a major focus of the Queensland Government's submission, reporting that the Government will implementing a targeted communications strategy concerning the purposes and appropriate uses of NAPLAN (p. 3).

The APC, The Smith Family and the QCEC submissions raised the possibility of improving feedback to parents about students' progress over time, from Years 3-9, on a single report, with several noting that this would require a national unique student identifier.

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[66] https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/downloads/publications/qcaa_stats_naplan_18_outcomes.pdf
[67] https://www.det.wa.edu.au/schoolsonline/home.do
[68] https://education.nt.gov.au/education/publications/government-school-annual-reports
[69] For example, http://web.ntschools.net/w/antgsr/Annual%20Reports/Casuarina%20Street%20PS_2017%20Annual%20Performan%20Report.pdf
[70] For example, https://www.wgs.sa.edu.au/uploads/files/Annual%20Report%202017.pdf
[71] For example, http://www.blch.act.edu.au/our_school/school_board and http://www.maribyrnongps.act.edu.au/our_community/school_board
[72] For example, http://mentoneps.vic.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/2018-Annual-Implementation-Plan.pdf
[73] In NSW, construction of comparative league tables from these school reports would be contrary to the NSW *Education Act 1990*.

NAPLAN, *MY SCHOOL* AND SCHOOL CHOICE

Submissions and stakeholder conversations on parents' use of the NAPLAN data on *My School* most often focused on the issue of school choice. Parents from one government school jurisdiction commented that there was little value in using *My School* data for school choice purposes, because enrolment in their jurisdiction was controlled by schools' residential boundaries. Others mentioned that use of *My School* to inform school choice was more likely when children were moving from primary to secondary school, or when families were relocating. Defence families, who move relatively often, were thought to be more likely to use *My School* in choosing schools. In the absence of these reasons to move or choose schools, the Grattan Institute submission cites empirical evidence that "In Australia, families don't generally move to high-performing schools nor leave low-performing ones" (p. 6).[74]

Survey data included in the submissions suggested that relatively few parents use *My School* to inform school choice. The APC submission reported that according to their 2018 survey, "Only 5% of parents in APC's 2018 national survey reported using NAPLAN results when choosing a school for their child." A somewhat higher estimate is provided by ISQ's 2018 What Parents Want[75] survey which reported that only 18% of parents identified *My School* among their top three sources of information. Much more common sources of information were family, friends and colleagues; other parents with children at the school; school open days; school websites and social media; and family members attending the school.

The ISQ survey also reported that when parents used *My School*, they were more likely to look at the school profile pages than the NAPLAN data pages. This conclusion is consistent with ACARA's internal Google Analytics analysis of the *My School* website, which shows that the school profile pages are the most frequently visited; only 20% of *My School* page views are of NAPLAN data pages. Several submissions mentioned a recent study of parents' use of the *My School* website conducted by Colmar Brunton for ACARA in 2018.[76] This large-scale parent survey reported that 44% of parents would use the *My School* website to see how their child's school is performing and 39% would use it to help inform decisions for their child's education. Three-quarters of all parents (74%) believe that it is important for parents to access the *My School* website and the information it provides on schools. Only one in eight (13%) parents responding to the survey believe it is not important. While only one-third of parents (34%) had used the *My School* website, nearly nine in ten of these users rated it as being at least quite important.

STUDENTS AND NAPLAN REPORTING

Despite the Issues Paper's invitation to comment on information about NAPLAN that students might need to contribute to their own education, it was mentioned in only a few submissions and stakeholder interviews.

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[74] https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/myth_of_markets_in_school_education.pdf
[75] https://www.isq.qld.edu.au/advocacy-representation/what-parents-want-survey
[76] https://acaraweb.blob.core.windows.net/acaraweb/docs/default-source/assessment-and-reporting-publications/2018-naplan-online-parent-research.pdf?sfvrsn=2

One parent submission noted that reporting of NAPLAN information to students "six months after testing takes place is highly unlikely to be of any benefit to their education" and another suggested that younger students should only be given NAPLAN performance information in consultation with their parents. Several submissions suggested that the move to online testing might reduce the delay and make individual student NAPLAN reports more useful for students. The ILSTE submission cited research confirming that there had been little engagement of students about NAPLAN, and that this was a concern in view of other research that demonstrates the impact of students' personal agency in enhancing self-regulation and their own learning. The submission questioned, however, whether this was possible with the current NAPLAN tests since "NAPLAN's diagnostic and formative assessment potential exist at the class or group level, identifying areas of instruction where student response patters indicate a consistent gap" (p. 13).

Among the suggestions for improved communication with students, IST and ISCA recommended that students receive age appropriate summaries of their NAPLAN results. ISQ noted that feedback focused on a student's gain a may provide a better link between test scores and understanding of their own educational progress, but that "optional formative assessment tools aligned to learning progressions … may provide a better opportunity for students to engage in conversations about their educational progress" (p. 9). Similarly, AISSA noted that "the power of data is in the ability to tell a story", that use of growth data over time supports students to make decisions, but that the NAPLAN data used for this purpose does not come from the *My School* website (p. 4). The Queensland Government submission indicated that it intended to develop a targeted communications strategy to help students (and others) to understand the purposes and appropriate uses on NAPLAN data (p. 3).

