

MEDIA RELEASE

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Making NAPLAN work for students

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Grattan Institute today urged the Federal Government to boost its national school performance plan with a new element which would help meet teacher concerns about unfair league tables.

"We need a stronger focus on individual student progress in literacy and numeracy within schools rather than measuring in a way which encourages unfair comparisons between schools," Dr Ben Jensen said on the release of Grattan Institute's "Measuring what Matters: Student Progress".

http://www.grattan.edu.au/publications/016_education_performance_measures_report.pdf
http://www.grattan.edu.au/people/ben_jensen.html

This "value-added" model provides much more accurate and useful measures and removes the bias in the current model against schools serving lower socio-economic areas. For these reasons, they have been supported by teachers, school associations, and unions in other countries, according to the Institute's Program Director of School Education, Dr Ben Jensen.

"Grattan's report makes NAPLAN work for students and recommends that school performance is calculated with value added measures that assess student progress in NAPLAN."

Value-added measures of school performance use a model that is fashioned to the individual student that gives a more accurate picture of a school's contribution to his or her progress.

School value-added performance scores measure their contribution to student progress, comparing the progress made by each student at each initial level of performance, and calculating the contribution the school makes to that progress (controlling for student background).

Dr Jensen said the Federal Government's 'My School' website was "a step in the right direction but falls short in providing targeted practical guidance to teachers to improve student performance".

"The desire by all, particularly parents, for transparency on school performance needs to be based on accurate data," he said.

"We need accurate measures of school performance to help the 30% of Australian Year 9 students who perform at only the basic minimum levels of writing literacy. We owe it to these

students to identify which programs work in lifting student progress. Substantial increases in expenditure in past decades have achieved little in lifting student progress”.

“Grattan’s approach makes NAPLAN work better for students. It focuses on student progress and how to lift that progress”.

“Our focus should be on the students. In this debate we don’t hear enough about improving student progress; about how measuring school performance will improve instruction and learning. Our approach empowers school principals and teachers as they have the greatest impact on student learning. The Grattan Report is a student centred one.”

“Schools need to be able to identify for which students, in which subject areas and in which grade levels they are effectively contributing to student progress. Effective programs and instruction can be expanded and less effective areas developed.”

“Opponents of publishing measures of school performance say they are concerned about unfairly stigmatising schools in poorer communities, and the likelihood of producing ill-conceived league tables. Our approach addresses both of these concerns.”

“Research findings overseas have continually found that such an approach has improved teaching and instruction and enhanced student performance. “

“The stakes for Australian education are too high to let inaccurate performance measures dictate future education initiatives”, Dr Jensen concluded.

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