

# **Reporting on School Performance**

**A Paper Prepared for the  
ACT Minister for Education and Training**

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## Summary

This paper reviews the case for publishing information on school results and presents Council's recommendations. The paper should be considered in conjunction with Council's report on *Review of Government School Reporting*, which outlines a range of measures to improve reporting on student progress, school achievement and system outcomes.

Council agrees that parents should have information about schools, but considers that this can be achieved by better means than those proposed by the Australian Government. It involves a combination of providing pertinent information to parents about schools and improved reporting of student achievement for the school system as a whole.

The publication of school results will not necessarily improve overall school outcomes; in fact, it can undermine school improvement.

Many studies of the impact of reporting school results are flawed in their methodology in that they fail to account for the influence of contemporaneous changes in education policies, programs and funding. They also fail to account for the detrimental impact of reporting standardised test outcomes on some groups of students and on other areas of school learning not measured by the tests. Overseas research studies show that schools have responded to the publication of school results in ways that artificially boost their comparative results. Many of these responses detract from overall student learning. They include:

- 'cream skimming' high achieving students from other schools;
- reducing time and resources devoted to student learning in curriculum areas and experiences not subject to standardised tests;
- devoting more time and resources to students who are close to reporting benchmarks at the expense of both high achieving and very low achieving students;
- finding ways to exclude low achieving students from the tests; and
- cheating by helping students in tests and changing answers.

The Government School Education Council recommends that the proposal of the Australian Government to require schools to publish their academic outcomes and other information on school performance be rejected because it is likely to:

- provide an inaccurate and misleading picture of school quality;
- lead to the construction of partial or full league tables of school results; and
- undermine effective school improvement.

School outcomes information is likely to be an inaccurate and misleading measure of school quality because:

- school outcomes are not influenced by teaching alone but also by other factors outside the control of teachers and schools;
- standardised assessments are an incomplete measure of school outcomes as they cover only selective aspects of student learning;

- school outcomes can be manipulated by cheating and by excluding low performing students; and
- school results can be distorted by the results of a few students in small schools, by transfers of students between schools and other sources of statistical error.

League tables are likely to:

- exacerbate the problems of misleading and inaccurate information about school performance associated with reporting school averages;
- lead to a public debasement of schools with very poor results and a low ranking, and to public labelling of their students and families as ‘failures’; and
- lead to greater education inequities and social segregation of schools as high ranking schools select ‘good’ students and reject ‘poor’ students, while the best teachers move to the high ranking schools.

League tables also tend to undermine school improvement efforts because they may:

- distort curriculum and teaching;
- discourage collaboration between schools around improved strategies and practices;
- promote increased focus on school image rather than school improvement; and
- discourage parents from seeing themselves as partners in schooling and tend to promote a divisive relationship between parents and schools rather than a collaborative approach to learning.

# Reporting on School Performance

## Introduction

While the Government School Education Council was preparing a report to the ACT Minister for Education on reporting to parents and the community, the Australian Minister for Education, Science and Training, Dr. Brendan Nelson, announced the Australian Government's national agenda for schooling.<sup>1</sup> A key part of the agenda is that schools will have to publish information about their performance as a condition of funding for the next few years, an issue that the Australian Government will take up with all State and Territory Governments.

Council decided that it should consider the proposal in formulating advice to the ACT Government on reporting school achievement. This paper reviews the case for publishing information on school results and presents Council's recommendations. The paper should be considered in conjunction with Council's report on reporting to parents and the community, which outlines a range of measures to improve reporting on student progress, school achievement and system outcomes.

Dr. Nelson outlined a range of information that schools will be required to publish, including:

- academic outcomes;
- student absentee rates;
- vocational educational and training options offered;
- school leaver destinations; and
- professional qualifications of teachers.

Moreover, he pointed to other information provided in school report cards in a number of states in the U.S.A including dropout rates, class sizes, suspensions and exclusions, and the number of days of staff development. He did not state, however, that Australian schools will be required to report this additional information.

The rationale for the proposal is to inform parents better about school performance and decisions on school choice. It is also intended to publicly identify under-performing schools so that action can be taken to improve their performance. Thus, the proposal is intended to assist parent choice of schools, improve public accountability of schools, and identify schools in need of improvement.

The proposal is unlikely to achieve its stated objectives and, in all likelihood based on the available evidence, will be counter-productive. The information to be published will provide an inaccurate and misleading picture of school performance and quality. It can be used to construct league tables of school performance, which will exacerbate this inaccurate picture, undermine schools serving disadvantaged communities, increase social segregation of schools and contribute to greater inequities in school

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Brendan Nelson, A National Framework for Schools, Media release, 13 November 2003; Dr. Brendan Nelson, Taking Schools to the Next Level, Speech at the Pursuing Opportunity and Prosperity Conference, University of Melbourne, 13 November 2003; Dr. Brendan Nelson, Time for Transparency in School Performance, Media release, 30 April 2004.

outcomes. It is also likely to undermine effective school improvement. Council elaborates on these issues below.

## **Inaccurate and misleading measures of school performance**

### **Academic outcomes**

The details of what academic outcomes will be published are yet to be provided, but Dr. Nelson has indicated it may include average Year 12 results, percentage of students achieving national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy and improvements on previous years.

Public reporting of this information is intended to provide a measure of school performance and will almost inevitably be interpreted as measures of school quality. However, such information is an inaccurate and misleading measure of school performance because:

- school outcomes are not influenced by teaching alone but also by other factors outside the control of teachers and schools;
- school results can be distorted by the results of a few students in small year cohorts, transfers of students between schools and other sources of statistical error.
- standardised assessments cover only selective aspects of student learning and are an incomplete measure of school outcomes; and
- school outcomes can be manipulated by cheating and by excluding low performing students.

As a result, improvement in school results may have nothing to do with teaching quality but simply reflect a change in the student population, increased absenteeism by low achieving students, greater resort to outside tutoring or cheating by school staff, and changes in the turnover of students between schools. They may also simply be a statistical artifice. Despite these acute problems, the improvement in the average score is likely to be interpreted by parents as an improvement in the quality of teaching, and families who base their choice of school on such data may be misled.

### **Influence of non-school factors**

School outcomes are not determined by classroom teaching alone. They are influenced by other factors as well, including student absenteeism, the extent of parent involvement in learning at home, the extent to which students are engaged in after hours tutoring and the socio-economic background of the community.