SUMMARY

PERCEPTIONS OF *MY SCHOOL* AND NAPLAN REPORTING

The right to high quality information and the risk of misuse

There is no national consensus on the balance between the community's right to high quality information and the risk of misuse on NAPLAN data.

The Australian Government and most state and territory governments were broadly satisfied with the current balance, citing the principles of transparency and accountability. The state and territory governments that were more cautious about the current balance defended the benefits of accountability but cited concerns about narrowing the curriculum, teaching to the test, student and teacher wellbeing and the use of *My School* as a resource for school choice.

Non-government school systems and sectors supported the continued publication of school-level NAPLAN data but shared the concerns raised by some state and territory governments. In addition, many non-government school sector stakeholders expressed concern about ICSEA-based "similar

school" school comparisons and the narrowness of *My School's* NAPLAN-based reporting of school performance.

Feedback from parent stakeholders was mixed. Several stakeholders argued that the current level of transparency was appropriate, but some of these also expressed concern that *My School* and NAPLAN had skewed parents' understanding about quality of schooling.

Views of principals' associations were also mixed. Most associations recognised the desire of governments to be transparent with the data and accountable to the community, but most were also concerned with the consequences of public access to school-level data. Negative consequences cited included ranking of schools, and the narrowness of NAPLAN-based judgements about school quality.

Union responses to the review supported public availability of data to track progress at the systemic level, but either entirely rejected reporting of school-level NAPLAN test results or argued for mitigation of negative impacts on teaching, well-being and enrolment behaviour.

Several of research and advocacy groups argued that publication of NAPLAN data is essential, either for transparency, accountability or school improvement. Others argued that publication of NAPLAN on *My School* did not achieve an appropriate balance between the right to know and the possibility of misuse, either because of technical limitations to the tests or evidence cited about the negative impact on teaching and well-being. Opportunities for improvement identified by research and advocacy groups included broadening the range of assessments to include students' general capabilities, focusing more on learning gain and alignment with learning progressions, changing the scope of the literacy and numeracy assessments or moving NAPLAN from census testing to sample testing.

Statistically similar schools

The use of ICSEA-based similar school calculations was deeply unpopular, especially with non-government system and sector stakeholders and school principals. Some of the objections were technical, with concerns expressed about self-reported data, the uneven impact of home language and culture on ICSEA scores, or the absence of other explanatory variables such as gender and disability. Other concerns were more fundamental, with stakeholders contesting whether statistical similarity had anything to do with the actual similarity of schools across geographical locations, with cultural contexts or levels of financial resources. Some stakeholders suggested that ICSEA be revised; others suggested that the focus should be on student gain compared with students who had the same starting scores.

Commentary on the quality of the explanatory materials on similar schools was mixed. Several stakeholders, including one parent group, rated the concept of statistically similar schools as well understood, but other parent and sector groups rated the information as not easy to understand or hard to find.

Information included on *My School*

Although stakeholders' views about ease of understanding the language and graphics on *My School* ranged from "easy" to "requiring a high level of data literacy", there was broad agreement that there is too much emphasis on NAPLAN on the *My School* website. Broader views of schooling, including student capacities beyond literacy and numeracy would be welcomed by many.

Transition to NAPLAN Online

There was some scepticism, especially from independent school and teachers' union stakeholders, about the comparability of pencil-and-paper and online NAPLAN results. The 2019 *My School* website NAPLAN displays have responded to these concerns by using dotted lines in the Student Gain and Graphs displays for schools that changed mode of assessment, and removing the Bands displays for NAPLAN Online schools.

UNDERSTANDING STUDENT PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENT

NAPLAN, *My School* and school improvement

School systems and sectors have made substantial investments in data analytics platforms designed (among other things) to assist schools to use their NAPLAN data for school improvement planning and feedback. The quality of these systems, as well as the degree to which they are integrated into system and sector reporting arrangements, mean that although NAPLAN data are widely used *My School* is rarely used by schools for school improvement purposes. When it was used, principals preferred the displays that focused on student gain to those that focused on average scores or school comparisons.

Stakeholders often commented on the limitations of NAPLAN for school improvement, characterising it as just a snapshot, or a piece of the puzzle, one among many areas of interest to schools in their school improvement planning.

Whole-population assessment and school improvement

All of the government and Catholic school systems and most independent schools currently use whole-population NAPLAN data in their data analytics, school review and school board reports. There were, however, concerns about the impact of publication of school-level whole-population data. For this reason, there was some interest in the prospect of moving NAPLAN from whole population to sample testing. The strength of this interest in sample testing ranged from openness to a debate, at one extreme, to vigorous advocacy by unions and the Gonski Institute. Others argued that it was important to continue whole-population testing for accountability and equity purposes. As one of the research group stakeholders noted, if NAPLAN were to become a sample test, school systems would most likely adopt other whole-population assessments to monitor school performance.

