



QTU Position Statement

NAPLAN in Queensland Schools

Background

The purpose of this position statement is to address issues arising at school, regional and central office level regarding the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) within Queensland state schools.

The QTU acknowledges that decisions about the future of NAPLAN are yet to be made, however there are a range of undesirable practices which can be addressed at the school, regional and departmental level.

Curriculum planning

A fundamental principle is that the Australian Curriculum, including general capabilities and cross-curricular priorities is the focus of teaching and learning in Queensland schools. Literacy and numeracy alone are not the curriculum, but they are fundamental parts of the curriculum. Literacy and numeracy are addressed across learning areas and through focused teaching all year round, and are not limited to the conduct or results of NAPLAN tests.

Schools and teachers determine their teaching and learning programs in line with the P-12 Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Framework (CARF). While regions may have specific areas of focus for improvement, it is not the place of regional officers to require schools to undertake specific programs relating to NAPLAN (such as NAPLAN improvement plans, upper two bands programs), or to provide data from other standardised testing activities relating to improving NAPLAN test scores (such as triangulation of data). School leaders determine priority areas for their school via a variety of means and in consultation with staff and the school community.

Assessment

Student achievement is to be determined in accordance with the P-12 CARF and the standards as established in the Australian Curriculum. The QTU asserts that NAPLAN testing will not be used for moderation purposes, for determining progress against student achievement standards or when considering out of catchment enrolments or participation in “academic excellence” programs.

Standardised testing such as NAPLAN provides limited information regarding individual student progress in relation to the Australian Curriculum. Teachers and school leaders use ongoing formative and summative assessments, across the curriculum, to make judgements about student progress using the achievement standards and report this to parents. NAPLAN, on the other hand, is a point in time assessment that provides information to schools and parents regarding the performance of their student in relation to literacy and numeracy and only to the extent assessed in that specific test. NAPLAN results are not more accurate than other diagnostic or standardised assessments.

Academic reporting

The focus of written and face-to-face reporting is to give an account of student progress in relation to the Australian Curriculum, social and emotional development, behaviour and other contextual factors such as school based programs in accordance with the P-12 CARF. These reporting



processes will be agreed at the local level in accordance with the *Joint Statement on Planning, Preparation and Differentiation including ICPs* agreed between the QTU and the department in 2016.

The QCAA produces a report regarding NAPLAN results for the information of parents. While this report is distributed through the school, it is not a report written by teachers and is not based on a program of teaching, learning and assessment provided by teachers. Consequently, it is not a report on student achievement in accordance with the P-12 CARF. Teachers should not be required to provide any additional reporting or commentary to parents regarding NAPLAN.

NAPLAN results are but one piece of evidence relating to student performance, and should be treated as such within the school. NAPLAN results should not be the focus of annual performance reviews, collegial engagements and conversations. Any use of NAPLAN data at the school level should be explained in the school's data plan, as required by the *Joint Statement on the Purpose and Use of Data in Queensland Schools*.

NAPLAN preparation

The QTU acknowledges that there is a legitimate place for limited familiarisation activities regarding the mode and conditions of testing itself, and that these activities (including multiple choice tests, timed activities and engaging successfully with test materials) are most useful to students when conducted just before the tests in the year the students are undertaking NAPLAN. It should be noted that this can be successfully accommodated in an authentic manner and opportunities can be managed through school planning documents and individual teachers' programming. NAPLAN practice tests, however, cause additional workload for teachers and school leaders and take up time which could be spent on teachers' core responsibilities of planning, teaching, assessing and reporting in accordance with the Australian Curriculum and the QCARF. As the NAPLAN website states: "Excessive test preparation using previous tests is not necessary nor useful.". Consequently, the QTU does not endorse repeated and regular NAPLAN practice tests or the implementation of pre-tests to capture data for the purpose of shaping teaching and learning programs specifically related to NAPLAN.

Use of NAPLAN data

NAPLAN results should not be used for the purposes of judging the performance of individual teachers, school leaders and schools or determining class allocation or timetabling. While the results can form a part of the picture, they cannot tell the whole story and caution must be exercised to avoid the overuse of NAPLAN data.

NAPLAN data should not be the focus of discussions for annual performance reviews nor a school's process of collegial engagement. NAPLAN should not be the sole focus of professional development opportunities for staff members. Any use of NAPLAN data at the school level should be explained in the school's data plan, as required by the *Joint Statement on the Purpose and Use of Data in Queensland Schools*. The display of individual student NAPLAN data on "data walls" within schools should be discouraged, as it does not reflect the core business of Queensland schools in the delivery of the Australian Curriculum.

Additionally, when undertaking recruitment and selection processes, NAPLAN data should only be referenced as part of a range of data or evidence put forward by candidates and should not form a gateway through which applicants pass when seeking promotion. Under no circumstances should the referencing of a school's NAPLAN performance be used by panels as a means of determining comparative reports or influencing the overall effectiveness of an applicant.

The QTU acknowledges that every school in every community is unique and that NAPLAN outcomes are one source of data that contributes to the headline indicators of a school. NAPLAN outcomes cannot be used in isolation and should be considered within a data set that is designed to reflect the complexities and factors that exist within a school. The QTU notes the impact that



publication of NAPLAN data on the MySchool website and the production of league tables has had in creating high stakes environments, and continues to advocate that this data should no longer be published in this way.

Schools must ensure that NAPLAN data and other student achievement data is not provided to third parties offering services to schools, such as NAPLAN improvement programs, data analysis tools, etc. The proliferation of for-profit enterprises offering schools programs based on NAPLAN improvement and the analysis of NAPLAN data is not supported by the Queensland Teachers' Union.

Student wellbeing

The safety and wellbeing of students is the priority of teachers and school leaders. It should be noted that an ongoing focus on NAPLAN throughout the school year and across all year levels can have the effect of heightening student perceptions of the stakes of the test. Similarly, participating in learning activities, intervention programs or small group work specifically related to NAPLAN which identify “bands” or “levels” can impact on student self-perception and wellbeing.

The Queensland Teachers' Union is aware of situations where students have experienced stress or anxiety in the lead up to or during NAPLAN testing. Students experiencing distress must not be made to participate in or complete the test, and in cases such as these, principals must be able to recommend to families that their child does not participate.

It is important to celebrate student learning and growth. However, the QTU and the department agree that programs rewarding NAPLAN participation and results, including celebrations, parties and the provision of student awards or medals, elevate the NAPLAN test to a level beyond its purpose or scope, and they should not occur. The existence of such reward programs creates a high stakes environment which may lead to student anxiety and promotes the idea that NAPLAN results contribute to student achievement in some way.

Note: This statement represents the QTU position in relation to NAPLAN in Queensland Schools. The QTU is currently working with the Department of Education to develop a Joint Statement.