Family background and resources have a significant effect on student outcomes. Low family income, unemployment and low parental educational achievement are strongly associated with poor education outcomes [Marks et.al. 2000; Rothman & McMillan 2003; see also Haveman & Wolfe 1995] while high family income, professional occupations and high parental educational achievement are strongly correlated with high education outcomes. Generally, school average outcomes indicate more about the catchment area of a school than their success at educating students.

Most systems for reporting school results do not distinguish between the ‘value added’ by the school and the influence of these other factors in the average “raw” score or grade for a school or a given year cohort in the school.

...most of the existing systems that have been introduced are not good devices for inferring the quality of individual schools. [Hanushek & Raymond 2002b, p.19]

Some state systems in the United States recognise the difference between average student achievement and the contribution of schools and provide additional information to show the impact of schools. For example, some provide data on family backgrounds (such as rates of free lunch participation and racial compositions of schools) or describe achievement for groups of students judged to have similar family backgrounds. These approaches still do not permit a very accurate estimation of school performance because they do not adequately identify family or cohort differences and do not take into account prior achievement [Hanushek & Raymond 2002a].

Some countries and systems have adopted ‘value added’ measures of school performance in an attempt to better measure the contribution of schools and teachers to student learning over time. A variety of measures are used, including comparing test scores from one year to the next for the same grade, tracking the performance of a year cohort from one year to the next, adjusting for student background by comparing the results of schools with similar student profiles and adjusting for both student background and school-level characteristics [see Linn 2001; Olson 2004a].

Conceptually, value added measures give a better indication of school quality than “raw” school results because they take account of prior achievement. However, they also have proved to have serious limitations [Goldstein & Spiegelhalter 1996; Goldstein 2003; Hanushek & Raymond 2002a]. For example, mobility of students between schools can seriously affect value added scores of schools. Students who shift between schools tend to have different rates of progress than students who remain in the same school and some schools have more mobile students than others. Student mobility can be high. In many English schools it is between 30 and 40 per cent [Tymms & Dean 2004] and average annual mobility in Texas schools exceeds 20 per cent [Hanushek & Raymond 2002a].

Most value added measures also fail to adjust for changes in the socio-economic background and demographic profile of students and differences in these characteristics between schools. For example, the new value added school reporting system in England does not control for family or background characteristics [Wilson 2003].

### **Measurement error**

School results are also prone to measurement error. Comparisons of school averages are subject to considerable statistical uncertainty, as discussed below, and this makes it impossible to compare or distinguish legitimately between the results of many schools [Goldstein 1997a, 1998; Kane & Staiger 2001; Schagen 1998].

School results tend to be volatile from one year to the next because of measurement and sampling error and non-persistent factors that affect scores in one year but not the

next [Kane & Staiger 2001; Linn & Haug 2002]. Such volatility tends to be magnified in measures of year-to-year changes in school results. This makes it very difficult to judge whether any real change in school performance has occurred.

Although gain scores are often touted as better indicators of a school's "value added", they are much more likely to be affected by idiosyncratic fluctuations in scores from year to year...Moreover, schools differ much less in their average gains than in their average test score levels. In other words, attempting to estimate a school's value-added is analogous to looking for a smaller needle in a bigger haystack. [Kane & Staiger 2001, pp.4-5]

This volatility results in some schools being recognised as outstanding and other schools identified as in need of improvement simply as the result of random fluctuations. It also means that strategies of looking to schools that show large gains for clues of what other schools should do to improve student achievement will have little chance of identifying those practices that are most effective. [Linn & Haug 2002, pp.8-9]

Small schools are much more likely to report large changes in average results from one year to the next, both positive and negative [Kane & Staiger 2001; Linn & Haug 2002]. School results can be heavily influenced by the results of 4 or 5 students in schools with small numbers of students in each year level and by the transfer of students between schools.

A similar effect can occur because of changes in teachers. Small schools are likely to report large changes in results because they have few teachers and changes in teachers can have large impacts on student outcomes from one year to the next [Hanushek et.al. 2004].

### **Incomplete measure of school outcomes**

Another source of inaccuracy is that the standardised literacy and numeracy assessments cover selective aspects of what schools do. They do not include all year levels or all key learning areas and they do not assess the social and personal development of students, a key schooling objective. Different schools often do better in some year levels, in some curriculum areas, and for some schooling objectives [Goldstein 1997c].

This is not to suggest that standardised assessments should be expanded to give a more comprehensive coverage of student learning. These measures would also be affected by factors outside the control and influence of schools. In addition, prohibitive costs would be incurred in extending standardised assessments to all learning areas and other year levels. Such resources would be better devoted to directly improving student learning.

### **Cheating and manipulation of results**

School results can be manipulated by cheating. The high stakes of reputation and status associated with reporting school test results create incentives for teachers to help students with answers in tests and change answers. This is an endemic problem in the UK and US where school results are published.<sup>2</sup> One US study found that

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<sup>2</sup> A survey of cheating incidents is provided in Amrein & Berliner 2002b and ACT Council of P&C Associations 2000. Incidents continue to accumulate, for example Hayasaki 2004.

cheating occurred in 3 – 5 per cent of primary school classrooms [Jacob & Levitt 2003].

Schools also increase their test outcomes by excluding low achieving students from tests. This practice is referred to as ‘gaming’. It can be done by categorising these students as special education students exempt from tests, holding students back a year, suspending them at test time and encouraging them to take subjects that are not tested, to be absent at the time of tests, or to leave the school.<sup>3</sup>

In any high stakes system, it is almost inevitable that this kind of ‘gaming’ or ‘playing the system’ will take place. [Myers & Goldstein 1997]

These have been common responses to ‘high stakes’ testing in the United States. For example, several studies have demonstrated that the placement of students in special education categories increased with the introduction of reporting on school outcomes. Figlio & Getzler [2002] demonstrated that, following the introduction of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, there was a significant increase in the proportion of low performing students and students from low socio-economic backgrounds re-classified into disability categories exempted from the reporting system. Exemption rates were also much higher in high poverty schools than more affluent schools, indicating a greater tendency for low performing schools to exclude students from tests as a way of increasing their reported outcomes. Jacob [2004] found a similar pattern in exemption rates for Chicago schools following the introduction of school reporting. Increased exemption rates following the introduction of school reporting regimes have also been observed in other states such as Texas [Deere & Strayer 2001; Amrein & Berliner 2002b] and North Carolina [Kane 2002].

There is evidence of increases in special education placements in England with the introduction of school league tables [Wilson 2003] and also a large increase in permanent exclusions of students from schools [West & Pennell 2000].