USING ACHIEVEMENT DATA TO INFORM TEACHING

NAPLAN, *My School* and teaching

There was little evidence that the NAPLAN displays on *My School* influenced day-to-day teaching and learning in schools. Much more common was the use of NAPLAN data to identify trends in student achievement at the school level, often used in triangulation with other standardised and local achievement data.

Assessment tools and data analytics

More than a dozen data analytics platforms were mentioned by stakeholders, and they were used in virtually all school sectors and systems to understand item-level student performance and identify strengths and weaknesses in teaching programs. Some platforms, such as the NSW Scout and Catholic schools' CeD3 were used in multiple jurisdictions; others such as the WA SAIS system were restricted to a single government school system. Some independent schools used these or other commercially available software; others used locally developed spreadsheet-based systems.

Timeliness of NAPLAN reporting

The move to NAPLAN Online was seen by most as the best opportunity to improve the timeliness of NAPLAN reporting.

HOW *MY SCHOOL* AND NAPLAN ARE REPORTED TO STUDENTS AND PARENTS

Communication with parents and the community

Individual student reports are provided to all parents of students who take NAPLAN tests. Stakeholders reported that schools sometimes discussed these with parents, especially if parents sought more information. Some stakeholders dismissed NAPLAN as a source of information to parents, preferring more contextualised information about student progress. School-level NAPLAN results are sometimes mentioned in school newsletters and almost universally used in school annual reports, improvement plans and reports to school boards.

Although *My School* is the only public, national source of school-level NAPLAN data, school-level results are very widely available in many jurisdictions. One state publishes them for all government and independent schools on its curriculum and assessment authority website; several others provide a searchable data base for government schools; and most of the remaining states and territories require government schools to publish annual reports containing standard NAPLAN displays on their school websites.

The quality of communications with parents and the community was raised in several submissions, and at least one state is considering how the unintended consequences of NAPLAN testing may be

ameliorated by clear and more effective communication about the purposes and proper uses of NAPLAN data.

NAPLAN, *My School* and school choice

The impact of NAPLAN and *My School* on school choice and competition between schools was an important theme in stakeholder submissions and conversations. The evidence is that relatively few parents use *My School* to inform school choice, and that those who do look at *My School* are more likely to look at the school profile page than the NAPLAN data pages. Nor do parents generally regard NAPLAN performance as an important source of information when choosing a school. There is, however, some evidence that parents believe that it is important to have access to this information. This view is shared by some, but not all, of the parent stakeholder groups consulted in this Review.

Students and NAPLAN reporting

Few stakeholders took up the invitation to comment on how information on NAPLAN achievement might better be communicated to students. Among those who did, however, suggestions included provision of age-appropriate summaries and a reminder of how important timely information about achievement could be in enhancing students' self-regulation and their own learning.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The NAPLAN Reporting Review has been framed by the four Terms of Reference:

1. Perceptions of NAPLAN and *My School* data, including the potential for misinterpretation or misuse of data;
2. How *My School* and NAPLAN reporting contribute to understanding of student progress and achievement;
3. How schools use achievement data, including NAPLAN, to inform teaching; and
4. How *My School* and NAPLAN data are reported to students and parents.

In this final Findings chapter, Terms of Reference 2, 3 and 4 are considered before Term of Reference 1. The purpose of this re-ordering is to provide findings about patterns of use of NAPLAN and *My School* by schools, systems and sectors, parents and students, before returning to broader perceptions about whether these patterns of use reflect an appropriate balance between the right to high quality information and the possibility of misunderstanding or misuse of data.

FINDINGS

UNDERSTANDING STUDENT PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENT

NAPLAN was introduced in 2008 and NAPLAN data have been available on the *My School* website since 2010. In that decade, NAPLAN has become a fundamental part of the school improvement process in most school systems and sectors. NAPLAN's role in supporting accountability and transparency was valued by most school sectors and systems as well as many principal and parent stakeholder groups. It remains the only authoritative source of whole-population literacy and numeracy data and is used by governments and school systems to make judgements about school and school system performance. Acknowledging this role, some governments have reservations about unintended impacts of NAPLAN testing and the publication of NAPLAN data on *My School.*

> **Finding 1.** Australian governments and school systems rely on NAPLAN to make judgements about school and school system performance, but some have reservations about unintended consequences of NAPLAN testing and the publication of NAPLAN data on *My School*.

NAPLAN data have been integrated into the data analytics platforms that have been developed by school sectors and systems in recent years. School leaders and teachers participating in focus group interviews confirmed that NAPLAN data are widely used for school improvement, accountability and identifying trends and gaps in achievement. Schools use their school system or sector data analytics platforms or locally developed data strategies rather than *My School* for this purpose.

> **Finding 2.** School sector and system data analytics platforms are widely used in understanding student progress and achievement, but schools do not use *My School* data displays for this purpose.

