

# **AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF STATE SCHOOL ORGANISATIONS (ACSSO)**

The national voice of parents of students in Australia's public schools and their school communities

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

*27 SEPTEMBER 2007*

### **PARENTS WARY ABOUT TEST RESULTS AND RANKING OF SCHOOLS**

The peak council for public school parents and citizens has voiced its opposition to publicly ranking schools according to their national literacy and numeracy test results.

The Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) was responding to proposals by Education Ministers to make schools' national literacy and numeracy test scores publicly available.

ACSSO President Jenny Branch said the moves were radical and would have a major impact on the education systems.

She said parents wanted information about their child's progress or lack of it and they wanted that information as part of a continuous dialogue between school and home.

"However, overseas experience and the nature of Australia's heavily privatized market place could lead to a number of damaging developments," she said.

She listed the major potential problems and questions that would need to be answered by any Minister who wanted those radical changes.

First, how are states going to guarantee that the media and sectional interests did not leak the raw data which could unfairly damage the reputation and morale of schools which had a high proportion of disadvantaged students?

"That raw data would be one of the most highly prized news items sought by media and unscrupulous competitors in the education market place," she said. "Yet it would be misleading to both the general public and parents."

Second, when schools are listed well down on the achievement ladder, recruitment, retention and maintenance of teacher morale are made especially difficult.

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"We have seen the blame game practised in the US and other countries where such league tables are made public," she said. "Sometimes parents are encouraged to vote with their feet when all the authorities want to do is to reduce the number of schools or privatize the education sector."

Third, the national testing data should primarily be intended to allow teachers and parents to diagnose student learning problems and to put in place learning plans to help those that fall below the national benchmarks. The tests were essentially only one teaching tool and should be followed up by remedial work.

Fourth, a simple test on a particular day was not an adequate way to judge a school's performance. There were many other factors such as values, discipline, retention rates, levels of school attendance, teacher morale, parent-school partnerships, socialization of students and student excitement about learning which could not necessarily be captured by such a test.

Fifth, schools wishing to cheat the system in order to recruit students could teach to the test which meant that other key learning went out the window. Already, at the higher school level, some private schools had also asked students to leave or not sit tests and exams in order to improve a school's performance average.

The President warned that any moves towards national and cross-sectoral comparisons should be carefully considered and never rushed into place. "Accountability yes, league tables no," Ms. Branch said.

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