It has been argued that such ‘gaming’ of school testing and reporting regimes has limited use over the long-term and will tend to be largely self-correcting [Hanushek & Raymond 2002b, p.19]. However, this observation is more relevant to value added reporting and few systems use this form of school reporting. ‘Gaming’ has an immediate impact on school rankings according to average scores and the ranking can be sustained as low-performing students in each new cohort are excluded from tests. Even in the case of value added reporting, any slowing of the rate of improvement in subsequent years can be minimised by continuing to exclude low performing students from the tests.

### Other measures

Similar problems are associated with the other measures of school performance proposed by the Australian Government. For example, student absenteeism and school exclusions tend to be highly correlated with socio-economic and ethnic background factors [Reid 1999; Stokes & Walton 1999] as are school retention rates

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<sup>3</sup> Other forms of gaming include selection in enrolments and diverting resources to the subjects being tested and to students who are close to the threshold levels of performance. These practices are discussed further below.

and school leaver destinations. For example, the Year 12 completion rate for Australian students from low SES families was 61 per cent in 2000 compared to 78 per cent for students from high SES families.<sup>4</sup>

Hence, parents who base their choice of school on indicators of school performance as proposed by the Australian Government may be misled as to the quality of teaching. Parents may mistakenly use the measures as a guide to choosing “better” schools when in fact the results of those schools are strongly influenced by factors operating outside schools rather than the quality of school programs. They end up making choices based on the mix of the student intake rather than program quality. In some cases, it may actually drive parents away from good, rather than poor, quality programs and teaching because the information does not accurately measure school quality.

The general conclusion from research into measuring school performance is that it is very difficult to design a statistically valid and robust method.

### **School performance measures can be used to publish league tables**

The publication of academic outcomes and other so-called measures of school performance can be used to construct school league tables. Once school outcomes or performance measures are published, anyone can then turn them into public rankings of schools. For example, the UK Government publishes school outcomes in each Local Education Authority in alphabetical order and the media then publish rankings. Council considers this process to be based on invalid premises and, therefore, to be rejected.

League tables are likely to:

- exacerbate the problems of misleading and inaccurate information about school performance associated with reporting school averages;
- lead to a public debasement of schools with very poor results and a low ranking, and to public labelling of their students and families as ‘failures’;
- lead to greater education inequities and social segregation of schools as high ranking schools select ‘good’ students and reject ‘poor’ students, while the best teachers move to the high ranking schools; and
- undermine effective school improvement.

### **League tables provide misleading rankings**

League tables may provide misleading rankings of schools because:

- rankings of raw results tend to reflect the socio-economic background of the families of students;
- different measures of school results lead to different rankings of schools; and
- rankings can create non-existent differences between schools and create failure where none exists.

### **Influence of socio-economic background**

League tables do not actually measure differences in the quality of teaching between schools and may simply reflect differences in student intake. A high score on a league

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<sup>4</sup> Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 2000, Table 40.

table for a school may reflect more the privileged family background and resources of that school community rather than the quality of teaching and the education program. League tables can camouflage under-achievement among mediocre schools with favoured intakes. On the other hand, a school might score badly on a league table compared with other schools despite high quality teaching because it serves a less-privileged community. High quality teaching in the school may have significantly increased student achievement but is not reflected in the ranking on public league tables because other schools may serve children of families of more privileged backgrounds.

Thus, school rankings on league tables tend to reflect relative socio-economic standings of the communities they serve. As the head of statistics at the UK National Foundation for Educational Research has stated:

... there is nothing like badly analysed or presented data for obscuring a situation. "Raw" league tables of examination results are an excellent example of this, when used to measure the quality of a school's teaching.  
... for judging a school's performance they tell you an awful lot about its catchment area and the ability level of its intake, but virtually nothing about how good they are at educating children. [Schagen 1997]

Studies have shown that there are large differences in the ranking of schools when account is taken of outside school factors such as the socio-economic background of students. For example, a UK National Audit Office [2003] study found that over half of the 621 schools ranked in the bottom 20 per cent of league tables for school GCSE level examination results were higher than this category once performance was adjusted for the influence of external factors and about 10 per cent of schools in the bottom 20 per cent moved to the top 20 per cent. Moreover, 70 per cent of those initially ranked in the top 20 per cent were ranked lower than this after the adjustment and over 10 per cent moved to the bottom 20 per cent of schools. Similar results were obtained for the age 14 examinations (key Stage 3).

#### **Different measures lead to different rankings**

Comparative school performance on test results is highly dependent on the data used to make the comparisons. Research in the UK and the US shows that the performance of individual schools varies according to the different measures used [Clotfelter & Ladd 1996; Goldstein et. al. 2000; Hanushek et.al. 2004; Linn 2000; Wilson 2003]. For example, a pilot study of nearly 200 schools published by the UK Government in November 2000 comparing school results on raw scores and on 'value added' scores revealed minimal correlation between the rankings under the two measures.<sup>5</sup> Not only were the rankings of the large majority of schools different on each measure of performance but also nearly 40 per cent of them were in a vastly different position relative to the overall pilot average on the two measures. Some 44 of the schools whose results were above-average on the raw scores were below average on the value-added scores and 28 schools that were below average on the raw scores were above-average on the value-added scores.

Similar volatility in school rankings has been revealed by recent research on school results in the United States [Linn & Haug 2002; McCall, Kingsbury & Olson 2004].

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<sup>5</sup> Data published by the UK Department of Education and Employment.

The most recent of these studies found that 20 per cent of schools that achieved high status levels on raw scores were in the bottom quarter of schools ranked according to change in scores over time. On the other hand, several schools with low results at a single point in time achieved as much growth in scores over time as the best high status schools. Another study [Hanushek et.al. 2004] based on a large data base of over 1000 schools found that 50 – 60 per cent of schools changed their quartile ranking when different measures of school results were used.

### **Rankings can create non-existent differences between schools**

League tables also create differences between schools that may not exist. Few published league tables ever report the statistical uncertainty of school averages that often make it impossible to legitimately rank one school above another. Published league tables can thus turn non-existent differences in results into seemingly significant differences in school quality.

Statistical error is a feature school performance reporting. School scores will typically have a margin of error or uncertainty associated with them because they are based on a sample of students and because of test unreliability. The uncertainty intervals for many – indeed, probably most schools – will overlap, making school results indistinguishable from each other, except for extreme results. This makes it impossible to compare the results of individual schools against other schools' results or to provide accurate rankings of school results. This problem is applicable to comparisons of both 'raw' and value added comparisons and, indeed, is magnified in the case of value added tables.