Although stakeholders and focus group participants confirmed that NAPLAN data are widely used in identifying trends and gaps in achievement, in school planning and in annual reporting to school authorities, many were concerned about aspects of NAPLAN. Some were concerned by what they called the narrowness of NAPLAN's focus on literacy and numeracy, arguing that there is much more to school quality than NAPLAN results. Others were concerned that NAPLAN results are just one point in time, or that there are long time-lags between testing and reporting. The consensus was that although there is value in NAPLAN, it is just one part of the puzzle for schools focused on improving teaching and learning.

> **Finding 3.** NAPLAN provides important but incomplete information on school quality.

School staff in the focus groups were more likely to agree that NAPLAN data were useful for school improvement and accountability than for setting targets or making school comparisons. They found the Similar Schools displays on *My School* less useful than the others. Among stakeholders, there was a strong preference for data displays that focus on student gain and significant concern about the use of statistically similar school comparisons.

> **Finding 4.** Data displays that focus on gain in student achievement were preferred to those that used ICSEA-based calculations to compare statistically similar schools.

USING ACHIEVEMENT DATA TO INFORM TEACHING

Although every one of the sample schools demonstrated a deep understanding of their students' achievement data and actively used it for school improvement purposes, NAPLAN was rarely used to inform day-to-day teaching practice. Where it was used, it was in triangulation with other assessments. Schools had available to them a wide variety of standardised and local assessment instruments and were more likely to use these to inform teaching. Dozens of such tests were mentioned by stakeholders, in sample schools and in submissions. Virtually every stakeholder conversation that touched on assessments used in schools mentioned ACER's PAT-R and PAT-M tests.

> **Finding 5.** Schools triangulate NAPLAN data with a wide range of other assessments including large-scale nationally normed and standardised tests.

REPORTING NAPLAN DATA TO PARENTS AND STUDENTS

There have been significant changes in the international context for public reporting of school-level achievement data in recent years. The United States has moved from national to state-based reporting procedures. Hong Kong has moved from whole-cohort testing to sample testing in Year 3. Singapore is moving from scale scores to reporting only in achievement bands. Scotland has made national standardised testing available to schools but publishes detailed school-level results only in broad bands based on teacher judgement. Wales grades schools but no longer publishes school-level results. New Zealand no longer has whole population testing; school reviews are published but do not require reference to national or standardised assessments. There is, however, no obvious

empirical relationship between levels of transparency of school-level achievement data and educational achievement among these jurisdictions..

Internationally, the two most common approaches to public reporting school-level assessment data are:

- achievement, and
- impact on achievement.

Achievement is sometimes reported in terms of benchmarks, bands or averages. Tennessee, California, New York City and Ontario, for example, report the proportion of students reaching a benchmark. Arizona and England report the proportion in achievement bands. Singapore reports the lowest, highest and average scores in the national primary school assessment. *My School* provides averages as well as the proportion achieving in each band.

Impact on achievement is reported using value-added, student gain or similar school/similar student calculations. Value-added calculations are published in Tennessee and were used in England for many years. Measures of student achievement gain are used in Arizona, in England and on the *My School* website. Statistically similar student calculations are published in the New York City school district and similar school calculations are published on the *My School* website.

Although most jurisdictions publish achievement data using simple numerical scores in individual tests, some create composite indicators of achievement or impact and represent these in terms of overall letter or numerical grades, colour codes or graphics. *My School* does not simplify data by using composite indicators.

> **Finding 6.** The *My School* website provides more comprehensive and detailed school-level performance data displays than any of the international jurisdictions considered in this Review, but less information than is provided in Australian system and sector data analytics platforms.

My School is the only publicly available source of school-level NAPLAN data on every Australian school. In many jurisdictions, however, governments make school-level data available to the public, either through searchable online databases, or through standardised annual reports or improvement plans posted on departmental or school websites. Independent schools also disclose their NAPLAN results on their websites in school board papers and annual reports.

> **Finding 7.** School-level NAPLAN results are widely but not universally available from sources other than *My School*.

Individual NAPLAN results are provided to parents, but stakeholders confirmed that discussions about individual results were more likely when parents actively sought more information from schools or teachers. Schools preferred to use more contextual, and often timelier, achievement data than NAPLAN in discussions with parents. School-level NAPLAN results are sometimes reported in school newsletters and about two-thirds of the focus group parents recalled their school providing

such feedback about NAPLAN. Parent stakeholder groups reported that such results have a relatively low profile in the schools.

> **Finding 8.** Schools make limited use of school-level NAPLAN data in communication with families and prefer timelier and more contextual data when discussing individual student achievement.

Many stakeholders were concerned that publication of NAPLAN data on *My School* had increased competition between schools, led to unfair comparisons or prompted parents to choose schools on the narrow basis of NAPLAN results. Although parents participating in the focus groups reported that the *My School* NAPLAN displays could be useful for choosing schools, fewer than half had looked at *My School* before the focus group meetings and few believed that *My School* was often used for this purpose. Almost all focus group parents agreed that school-level NAPLAN results should be available on a public website. Similar conclusions about parents' perceptions have been reported in the recent Colmar Brunton review[77] commissioned by ACARA:

> "Parents had generally not given this issue prior thought and, when questioned, found it difficult to see a reason why the information on the My School website would not be freely available in the public domain" (p. 5).

