



One voice for every
child in public education



Australian Council of State Schools
Organisations Ltd

Response to Review of NAPLAN 2020

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Introduction

Australian Council of State Schools Organisations (ACSSO) welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the discussion about the review of the Melbourne Declaration.

About us

ACSSO represent the interests of the families and communities of more than 2.4 million children attending government schools in Australia. We are one of the oldest continuously operating parent organisations in Australia and possibly the world. We were formed in 1947 to bring together various state and territory parent groups to develop national policies reflecting the way families wanted public education to be offered for their children. Over time there have been some changes in the way our members in states and territory peak parent groups have approached national issues, so membership has occasionally varied. Currently we have six members.

Policy

We believe that the primary obligation of governments, both Federal and State, is to establish and maintain government systems of education which:

- will be of the highest standard and open to all, irrespective of race, gender, religion, social-economic status, geographic location, disability (physical or intellectual);
- can respond to changing circumstances and can develop the flexible and diverse programs necessary to meet individual needs;
- discriminate in favour of those schools and individual students facing disadvantage and/or disability;
- provide for participation by parents and community at all levels of education decision making.

This submission

The Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) would like to congratulate the review team for the comprehensive work completed on the NAPLAN review and acknowledge the findings in the interim report. We appreciate the opportunity to be able to comment through the process and also happy to add our comments post the interim report. We are also aware many of our colleagues who are part of our member organisations have taken part in face to face consultations.

In general, families are supportive of a national assessment program. Whilst the majority of parents are pleased with the communications from their child's school regarding their child's progress our discussions with the Australian Research Council last year revealed that families often found school reports cumbersome and difficult to gauge whether their child was performing to a standard that was comparative to the other young people around the nation. Whilst NAPLAN was just a snapshot of their child's performance in two areas in a given timeframe it was this was well received.

Families believe that NAPLAN should

- give literacy numeracy performance data of systems and the nation as a whole. It could identify areas needing additional resourcing and may provide opportunities to possibly identify illustrations of great practice.
- provide schools with the data that would enable them to identify students and/or cohorts strengths and areas for improvement in literacy and numeracy. Parents want to be aware in particular of their own child's areas of achievement and needs for improvement. This enables schools and families to target resourcing and build strategies and support for the individual, the cohort and the teachers.
- provides families with individual and independent information on their child's performance; what their strengths and weaknesses together with the mean of those of similar age sitting the assessment, with an added value of measuring growth from assessment to assessment.

TIMING OF NAPLAN

Parents are keen to have support as early in the school year as possible for any of their students that may identify as struggling. There is no doubt that schools would also benefit from data to analyse and inform targeted strategies to improve both individual and class performance. Schools equally would benefit from the results early to ensure that classes are formed to maximise the benefit for students and ensure that resources are distributed for the same purpose

Earlier reporting of NAPLAN assessment results to parents and carers allows, parents to pursue a conversation with the school to pursue timely advice from schools where gaps in learning arise. This also allows schools and families to work in partnership on any challenges immediately, this is currently an issue due to the delays between assessment and reporting.

Should this be a decision then there needs to be clear and explicit communication around this.

TEACHING TO THE TEST

ACSSO believes that teaching to the test actually undermines the purpose of the assessment, whilst we understand the need to familiarise young people with the format – teaching to the test compromises the results for proper diagnosis of the need for support both for the individual and/or the system

WRITING COMPONENT

With respect to the writing component of NAPLAN whilst ACSSO has not discussed the technicalities we do believe that students should be assessed via the mode that is most familiar with them at the time of the assessment. The decision, be it handwriting, word processing or keyboarding, should be made by the classroom teacher to enable the student

to be able to attempt the assessment in the mode most familiar to their daily practice. We believe that this should not be assessing their keyboard skills or what they can produce in a short time frame but assess using resources that they would use in any given school day to complete that task.

REPORTING OF NAPLAN RESULTS

ACSSO believes individual results should be reported to parents and schools. Families have expressed a desire to see how their child fares in respect others within their “cohort”.

Most parents feel this provides parents and schools with independently assessed data on student’s strengths and weaknesses. This supports targeted strategies and resourcing to be developed and put in place and for schools to work in partnership with families.

We believe NAPLAN data should be available on My School to allow for external accountability of schools. We condemn any public comparison of schools or development of league tables – we believe that NAPLAN results should not be used as a marketing tool. These assessments are for the sole purpose of a snapshot of where a student and schools is at and to be used in concert with other collected data by the individual family, school and systems to plan and resource for improvement.

Our discussions with families are clear that MySchool is rarely, if at all, used in a decision to select a school for their child to attend.

RANDOMISED TESTING

Randomised sampling may reduce stress and anxiety for some students – it could also alleviate the decision making for families whose children have additional needs

Sample testing will not have the ability to identify individual students’ gaps and / or strengths in literacy and or numeracy skills. Many parents report that the individual NAPLAN results, particularly in Year 3 was the only indication that their child had learning gaps. Parents are first to note that their child’s teacher is also tracking their child’s progress, but they feel that this external assessment is validation for them and information for the system. Parents expressed that whilst the current high stakes and public attention – given by media and many system leaders – is of concern they do like the opportunity know how their child is progressing – in particular they are keen to see the value add as well as where their child has challenges/strengths

The greatest concern for parents is the public pressure and discussion surrounding the assessment – we have seen 10 years of results and it’s is extremely clear that there are particular students are in need – how can we use this knowledge to re shape curriculum and produce resources and professional learning that support our students

ACSSO believes NAPLAN should be timely and informative for the benefit of targeting teaching and learning – not for comparing of schools, systems or individuals. Special breakfasts, teaching to test and similar events should be discouraged, and these assessments should be delivered as part of a normal school day

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