Sampling variation has been shown to account for a significant proportion of differences in school results, an influence which can vary significantly over time. For example, a UK study has shown that some 75 per cent of school uncertainty intervals overlap the overall mean of school results [Goldstein 1997a]. A US study found that 80 per cent of the differences between schools in year-to-year changes in school scores were due to a combination of sampling variability and other non-persistent factors [Kane & Staiger 2001]. A recent study of value added results in California concluded that it was only possible to reliably distinguish the top third of schools from the bottom third [Betebenner 2004]. A recent Australian study found that 84 per cent of the uncertainty intervals for each school overlapped the population mean [Rowe 2004].

The general point is clear:

... we now know from a number of studies that estimates of these contributions have so much statistical uncertainty attaching to them that it is impossible reliably to make valid comparisons between most schools. It is this finding above all that provides strong evidence against the current policy on the publication of league tables – of whatever kind, and those who advocate evidenced based policy making would do well to understand this....schools can only be separated statistically if their intervals do not overlap [Goldstein 1998].

This is one good reason why 'league tables' of schools, even if they are based on value-added data, are statistically pretty worthless [Schagen 1998].

These findings mean that random fluctuations from year to year can cause large distortions in league table rankings. Even where changes in school results are real, small changes can have a very large impact on a school's ranking simply because there are only small differences between school results in the first place. Such statistical volatility can severely mislead the public and parents about school quality.

Such volatility can wreak havoc in school accountability systems. First, to the extent that test scores bring rewards or sanctions, school personnel are subject to substantial risk of being punished or rewarded for results beyond their control. Moreover, to the extent such rankings are used to identify best practice in education, virtually every educational philosophy is likely to be endorsed eventually [Kane & Staiger 2001, p.2].

League tables are also based on the idea that some schools are always failing, whether or not this is true in reality.

Public league tables are, of course, entirely relative. It is perfectly possible that, in some sense, all schools could be performing satisfactorily, given the various conditions under which they are operating. Yet by ranking them, those at the lower end may not be able to escape the 'failure' label. [Myers & Goldstein 1997]

Thus, reporting individual school results and the creation of school league tables can give a false impression of a school's performance. Parents who base their choice of school on league table rankings may be misled as to the quality of teaching.

### League tables label students and schools as failures

League tables institute a system of public blame and labels of 'failure' on schools, which may undermine teaching and learning in some schools. It amounts to a public punishment system that creates a climate of recrimination and retribution. For example, the UK experience is that failing schools are pilloried in the popular press.

Hunting the failing school has become an exciting and rewarding political pastime. When the quarry is identified it can be savaged and humiliated. [Myers & Goldstein 1997]

The publication of school performance tables regularly leads to a similar process in the United States. One US educationalist has described it as a "... highly public tar and feathering" and a "crime and punishments approach to learning" [Sacks 2000]. Other researchers have documented the "demonisation" of inner city schools [Reay & Lucey 2003].

Public reporting outcomes of individual schools and public rankings of schools can result in the humiliation of schools, teachers, students and their families. This is particularly insidious for students. Reay & Lucey [2003] show how students become very much aware of the public status of their school, especially those that have been "demonised".

...working class children are frequently caught up in a self betraying process of stratification; self betraying because they utilise classificatory systems which position themselves as inferior, 'at the bottom' of any hierarchy. Half concealed between the lines of children's accounts were associations, links that were particularly painful for these children.

...the children going to demonised schools continue to be bombarded by negative evaluations both among the peer group and the wider public generating what we have termed 'a concentrated ambivalence' in which their defence mechanisms are constantly under threat of breaking down. [p.134]

There are clear implications for the Australian Government proposal. League tables of academic outcomes will be constructed on the basis of standardised assessments in only a few years of schooling. Generally, States and Territories conduct assessments on no more than four cohort years from K -10. Students in particular years will be easily identifiable as the "culprits" when a school gets a low ranking, especially in small schools, of which there are many in rural areas of Australia. These students will be humiliated and demoralised.

School outcomes are heavily influenced by the proportion of students from low socio-economic, ethnic and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. Reporting individual school results and establishing league tables of school results will lead to students and their families in disadvantaged, ethnic and Aboriginal communities being publicly labelled as failures.

Students who are humiliated for their learning accomplishments are unlikely to respond positively in their future learning. They could become alienated from schooling and, possibly, from their peers and their community as well. The task of schools will be made harder. Far from creating incentives for better performance, league tables are likely to impair the future learning of some students.

...it is highly questionable whether the public humiliation of being assigned a low rank on a 'league table' is the best way to encourage remediation and improvement. [Rowe 2000, p.82]

Receipt of a lower place on a public league table can also unfairly damn a school in the eyes of parents and the public without good cause and despite the presence of quality learning programs and care for students. Such schools may suffer further if parents choose to leave schools because of their low place in the league table. Reduced enrolments make it harder to keep quality teachers and maintain adequate resources.

The publication of league tables of results may thereby initiate a spiral of decline for some schools despite the existence of high quality programs. This has occurred in the UK and the US, particularly for schools serving disadvantaged communities [Audit Commission & OFSTED 2003; Gewirtz et. al. 1995]. It has also occurred in New Zealand with public reports on the quality of individual schools and public reporting of national examination results for secondary schools [Fiske & Ladd 2000; Lauder & Hughes 1999].

**League tables increase inequities in schooling & social segregation of schools**  
Reporting the results of individual schools and comparisons of school results can contribute to increasing inequities and social division in schooling. This has happened in the UK since the introduction of public league tables [Gewirtz et.al. 1995] and in New Zealand with public reporting on the performance of individual schools [Fiske & Ladd 2000; Lauder & Hughes 1999]. Inequities are exacerbated because:

- high ranking schools select “good” students and reject “poor” students;
- low achieving students receive less assistance;
- the best teachers move to the high ranking schools; and
- separate schools develop for the well-off and the disadvantaged.

### **Student selection**

The easiest way for schools to improve their performance (besides outright cheating) is to replace low achieving students with those who generate better test results. In the UK, league tables have led to the introduction of selective entry into high ranking schools as schools attempt to recruit higher attaining students in order to sustain their ranking [Gewirtz et. al. 1995; West et. al. 1998, pp. 188-200; Whitty et.al. 1998; Wilson 2003; Woods et. al. 1998].