Few focus group teachers or school leaders had personal experience of parents choosing or leaving schools because of NAPLAN results, and fewer agreed that the NAPLAN pages on *My School* were useful in supporting parents' school choice. Stakeholders confirmed that NAPLAN results are not among the most important factors in parents' school choices.

Stakeholder consultation with parent groups, focus group interviews and research conducted for ACARA confirmed that parents often – but by no means universally – expect that school-level results should nevertheless be made public for transparency and accountability.

> **Finding 9.** Parents generally do not place a high priority on NAPLAN results when choosing a school, but many believe that transparency and accountability require publication of these results.

Stakeholders varied in their judgements about the accessibility of *My School's* NAPLAN pages. Considering the range of concerns raised by parent stakeholders about the purposes for which the website was designed compared with the purposes for which it is now used, there is merit in considering a broader communication strategy that clarifies appropriate uses and purposes for *My School* and NAPLAN.

> **Finding 10.** *My School* and NAPLAN would be strengthened by a public communication program that clarified the purposes and proper uses of the data and the website.

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[77] http://docs.acara.edu.au/resources/20150304_Perspectives_on_the_My_School_Website.pdf

Few stakeholders, submissions or focus group members commented on communication to students about NAPLAN. In the student focus groups about one-third of students recalled their teachers providing any feedback on class or school NAPLAN results. Those who could, recalled their teacher going over the questions after the test or acknowledging good performance. The vast majority of students participating in the focus groups, however, were aware of the importance to their families, teachers, school (and indeed themselves) of their NAPLAN results. Considering the research evidence on the impact of appropriate information on students' self-regulation and achievement, NAPLAN would be strengthened by age-appropriate communication strategy directed at individual students.

> **Finding 11.** Students would benefit from age-appropriate explanations of their NAPLAN results.

PERCEPTIONS OF MY SCHOOL AND NAPLAN REPORTING

School systems and sectors rely on NAPLAN for accountability purposes and these purposes were accepted by a large majority of respondents to this review. Submissions were often framed, however, by stakeholders' restatements of their understanding of the purposes of either NAPLAN or *My School*.

Stakeholders' understanding of the purposes of NAPLAN of ranged from system accountability to guiding teachers about concepts not yet attained by students. The Colmar Brunton report prepared for ACARA found the same spread of views, with parents suggesting that NAPLAN and *My School* were intended to facilitate comparisons among states, comparisons among local schools, for monitoring teacher or student cohort performance, or for monitoring the performance of individual students. They found a similar range of views about the uses of NAPLAN, including allocation of funds, school choice, school improvement planning and intervention with individual students, as did the Queensland Government's recent *NAPLAN Review*. [78]

> **Finding 12.** There is no settled view of the purposes or proper uses of NAPLAN and the *My School* website. Further clarification and communication of these issues would be welcomed.

Some school principal stakeholders and the teachers' unions contested whether NAPLAN provided valuable or rigorous data, but this view was not widely held among other stakeholders. What was more common, especially among principal stakeholder groups, was discomfort with the public release of school-level data. Most did not contest the collection of population data but did contest the value of making it public beyond the school and school system. As one principals' association commented, "as soon as it becomes public it is used to rank schools".

> **Finding 13.** Many stakeholders were concerned that publishing school-level NAPLAN data had made the tests "high stakes", and that any negative consequences flowed from

[78] https://qed.qld.gov.au/programsinitiatives/education/Documents/naplan-2018-school-perceptions-report.pdf

publication of NAPLAN data rather than the collection of data or provision of data to schools and school systems.

Among stakeholder groups that reported negative consequences of NAPLAN and *My School*, three issues were most commonly raised: inappropriate school comparisons; diversion of teaching time; and stress and wellbeing. These negative consequences were predicted by opponents of population testing long before NAPLAN and *My School* were established[79], have been reported in local[80] and international[81] studies of the impact of population testing, and were raised in the recent Queensland *NAPLAN Review*. The strength of concern about these issues, however, clearly varies among stakeholders, with views marked by regional differences, roles within or outside schools, ideological perspectives and the sources of empirical data to support or contest these claims.

There are several dimensions to concerns about school comparisons. Some of the concerns were with the ICSEA-based comparisons on *My School*. Technical issues were raised, with stakeholders drawing attention to the calculation of predictive factors in ICSEA, such as home language background, disability or gender.[82] Other stakeholders were concerned that statistically similar schools based on ICSEA calculations had little to do with actual similarity across geographical locations, cultural contexts and levels of financial resources. Most parents, teachers and school leaders participating in focus groups for this Review and some of the principal stakeholder organisations, however, agreed that colour-coding of cells and diamonds in *My School* NAPLAN displays – which are based on ICSEA similar school comparisons – was useful in interpreting the results. Such colour-coding to aid interpretation is very common among international jurisdictions that report school-level test results.

