

TO: QTU REPRESENTATIVES

(Please ensure that the Principal and each QTU Rep receives a copy of this Newsflash)

Please e-mail or provide a copy to each member (do not simply place on the noticeboard)

My School Ballot

1. The issue

The federal government launched the *My School* website on Thursday, 28 January 2010, claiming the site delivered so-called “transparency” for parents to evaluate schools’ “performance”.

In reality, the site offered parents no more useful information than that already freely available in schools’ online annual reports. What it does is:

- make it much easier for media outlets and profit-making private businesses to misuse NAPLAN data to create damaging league tables
- stigmatise the communities to which schools belong through the use of broad and often irrelevant ABS data
- label schools as “performing above or below average” based on nothing but NAPLAN data
- ignore much of the rich information in schools’ reports, which present a fuller and fairer picture of schools for parents, such as extra curricular activities and Year 12 outcomes.

The government ignored teachers’ warnings about the effect on schools if the media chose to misuse the simplistic data on the site. The government also refused to acknowledge that there are significant issues with the *My School* website and its potential to negatively impact on schools and communities.

The QTU believes that the best way to gauge the view of members with respect to the dangers presented by the *My School* website, including whether members are willing not to co-operate with the 2010 NAPLAN test, is to conduct a democratic ballot..

2. QTU ballot

It is important when considering the ballot questions that members acknowledge that the action is:

- **NOT** a vote against providing parents with information on schools;
- **NOT** a vote against national testing (the QTU recognises the reality that both sides of politics support national testing); and
- **NOT** about recognising that different schools achieve different outcomes.

This campaign calls for improvements to the *My School* website including:

- a. removing the red and green highlighting in school NAPLAN results;
- b. recognising that the comparisons made against “like” schools are inaccurate - they should be removed or improved;
- c. recognising that the demographic data is counterproductive to supporting schools;
- d. acknowledging that the data provided is a “point in time” picture of a school remaining static for 12 months.
- e. acknowledging that the site omits information vital to presenting a fair and full picture of schools.

The resolution to this dispute rests with the federal government. The government can resolve this issue and put teachers’ concerns to rest by preventing misuse of the data by the media through legislation and improving the website as outlined above.

3. My School has negative effects

What this government has failed to realise is that the *My School* website would be more useful, if it focused on the good things that schools do, rather than expecting parents to make decisions on raw data that in its current form has the potential to misrepresent the positive aspects of the school.

Bad for parents: Due to the static nature of the data and the misleading statistics used on the website, *My School* can only encourage parents to make ill-informed decisions.

Bad for schools: The *My School* website will enable schools to be stigmatised as a certain type of school. This stigmatisation will remain with the school, regardless of the many programs and educational opportunities it provides to students.

Bad for the economy: The *My School* website will result in some schools being marginalised as parents move their children from one “poor performing” school to a “better” school. This will place significant pressure on infrastructure as schools are required to expand to meet this growth and other schools lose resources as they lose students.

Bad for communities: The socio-economic data on the *My School* website encourages community "labelling": if this data identifies a community as low SES community and schools are marginalised by the movement out of the community of families, community support services will also become marginalised.

4. My School has significant problems

There are many faults with the *My School* website including:

a. The collation of the statistics used to determine the concept of "like" schools

It beggars belief that Yeronga State High School, with one of the state's largest population of children from refugee families can be a like school to Aquinas College at Southport, Cleveland State High School on Moreton Bay and Sunshine Beach State High School (near Noosa) or that Cannon Hill State School, in a poorer middle ring suburb of Brisbane, equals the Kooralbyn International School, where kids on "equestrian scholarships" can keep their showjumping horses.

b. The static nature of the data on the website

The current point of comparison on the *My School* website is the school's 2008 and 2009 NAPLAN results. No updates are made to the website over a 12-month period. Teachers and parents know that it is the culture of the school, the many programs that teachers put in place and positive parental involvement that provides a quality learning environment for children. This information is not available on the *My School* website, as it is data driven.

c. Misrepresentation of high school results

The use of the NAPLAN data alone also raises concerns for many secondary schools. The website encourages comparisons of the school based on the Year 9 NAPLAN results, which in Queensland means for most schools that the student has only been attending that school for 18 months before the test is administered. This point of comparison again demonstrates the limited and misleading nature of the information on the *My School* website.

d. The potential for "league tables" to be created using the data

Such tables rank the order of the "performance" of schools based on the results collated from instruments such as NAPLAN. The concept of league tables is a sporting reference arising from the ranking of soccer teams in the United Kingdom. The QTU is definite that the education of children should not be treated like a spectator sport.

Apart from league tables that have been published in some newspapers, a new website has been established that ranks schools on a national level based on the results from the *My School* website. This list is currently available to be purchased by parents and other interested parties for \$97.

If the purpose of *My School* is to provide parents with information about their local school, then this information should not be misused in the public forum.

5. A national approach

Australia-wide teacher union decision

On 19 January 2010, delegates at the Australian Education Union (AEU) Annual Federal Conference unanimously adopted a resolution that unless the federal government takes steps to prevent the creation and publication of league tables, the teaching profession should not cooperate in the collection of data on which they are based. An AEU meeting to discuss the progress in the dispute is scheduled for 12 April 2010. The QTU will report its ballot results at that meeting.

The federal government can avert action if it, for example, legislates to prevent the creation of league tables based on the data.

It is likely that, should the federal government fail to act in providing adequate protections around this information, the AEU Federal Executive meeting will resolve **that teachers not co-operate in the distribution, implementation and conduct of the 2010 NAPLAN tests.**

However, the resolve of the Australian teacher unions is strong and we expect the government to come some way towards alleviating our concerns to avert the necessity for this directive.

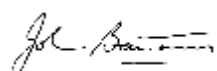
Members are advised that as NAPLAN is not currently subject to a directive from the QTU they should continue performing their duties in relation to NAPLAN until any such directive is issued. This includes preparation that is imbedded as part of the school curriculum.

Work bans and industrial action

Members would be aware from the EB6 campaign that, under the Queensland industrial relations legislation, work bans are viewed as industrial action. It is likely that a directive that relates to "non-co-operation" with NAPLAN will be viewed as a work ban and therefore constitutes industrial action. As a consequence DET may well refer the dispute to the QIRC. As always, the QTU will make decisions in the best interests of members depending on the outcomes of the QIRC.

Members should vote on the resolution for industrial action via a secret ballot that will be conducted at workplace meetings from 19 February 2010. The date of returns for the ballot will be 5.00pm on 19 March 2010. The determination regarding the issuing of any directive that might arise as a consequence of this ballot will be made following the AEU Executive meeting on the 12 April 2010.

Authorised by:



John Battams
General Secretary

Attention Union Reps / Principals

Please note that a Union Reps Update containing the ballot material will be forwarded later today.