Formal processes are used to select students for ‘ability’, ‘aptitude’ or ‘motivation’ and informal or ‘covert’ selection processes are used to discourage ‘undesirable’ students [Gewirtz et. al. 1995, pp. 185-6]. The latter include the less ‘able’, children with emotional or behaviour problems, students from low socio-economic communities, children with learning difficulties and other special needs. These students and their parents are discouraged by admission procedures that use complicated admission forms and pre-admission interviews [Wilson 2003].

Despite recent legislative changes to reduce inequitable admissions criteria in England, a significant minority of schools continue to use criteria designed to select certain groups of students and exclude others [West & Hind 2003; West et.al. 2003]. Interviews of parents remain a common admission practice and some schools sustain the effect of past practices of selection by giving priority to students whose siblings or parents went to the school.

There are clear opportunities for schools to ‘select in’ and ‘select out’ pupils and, given the links between social background, prior attainment and later examination performance, these practices enable some such schools to obtain higher positions in examination ‘league tables’. [West & Hind 2003, p. 17]

Suspension and expulsion of students also offer a quick and easy way for schools to manage ‘problem’ children and remove those who might perform badly in tests.

As the more selective schools siphon off students, as well as the better teachers, the unpopular schools become the dumping ground for disengaged pupils. Some schools are left with a high proportion of troubled and under-performing students, as recently pointed out by the London Commissioner of Schools [Pyke 2004].

Even if schools do not engage in ‘cream skimming’ of high achieving students they may deny entry or fail to provide programs to students whose special learning needs may result in lower average test results. For example, charter schools in Washington DC do not appear to focus on an elite clientele, but they are less likely than traditional public schools to serve some high need populations. Rather than ‘cream skimming’ students they ‘crop-off’ services to students whose language or special education needs make them more costly to educate [Henig et.al. 2002].

### **Low achieving students disadvantaged**

League tables also create incentives for schools to ignore the low-achieving students [Reed & Hallgarten 2003, p.9; Goldstein 1997c]. Research by the Institute of Education at the University of London found that schools have increasingly concentrated on students who are on the border of accepted benchmarks rather than the lowest attainers [Gillborn & Youdell 1999]. One recent study conducted by researchers at Cambridge University found that about 75 per cent of the 50 schools in the study provided additional, or “booster”, classes for students which focused on those at or near the borderline of desired targets [Galton et.al. 2003, pp.16-18, 25]. Another response has been to remove low performing students from GCSE courses and put them into less demanding GNVQ courses [Wilson 2003].

Similar strategies have been employed in US schools [Amrein & Berliner 2002b]. For example, consultants helping Texas schools improve their school ranking aim test preparation at those students who previously failed tests by just a few points [McNeill 2000, p.254]. These students are referred to as the ‘bubble kids’ because their scores form a bubble just below the passing score. Improving their score is seen as the most efficient way to raise a school’s average score or the proportion of students achieving a benchmark.

However, while this strategy gives schools a better chance of improving their ranking, it may lead to worse outcomes for low performing students.<sup>6</sup> At the very least, their learning needs may receive less priority than those near the test benchmarks.

Student learning needs may be ignored or downplayed because schools focus their planning and resource allocation on the year levels being tested. For example, the Cambridge University study found that that a majority of schools concentrate their most experienced teachers in the year levels that are being tested [Galton et.al. 2003, pp.14, 16]. They also focused the efforts of support staff in these years.

### **Teachers attracted to high ranking schools**

League tables are also used as a job guide for teachers. Teachers applying for jobs in UK schools use league tables to determine which are the best posts to apply for [Salmon 1997]. Schools with poorer results find it difficult to attract the staff they need to improve their results [Ladd & Zelli 2001].

### **Social segregation**

Publication of school results and league tables contribute to increased socio-economic segregation in schooling. A two-tier government school system has developed - one group of schools for the well-off and another for the least well-off. There is over-subscription for schools serving well-off communities and under-subscription to schools in disadvantaged communities. This has occurred in New Zealand [Fiske & Ladd 2000; Lauder & Hughes 1999], England [Audit Commission & OFSTED 2003; Fitz et.al. 2002; Goldstein & Noden 2003; Gorard & Taylor 2001] and the United States [Cashin 2004].

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<sup>6</sup> This effect is well documented in the case of health care report cards for individual physicians or hospitals. This public information creates incentives for doctors and hospitals to decline to treat more difficult, severely ill patients and has resulted in worse health outcomes, particularly for sicker patients [Dranove et. al. 2002].

Apart from the general increase in social segregation by socio-economic background in secondary schools in England, there was a much larger increase in social segregation in areas operating selective secondary school education systems than those do not have selection [Goldstein and Noden 2003]. There was also a small increase in segregation associated with schools which have control over their own admissions.

Schools are also increasingly segregated by race as well as class. A UK parliamentary report prompted by race riots in the north of England has warned that greater parent choice has led to the development of racially segregated schools [Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2004]. Increasingly, children are being sent to schools of the same racial background and most often it is generated by 'white flight'. It found that there are many schools whose students do not reflect the range of cultural groups in their locality and that this was restricting opportunities to promote social understanding and cohesion. A research study has found that students in England are more segregated by school than in their residential neighbourhood [Burgess et.al. 2004].

Government schools in the United States have also become more segregated than local neighbourhoods [Cashin 2004]. For example, school segregation has increased in metropolitan areas in North Carolina during a period of decreasing residential segregation [Clotfelter et.al. 2002]. Over 70 per cent of New York schools are now virtually segregated by race [Noguera & Cohen 2004]. The social segregation of schools in New Zealand also has a strong racial element [Fiske & Ladd 2000; Lauder & Hughes 1999].

While league tables and school performance reports have contributed to increased social segregation, it should be pointed out that the extent of this influence compared with other factors is a subject of debate [Noden 2001]. Factors such as the economic cycle, changing local demographic and employment profiles and the pattern of housing development also influence social segregation in schools.

#### **Tables used by well-off families**

Recent research on secondary school choice in the UK has found that only 4 out of 10 parents used performance tables while 81 per cent of all parents said they had not used league tables to select their child's school [Reed & Hallgarten 2003]. It is primarily well-off families who use this information [Ball 2003; Gewirtz et. al. 1995; Reay & Lucey 2003].

When parents are left with standardized scores as the only readily available indicator of school performance, they are led almost inevitably to the conclusion that the "best" schools are those that have the fewest low-income and minority students. Expanding parent choice in an environment of such one-dimensional information reinforces tendencies toward racial and economic separation.

