Media urged to end harmful school league tables



Education leaders from across Australia have written an open letter to News Corp Australia, calling on them to immediately cease the publication of misleading school league tables.

Representatives from across the nation's education unions, principal associations, state and territory peak bodies, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), parents and citizens associations, sector leaders and academic experts have joined together in urging the media to act responsibly and end the publication of these crude and harmful tables.

The joint open letter was published last December in Nine Newspapers, after News Corp newspapers refused to publish the letter, for which advertising space had been booked.

The 41 signatories, including SSTUWA President Matt Jarman, expressed deep concern and dismay that News Corp continues to produce crude rankings based solely on NAPLAN data without accounting for the greater context of each school.

They warn that these tables harm students, teachers and communities by oversimplifying complex learning environments and misrepresenting school performance.

As the letter states, ranking schools in this way is not in the public interest, causes harm and does nothing to support improvement. Crude tables ignore progress, fail to show how schools help students grow and undermine public confidence by reducing education to a simplistic competition.

The leaders also highlight that data, when used responsibly, can inform improvements, celebrate genuine achievements and help identify where additional resources are needed.

They call on the media to refocus on deeper, more collaborative reporting that enhances community understanding rather than reducing schools to rankings.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said publishing school league tables was irresponsible and harmful.

“These reductive rankings ignore the real work happening in classrooms every day and unfairly stigmatise schools and communities, particularly those already facing significant disadvantage,” she said.

“Teachers and principals work tirelessly to meet the diverse and complex needs of their students. Reducing their efforts to a single number is not only misleading, it is demoralising for teachers and damaging for school communities.”

“NAPLAN data was never designed to be weaponised into league tables. When misused in this way, it distorts public understanding and undermines confidence in our public education system.”

ACARA CEO Stephen Gniel said: “When our education leaders including teachers, principals and experts join forces with parent groups to call out the harm creating and publishing crude league tables cause, ACARA expects those media organisations to heed the advice.”

“ACARA has long discouraged the use of data from our My School website to create and publish league tables – they are misleading for our parents and carers as it doesn’t tell the full picture of a school,”
he continued.

“It’s also disrespectful to our hard-working teachers, principals and young people who deserve better – especially in those areas of significant socio-educational disadvantage.

“Only ACARA’s My School website – myschool.edu.au – provides the comprehensive picture for every school in Australia for free. It gives parents and carers, as well as the wider community, a richer insight which, of course, should always be accompanied by a visit to the school itself.”

University of Melbourne professor of educational leadership Pasi Sahlberg said: “Research shows that standardised tests like NAPLAN are poor indicators of school quality because most variation in student scores is explained by factors outside the school, especially socio-economic background, family resources and broader community conditions.”

For the full list of letter signatories visit
bit.ly/4pwrvAQ

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