Finding 14. Colour-coding of NAPLAN results was regarded as useful by many focus group participants, but stakeholders had concerns about the use of current ICSEA comparisons as a basis for the similar school calculations that underpin the colour-coding. A technical review of ICSEA would be well regarded.

Internationally, strategies other than similar school calculations have been developed to estimate the impact of schools on students' performance. Tennessee pioneered the use of contextual value-added calculations that were used in the United Kingdom for many years but have recently been replaced by measures of student achievement gain. The New York City school district makes comparisons based on gain achieved by a matched group of students with similar starting scores and

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[79] Cobbald, T. (2004). *Reporting on school performance. A paper prepared for the ACT Minister or Education and Training*. Government Schools Education Council ACT. June 2004. http://www.saveourschools.com.au/file_download/16

[80] For a summary, see: Wyn, J., Turnbull, M., & Grimshaw, L. (2014). *The experience of education: The impact of high stakes testing on school students and their families*. https://www.whitlam.org/publications/2017/10/17/the-experience-of-education-a-qualitative-study

[81] See, for example, https://www.nfer.ac.uk/what-impact-does-accountability-have-on-curriculum-standards-and-engagement-in-education/

[82] The most recent technical review of ICSEA was published in 2014: https://www.myschool.edu.au/media/1032/icsea_2013_generation_report.pdf

demographic characteristics. Among teachers and school leaders participating in this Review's focus groups, measures of gain were much preferred to statistical similar schools. Principals' groups, independent and Catholic education authorities and research and advocacy groups were among those who advocated for a focus on gain in NAPLAN and *My School* displays. The consensus among state and territory government authorities was that displays on *My School* could be reduced to school achievement and student gain, as other estimates of school performance of interest to schools and school systems were available to schools from their data analytics platforms.

> **Finding 15.** Measures of student achievement and gain may be sufficient information for public accountability and transparency purposes.

League tables have emerged in every international jurisdiction considered in the environmental scan, except New Zealand, including those in which governments already publish detailed and web-searchable school-level performance data. These league tables often involve composite indicators and gradings, simpler than and different from the information provided on official websites.

In Australia, the data required to construct NAPLAN league tables are readily available in many jurisdictions: in a downloadable table on a government website in one state; in searchable data bases on government websites in several others; and in annual reports or improvement plans published on individual school websites in most other government school systems.

My School currently seems to have a limited role in the propagation of school league tables, although it may have been more common in the past. Use of the *My School* data for this purpose is contrary to the terms of use of the website and ACARA has been active in pursuit of users who have ignored the terms of use. Two of the three recent league tables published in Australian newspapers have drawn on publicly available sources other than *My School*, and one appears to have drawn directly on *My School* NAPLAN data.

> **Finding 16.** Some, but not all, of the recent Australian league tables have drawn their NAPLAN data from publicly available sources other than *My School*.

Judgments about negative consequences of NAPLAN varied by stakeholder group and data source. Most school leaders, teachers and parents consulted in this Review's focus groups disagreed that the curriculum had been narrowed to boost NAPLAN results in their schools, but some suggested that it might be happening at schools other than their own. Most also disagreed that too much time had been spent on test preparation. In contrast, more than 70% of members responding to the IEU survey agreed that time spent on test preparation had impacted on time available for teaching the curriculum. According to the Queensland NAPLAN Review school staff reported that attention to NAPLAN and NAPLAN outcomes affected the full implementation of the Australian Curriculum, even though the policy discourse had given primacy to teaching the full curriculum and using school assessments (p.13).

> **Finding 17.** Concerns about the impact of NAPLAN on teaching and learning programs were reported but estimates of the severity of this impact varied among stakeholders and data sources.

Evidence of impact on staff and student wellbeing was also mixed. A 2017 study[83] cited by the AEU reported negative impacts on student wellbeing and staff morale. Similarly, school staff responding to the survey conducted for the Queensland *NAPLAN Review* indicated that NAPLAN was having a negative effect on their well-being but their interview and focus group respondents were more likely to attribute this to media representations of NAPLAN or background morale issues than NAPLAN testing (p. 12). Students consulted in the Queensland survey did not agree that NAPLAN testing had a negative impact on their well-being. In the focus groups conducted for this Review, few parents agreed that their children and been too stressed by NAPLAN tests, but it was a cause for concern among about half of focus group teachers and leaders.

> **Finding 18.** Concerns about the impact of NAPLAN on wellbeing of teachers and students were reported but estimates of the severity of this impact varied among stakeholders and data sources.

Many stakeholders canvassed alternative possibilities for the future of NAPLAN. Some suggested that it be replaced by online, formative assessments based on learning progressions; others suggested that the system-level accountability functions of NAPLAN could be met by sample testing. Neither of these proposals is within the scope of this Review, but both are relevant to considerations about current representation of NAPLAN in *My School*.