#### **League tables can undermine effective school improvement**

The philosophy behind the Australian Government's proposal is that school improvement is best achieved by promoting parent choice between schools. The belief is that information about school performance will mean that parents are better placed

to make informed choices about the schooling of their students. Schools that are failing to hold students will lose funding and they will thereby be encouraged to improve their programs and teaching practices. The basic case is that more information about school performance will promote competition between schools to hold students and therefore improve school quality and outcomes.

There are several problems associated with this approach to school improvement:

- it can distort curriculum and teaching;
- it discourages collaboration between schools around improved strategies and practices;
- it promotes increased focus on school image rather than school improvement; and
- it discourages parents from seeing themselves as partners in schooling and tends to promote a divisive relationship between parents and schools rather than a collaborative approach to learning.

### **Curriculum and teaching priorities may be skewed**

League tables can skew school teaching priorities. The pressure to perform well on the public league table encourages schools to devote more of their resources to the year levels and curriculum areas that are tested.

As noted above, many schools in England now allocate the most experienced teachers and more support staff to the year levels that are tested [see also Olson 2004b]. As a result, the longer-term development of students may be sacrificed to the need to perform well in the assessment years.

Schools may also reduce the scope of the curriculum in the years that are tested. Many schools in England suspend the broader curriculum in the lead-up to the assessment period and balance in student curriculum experience is only restored in the final months of the year [Galton et.al. 2003, pp.14-16]. As a result, something approaching a two-part year has emerged for Year 6. During the period up to May the focus is largely (in some cases, exclusively) on the subjects to be tested and after the assessments other areas of the curriculum are re-introduced.

A similar process has been observed in the United States. For example, many schools have directed more resources into the tested subjects of literacy and maths while untested subjects such as science, history, social studies, arts, physical education and health are given much less time [Amrein & Berliner 2000b; Jacob 2004; Jones et.al. 2003; Ladd & Zelli 2001; McNeil 2000]. Arts and cultural activities are cut back considerably and excursions are also being dropped [Mathews 2004].

Even within subject areas that are tested, schools often constrict what is taught to skills that are most conducive to testing by multiple-choice questions that are the basis of most standardised tests. This is sometimes referred to as 'item teaching' [Jones et.al. 2003, pp.65-66] and it restricts the range of knowledge and skills that students learn within a curriculum area in order to focus more on likely test items.

Another effect is to turn classroom experience into test preparation. Weeks and months can be devoted to test preparation at the expense of other parts of the curriculum and other learning areas. Focus on practice tests is a priority now in many

English and US schools [Galton et.al. 2003, pp.13, 15; Sacks 1999, pp.127-131]. This takes the form of repeated drills and practising on test items with the aid of test-prep booklets [Jones et.al. 2003, p.41, 64-65; McNeil 2000, pp.235-6].

A change in teaching practice tends to accompany the increased emphasis on test preparation. Teachers are less likely to engage in multi-faceted approaches to classroom learning, such as classroom discussion, student presentations and laboratory experiments and are more likely to employ lecturing and rote learning approaches [Jones et.al. 2003, pp.40-44, 61-64; Sacks 1999, pp.129-130]. It means the neglect of learning experiences that develop deeper understanding and critical thinking.

The very nature of learning, as an open-ended, somewhat uncertain, spontaneous, creative, and complex process, is turned upside-down. [Sacks 1999, p.130]

One disturbing trend associated with reporting individual school results on standardised tests is a reduction in free time for students so as to allow more time for special coaching for tests. Many elementary schools across the United States have reduced or eliminated recesses in order to find more time in the school day for test preparation [Dounay 2000, Mathews 2004]. According to Gratz [2000, p.686], recess has become a casualty of high stakes testing in many schools. He cites one major city school superintendent who justified the elimination of recess as follows:

We are intent on improving academic performance. You don't do that by having kids hanging from monkey bars. [Gratz 2000, p. 686]

One result of the narrowing of curriculum and focus on test preparation in the subjects tested is for a gap to emerge between student outcomes in the subjects tested and the subjects not tested. This appears to be occurring in England [OFSTED 2004].

### **School collaboration is discouraged**

League tables encourage competition between schools rather than collaboration and co-operation. This undermines one of the key measures of school improvement – the opportunity and capacity of schools to learn from each other [Myers & Goldstein 1997]. League tables promote school isolation and self-reliance and often leads to a reduction in cross-school collaboration [Whitty et.al. 1998, p.62]. Schools are reluctant to share their successful practices with other schools if it means those schools could jump above them in public rankings of performance. It appears to have increased wasteful duplication and slowed the speed of dissemination of best practice [Adnett & Davies 2001, p.3].

### **School image and reputation are emphasised**

League tables may divert effort into improving school image and reputation rather than effective school improvement. As changes in league ranking affect enrolments and therefore resources and staff, school leaders may become pre-occupied with self-preservation, surface appearance and image rather than effective school improvement. Principals are diverted from educational leadership and planning to marketing their school image. The main goal becomes one of attracting those students who will enhance the school's ranking at lowest cost. This means marketing the school image and its presentation to appeal to high achieving families and students.

Competition for league ranking diverts energy, attention and resources to the superficial and away from pedagogy, curriculum development, equity in education and the welfare of students. It encourages resort to quick fixes and superficial solutions to deep-seated problems. In this way, schools come to focus on the symptoms of problems rather than their causes. It may even undermine overall school quality rather than improve it.

### **Reduced incentive to parent participation**

League tables tend to diminish the role of parents as partners in education. In encouraging parents to see themselves primarily as customers of schools, league tables also discourage active parent participation in decision-making in schools. Parents who see themselves as customers to be served tend not to see their role as to contribute to policy development and decision-making. If things go wrong, they can leave rather than work at school improvement in partnership with teachers and other parents. In this way, league tables promote exit over voice by parents. As such, they detract from parents and teachers working together in partnership for the development of children.

### **School performance reporting and student achievement**

#### **Evidence of increased student achievement**

Advocates of reporting school results and league tables of school results consider that it leads to improvements in student outcomes [for example, Buckingham 2003]. However, there is little soundly based evidence to support this case.

Part of the problem in assessing the impact of school reporting on student achievement is that existing forms of reporting confuse school and non-school influences on outcomes.

...more extensive and focused analysis is needed before we can make many strong statements about the effectiveness of accountability for raising student performance...  
...part of the uncertainty results from the particular forms of accountability systems that have been adopted. The vast majority of existing systems use performance measures that confuse changes in school performance with other factors that the school does not control – families, student abilities, neighborhood effects, and simple measurement errors. [Hanushek & Raymond 2002a, pp.30-31]

Given the difficulty of separating out the different influences on changes in school results, most studies of the impact of school reporting are conducted at a highly aggregated level where demographic and background characteristics are assumed to be relatively stable. However, this aggregated approach brings its own problems as discussed below.

One English study has pointed to improvements in student outcomes in England since the introduction of school reporting as evidence of its success [Bradley and Taylor 2002]. Several US studies use national test data (National Assessment for Educational Progress) in a variety of ways to assess the impact of school reporting of outcomes on student achievement. Some compare student achievement in states with school reporting against states without reporting [Hoxby 2001], some assess the impact of

the introduction of school reporting in states with reporting [Hanushek & Raymond 2002b] while others compare outcomes for states with consequences attached for low school performance against all other states or states that do have consequences attached to school reporting [Amrein & Berliner 2002a; Amrein-Beardsley & Berliner 2003; Braun 2004; Carnoy & Loeb, forthcoming; Hanushek & Raymond 2002b].

Student achievement is shown to have improved with the introduction of school reporting. However, the gains tend to be small and, in some cases, not statistically significant. The evidence on student achievement under reporting regimes with and without consequences is mixed, some demonstrating gains with consequences attached and other demonstrating no gains.

Other US studies examine changes in student achievement in particular states or cities with the introduction of school reporting [for example, Carnoy, Loeb & Smith 2000 (Texas); Jacob 2004 (Chicago); Kane & Staiger 2001 (North Carolina)]. These also tend to find increased student achievement with the introduction of reporting school results.

### Flaws in studies

There are several problems with most of the existing studies on the impact of reporting school results that give cause for caution in interpreting their results. They include the following:

- the studies do not adjust for the impact of other changes in education policies, programs and funding;
- the improvement may be over-estimated because of increased exclusion of low achieving students from the tests through special exemptions, suspensions, students dropping out and other forms of ‘gaming’;
- the improvement may be partially due to changes in the tests over time and a test score inflation effect; and
- measurement error may be a factor contributing to the observed improvements.

A critical problem in many existing studies of the impact of the introduction of school reporting is that they do not allow for contemporaneous changes in education policy, programs and funding. For example, in England, many other significant changes occurred over the same period as the introduction of reporting school results, such as changes in curriculum, a national literacy and numeracy strategy and increased funding for students with special needs. In particular, the national literacy and numeracy strategy involved detailed teaching programs, extensive professional development for teachers and extra help for children who fall behind. A variety of changes have also occurred in the state-based systems of the United States that confound analysis of the impact of school reporting and this is acknowledged in some of the studies. For example:

Education is the responsibility of state governments, and states have gone in a variety of directions in the regulation, funding and operation of their schools. As a result, it is difficult to assess the impacts of individual policies without dealing with the potential impacts of coincidental policy differences. [Hanushek & Raymond 2002b, p.16]

...these 18 states (and the other 32) have engaged in a number of education initiatives in addition to their testing policies so that ascribing differences in NAEP results (solely or principally) to the impact of high-stakes testing is problematic.  
The general lack of strong associations across states between achievement gains and policy scores suggests that we have to be more diligent in documenting each state's policy history as well as the trajectories through time of other relevant variables.  
[Braun 2004, pp.2, 35]

Thus, apparent relationships between student achievement and states with, or without, school reporting may be the result of differential changes in education policy, programs or funding across states. The failure to take such factors into account points to the lack of sophistication and unscientific nature of the existing studies.

A second significant problem with these studies is that the test results used to make state comparisons may be compromised by the various forms of 'gaming' associated with the introduction of school reporting. In particular, the increase in test scores in those states with school reporting systems may be due, at least partially, to an increase in students excluded from the tests. Kane [2002] has raised this issue in regard to the NAEP data used for the aggregated studies. Amrein-Beardsley & Berliner [2003] show that exemption rates for students in states with high-stakes testing have increased at a faster rate than in states without. They conclude:

...for the most part the gains posted by states with high-stakes tests on two of the three NAEP tests are more related to the rates by which students are exempted from the tests than they are related to the high-stakes tests themselves.

The conclusion from such studies appears inescapable. It seems that it is no accident that the largest gains in school results following the introduction of school reporting has occurred in low achieving schools.

...schools that ex ante are likely to be more threatened by a test-based accountability system, because they have a larger fraction of students likely to perform poorly on the examination, tend to be more aggressive in reclassifying previously low-performing students as disabled in an apparent response to the introduction of the high-stakes testing program. [Figlio & Getzler 2002, p.11]

Similarly, questions have been raised about the impact of reporting school performance on school retention and drop-out rates. For example, a study of test scores by Texas high school students suggests that much of the apparent increase in performance is a mirage because increasing numbers of students dropped out of school [Viadero 2000]. There is widespread practice in Texas of keeping students who might achieve a weak score or fail the tenth grade test back a year or more to give them more practice at the test. As a result, the ninth grade classes at many minority urban high schools comprised about half of the school population [McNeill 2000, p.251]. Secondary students who are being held back have less incentive to try to graduate from high school and drop-out early [Jones et.al. 2003, p.130].

In the case of England, there is some evidence that a significant part of the improvement in literacy outcomes may be due to variation in test standards [Olson 2004b]. Indeed, a former chief inspector of schools in England has also argued that the improvement in school results in that country reflects a lowering of standards and easier tests [Woodhead 2002]. Several studies have also pointed to a test score

inflation effect in the United States [for example, Jacob 2003, p.70; Sacks 1999, pp.135-140].

Finally, measurement error may also contribute to observed increases in student achievement. For example, Kane and Staiger [2001] show that this has been a factor in school improvement in North Carolina. A related issue is that some state tests have changed several times the subjects and grades tested, the pass rates and the benchmarks for testing. This makes their comparability over time problematic. It appears to be a significant issue in Texas [McNeil 2000, pp.233-4].

It is quite possible, and perhaps likely, that the relatively small improvement in student outcomes found in the above studies would largely disappear if all these considerations were taken into account in assessing the impact of reporting school results.

Even assuming that part of the observed gains in student achievement is real, there are issues about the source of gain and the overall impact on student learning. As discussed above, resources tend to be diverted into the subjects tested to the detriment of other subjects and to support students at the threshold of key achievement levels rather than very low achieving students. It is difficult to see that gains in some subjects and for some students at the expense of others can be considered an overall improvement in student learning.