The source of many stakeholders' conviction that NAPLAN would be insufficient for the future was their interest in or support for the kind of assessment that the 2018 Gonski *Through Growth to Achievement*[84] report foreshadowed*:*

> "an online, formative assessment tool to help diagnose a student's current level of knowledge, skill and understanding, to identify the next steps in learning to achieve the next stage in growth, and to track student progress over time against a typical development trajectory" (p. x).

The development of such a tool is some way off, although there are some current initiatives that would contribute to this work (ACER's *Progressive Achievement Tests*[85], the ACARA *Learning Progressions*[86] and *Brightpath*[87], to name a few). It is unclear, however, whether such a tool would be the best approach to meeting the accountability purposes for which NAPLAN is currently used. The Grattan Institute submission warned that different assessment tools are appropriate at different levels of education systems: teacher-generated data are most appropriate for targeting teaching and standardised tests are most useful for assessing school and system performance. This is a complex

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[83] https://www.whitlam.org/publications/2017/10/17/the-experience-of-education-the-impacts-of-high-stakes-testing-on-school-students-and-their-families
[84] https://www.education.gov.au/review-achieve-educational-excellence-australian-schools
[85] https://www.acer.org/au/pat
[86] https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/national-literacy-and-numeracy-learning-progressions/pdf-documents/
[87] https://www.brightpath.com.au/

trade-off and may not be able to be resolved until the proposed formative assessments have been developed.

> **Finding 19.** There is widespread interest in the development of on-line, formative assessments based on learning progressions.

Some stakeholders have also advocated a move from whole-population to sample testing. This has been seen as an opportunity to reduce the reported negative effects of NAPLAN. Some school sectors have indicated an interest in contemplating this option. Other stakeholders, the teachers' unions and the Gonski Institute particularly, have strongly advocated for it. Several of the research and advocacy groups have taken an alternative view, arguing that whole-population testing is essential for accountability and equity purposes. Whether or not sample testing would be sufficient for accountability purposes, and whether governments would agree to a move to sample testing, is uncertain. What is certain, however, is that all of the government and Catholic school systems and most independent schools currently make substantial use of school-level data that require population testing.

> **Finding 20.** Some stakeholders advocated for a national accountability system based on sample testing, but this is inconsistent with school systems' and sectors' current use of population NAPLAN data in their data analytics, school review systems and school board reports.

RECOMMENDATIONS

My School, NAPLAN and indicators of school quality

Australian governments and school systems currently rely on NAPLAN to make judgements about school and system performance and most governments expect that data collected through a national assessment system should continue to be available to the public (Finding 1). Although the NAPLAN displays available on *My School* are not among the most important sources of information for parents when choosing their children's schools, most parents also expect that school-level achievement data will be available to the public (Finding 9).

My School's NAPLAN displays are more comprehensive and detailed than school-level performance displays available to the public in comparable international jurisdictions (Finding 6). NAPLAN, however, provides incomplete information on school quality (Finding 3). Many would welcome less emphasis of NAPLAN data on the *My School* website. One option is to reduce the content of *My School*, removing the least used and understood NAPLAN data pages. Another is to reduce the number of NAPLAN assessments published on *My School*, perhaps focusing on the core assessments of reading, writing and numeracy and removing the spelling and grammar results (although these assessments could continue to appear on school system and sector data analytics platforms).

Recommendation 1: That the number of NAPLAN displays on *My School* be reduced.

NAPLAN-based school comparisons

Schools use system or sector data analytics platforms, not *My School*, for understanding student progress and school systems could be expected to continue provide a range of data displays and analyses that meet this professional need through their data analytics platforms (Finding 2).

Given the broad preference for measures of student gain (Finding 4) and the ability to meet public accountability purposes without using ICSEA-based similar school comparisons, a single NAPLAN data display focused on student gain may be sufficient (Finding 15). Something like the current *My School* Student Gain page would provide the public with the two most important kinds of information about student achievement: the average level of achievement and student gain compared with students with the same starting point.

There are several relatively minor adjustments to the current display that would reduce the emphasis on comparisons and increase the emphasis on gain. The default display could show the gain of students with the same starting point in the selected school, with the option of adding comparisons with the Australia-wide mean starting point and gain. Secondly, consideration might also be given to making the mean scale score at the end of each gain line available through a "mouse over" function rather than printing the scores on the display.

Many stakeholders had concerns about the use of ICSEA for similar school comparisons (Finding 14). For some, the issue was the technical construction of the index. Concerns were expressed about the weighting of factors in the index including the treatment of language background, gender and disability. Others had a more fundamental concern about ICSEA-based similar school comparisons, arguing that such similar school calculations had little to do with actual similarity among schools across geographical locations, cultural contexts and levels of school resources. For this reason, there was a strong preference among stakeholders for NAPLAN displays that feature student gain rather than ICSEA-based comparisons with statistically similar schools. A technical review of ICSEA would be welcomed by many, but stakeholders would prefer that similar school comparisons were removed from *My School* (Finding 14).