The case that reporting school results has led to an improvement in student achievement therefore appears unconvincing. Relevant factors have not been taken into account in assessing the impact of reporting school results. Some have unintended negative effects that may partially or wholly offset positive effects. As one expert has concluded:

Assessment systems that are useful monitors lose much of their dependability and credibility for that purpose when high stakes are attached to them. The unintended negative effects of the high stakes accountability uses often outweigh the intended positive effects. [Linn 2000, p.14]

### Disparities in school outcomes

Perhaps the strongest conclusion that can be derived from studies of the impact of reporting school results on student achievement is that it mainly assists in re-distributing high achieving students and students from well-off families between schools. As noted above, some schools are able to improve their measured performance at the expense of other schools by ‘creaming-off’ high achieving students from other schools or, at least, restrict the entry of students who are likely to achieve poor results.

There is evidence of a widening gap between the achievement of students in the highest and lowest ranking schools in England in recent years [OFSTED 2004, p.27]. ‘Cream skinning’ and the increase in exclusions associated with league tables is likely to have contributed to this increasing disparity in school outcomes. However, as noted above, it is likely that there are other contributing factors as well, such as changing demographic and socio-economic characteristics of communities and changing employment patterns.

## Choice and competition

It may be argued that the publication of school results and league tables leads to better student outcomes because it contributes to more informed parent choice of schools and greater competition between schools for enrolments. This is an indirect argument in that it relies on evidence of the impact of parent choice and competition on student outcomes.

There is a substantial literature on the impact of the introduction of parent choice and competition on student and school outcomes and it contains much claim and counter-claim. The evidence on the overall impact of choice and competition is mixed [see Gill et.al. 2001; Good & Braden 2000; Henig 1994]. The results are highly inconsistent from study to study and, at best, the evidence is equivocal. In some instances, school choice is associated with improved student outcomes, but in other cases it is not.

Even in those studies that show a positive relationship between school choice and student achievement, the impact of school choice is minor in comparison with other variables such as parent involvement in student learning [Gill et.al. 2001]. There are also significant methodological problems in designing empirical studies to give robust results and many studies are not well designed to separate out the various factors influencing student achievement.

Much of the debate centres on the effects on overall student performance, including students whose families do not make positive choices about schools [Gill et.al. 2001]. Most studies consider only the outcomes for students who make choices and ignore the impact on those who remain in assigned schools. The evidence about systemic or overall effects is scant.

The results of more general studies on the impact of competition between schools on school performance is also mixed. The results are sensitive to the chosen measure of competition and the measure of performance [Levacic 2001]. A recent review of research studies found a reasonably consistent relationship between competition and education quality [Belfield & Levin 2002]. However, it also found that the effects appear quite modest and many of the estimates in studies lack statistical significance. This may be because many other factors determine the quality of student outcomes.

It is difficult to discern the particular contribution of school reporting and league tables to the impact of competition. Choice and competition can, and do, occur without public reporting of school results and league tables. The introduction of choice of school and competition for enrolments has also involved a number of changes in education systems. These include open enrolments for schools (or reduced residential criteria), funding determined by student enrolments, increased autonomy in school decision-making with some schools being able to opt out of direct government control, the latter permitting school promotion and marketing to the public.

Another reason for caution in accepting a significant indirect effect on student outcomes by school reporting is that it is questionable whether the publication of school results has created more informed parent choice given the misleading nature of the information that is generally provided.

## Public right to information

A tenet that is frequently advanced by advocates of public reporting of the results of individual schools is that any information about schools is a social good. There is a tendency to believe that any information about schools is better than none at all.

The right of the public to any information is not generally accepted as an absolute principle by society and government. Public release of information is not always in the public interest and this is well-established in relation to court procedure and national security issues. A basic consideration in deciding what information should be released by government is whether it will cause undue harm to some people and/or seriously mislead the public.

Yet public disclosure of information cannot be upheld as an absolute principle. This is recognized by governments, for example, when they reserve the right to withhold information they deem to threaten national 'security'. Likewise, if publication of information is likely to harm individuals unfairly, or to mislead, then there is a case for refusing to publish. It is our contention that some published performance indicators which make statements about schools or other institutions fall into this category. Their capacity to reflect reality accurately may be extremely limited and their publication may cause inappropriate inferences to be drawn about institutions. [Myers and Goldstein 1997]

Public reporting of individual school results and comparisons of results in league tables are certainly in this category. Their 'side effects' or negative consequences can be very severe, especially in relation to general well-being and future learning of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in small schools and/or readily identifiable local communities. Moreover, they can seriously mislead families as to the quality of school programs.

## Conclusion

The conclusions from the available research on reporting individual school results as a measure of school quality are quite definite, whether raw, unadjusted data or value added measures are used. They are unreliable for variety of reasons.

The use of test or exam scores to judge schools publicly is insupportable. Information provided by 'raw' exam or test score league tables is misleading and potentially educationally damaging. Value-added league tables eliminate one source of error but retain others that also make them insupportable. [Goldstein & Thomas 1995, p. 37]

As such, they are not a useful device to assist parents in choosing a school or as a form of public accountability. They are unable to deliver the objectives of the Australian Government.

...there are inherent limitations in the use of *either* raw or value added measures when it comes to comparing schools....This limitation is inherent and means that they provide very limited information indeed for anyone wishing to use them as devices to choose among schools. [Goldstein 1997b]

...league tables are a poor method of ensuring accountability, can distort teaching and are a poor way of measuring standards. [Goldstein 2001, p.197]

The Government Schools Education Council (A.C.T) considers that the Australian Government proposal is likely to undermine a key principle and policy goal of public

education in the ACT, namely, improvement of equity in school outcomes. The experience of public reporting of individual school results in the UK, US and New Zealand is quite clear: it contributes to further inequities and social division in schooling.

Council agrees that parents should have information about schools, but considers that this can be achieved by better means than those proposed by the Australian Government. It involves a combination of providing pertinent information to parents about schools and improved reporting of student achievement for the school system as a whole.

Council is examining these matters in its inquiry on reporting to parents and the community. It is currently considering ways in which reporting of school achievement and other information to parents can be improved, including information to help parents assess school effectiveness. It is also looking at ways in which system reporting can enhance public accountability for improving school performance.

Council therefore recommends that the ACT Government does not publish the information about schools proposed by the Australian Government.

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