Recommendation 2: **That the focus of NAPLAN displays on *My School* should be student gain, not statistically similar school comparisons.**

Recommendation 3: **That a technical review of ICSEA be undertaken.**

Accountability and assessment for learning

Schools use a wide variety of assessments including standardised assessments and they triangulate these with NAPLAN (Finding 5). There were concerns about the limitations of NAPLAN (Finding 3) and widespread interest the development of on-line, formative assessments based on learning progressions (Finding 19). In the short term, moving NAPLAN online should improve the diagnostic quality of the assessments and reduce the time-lag between assessment and the availability of

results to schools, but NAPLAN data are still likely to provide the core of school system and sector data analytics, school review systems and school board reports (Finding 20).

Recommendation 4: **That the national priority initiatives on learning progressions and formative assessment tools be pursued, in order to improve the timeliness and diagnostic quality of assessments available to schools.**

Impact of publishing school-level NAPLAN results

Concerns about the impact of publication of school-level NAPLAN data are widespread (Finding 13) but empirical evidence of the severity of the impact of NAPLAN of teaching and wellbeing varied among stakeholders and data sources (Findings 17 and 18). School-level NAPLAN results, however, are available from sources other than *My School* (Finding 7) and *My School* data have not been necessary for the production of some recent NAPLAN-based Australian league tables (Finding 16). Third-party newspapers and websites create league tables in most comparable international jurisdictions, even when school-level assessment data are not published by governments.

Recommendation 5: **That school systems publish school-level NAPLAN data in ways that reduce the likelihood that third-party NAPLAN-based school league tables will be produced.**

Communication about NAPLAN and *My School*

Schools make limited use of NAPLAN data in communicating to parents about student or school-level achievement (Finding 8). Despite the ubiquitous recognition of the NAPLAN acronym and awareness of the existence of the *My School* website, stakeholder submissions and consultation confirmed that there is no settled view of the purposes or proper uses of either NAPLAN or the *My School* website (Finding 12). Some stakeholders expected NAPLAN to provide diagnostic information about individual student achievement and others saw it as a high-level accountability measure. Similarly, the range of purposes of *My School* included transparency and accountability, school choice and school improvement. Further clarification of the proper uses of both NAPLAN and *My School* would be welcomed by many stakeholders (Finding 10). Improved communication to the public and students (Finding 11), combined with other prospective changes in NAPLAN reporting may reduce the degree to which NAPLAN is regarded as a high-stakes assessment and the risk that there are negative consequences from the national assessment program.

Recommendation 6: **That in order to reduce the risk of misuse of NAPLAN data, clear guidance be provided to schools, the public and students about the purposes and proper uses of NAPLAN and *My School*.**

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS

ACT Government
Association of Independent Schools South Australia
Australian Education Union
Australian Heads of Independent Schools
Australian Parents Council
Australian Primary Principals Association
Catholic School Parents Victoria
Catholic Education Commission of Victoria*
Catholic Schools Parents Australia
Centre for Independent Studies
Department of Education and Training, Australian Government
Department of Education, Northern Territory
Department of Education, South Australia
Department of Education, Western Australia
Gonski Institute of Education, University of New South Wales
Grattan Institute
Helena Chomley
Independent Education Union of Australia
Independent Schools Council of Australia
Independent Schools Queensland
Independent Schools Tasmania*
Institute for Learning Sciences and Teacher Education, Australian Catholic University
Loreto Kirribilli
McCarthy Catholic College Tamworth*
National Catholic Education Commission
Principals Federation of Western Australia
Queensland Catholic Education Commission
Queensland Government
Schools Curriculum and Standards Authority, Western Australia
St Pauls School, Bald Hills, Queensland
Steiner Education Australia
The Smith Family
Townsville Catholic Education Diocese

* Confidential submission

APPENDIX 2: STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

Consultation meetings were held with the following stakeholder groups:

Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia
Australian Capital Territory, Education Directorate
Australian Catholic Primary Principals Association
Australian Council of State School Organisations
Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
Australian Education Union
Australian Government, Department of Education and Training
Australian Parents Council
Australian Primary Principals Association
Australian Secondary Principals Association
Catholic School Parents Australia
Catholic Secondary Principals Australia
Gonski Institute for Education, University of New South Wales
Independent Education Union
Independent Schools Council of Australia
National Catholic Education Commission
New South Wales, Department of Education
Northern Territory, Department of Education
Queensland, Department of Education
South Australia, Department for Education
Tasmania, Department of Education
Victoria, Department of Education and Training
Western Australia, Department of Education

APPENDIX 3: ISSUES PAPER

https://www.education.act.gov.au/__data/assets/word_doc/0007/1314583/Issues-paper.docx

APPENDIX 4: PRINCIPLES AND PROTOCOLS FOR REPORTING ON SCHOOLING IN AUSTRALIA 2009

Principles and Protocols for Reporting on Schooling in Australia 2009