

NAPLAN 2010

By Lauren Djakovac

More than one million students in Years 3, 5, 7, and 9 across Australia, including about 80,000 from South Australia, sat for the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) tests in May. Students were assessed in areas such as reading, writing, spelling, grammar, punctuation and numeracy.

Commencing in 2008 and now in its third year of testing, the lead up to this year's NAPLAN tests was riddled with controversy - with complaints of the possible creation of 'league tables', boycott threats, and cheating claims rife.

In 2008, parents raised the alarm about our children's knowledge of the basics, when SA students scored below average in 15 of the 20 categories. These concerns were ignored and in 2009, we were told that our state had no targets for improvements on the tests.

Recently released 2010 data enables comparisons of the same group of students to gauge the improvement they make as they progress through school for the first time. With little improvement in South Australia over the last few years evident, these results show that it's now time for some targets.

“Fewer SA students are meeting national minimum standards than previous years...”

Individual student reports were distributed to parents in September, with the National 2010 Summary Report revealing:

South Australia

Comparing results from the last two years, South Australia is not improving, and in some areas actually declining.

SA students below the national average:

- In 2010, SA students scored below the national average in 19 of the 20 categories.
- In 2009, students scored below in 18 of 20.
- While in 2008, scored below in 15 of 20.

Fewer SA students are meeting national minimum standards than previous years:

“SA students scored below the national average in 19 of the 20 categories.”

- In 2010, SA students reached or exceeded minimum standards in only 14 out of 20 categories.
- In 2009 students reached or exceed minimum standards in 16 of 20 categories.
- Fewer than 90% of SA students reached the minimum standards in Year 3 spelling.
- Year 9 has the least number of SA students meeting national benchmarks with less than 90% achieving the benchmarks in reading, writing and spelling.



According to the Federal Government's 'Education Revolution' document, achievement in literacy and numeracy is the most influential factor in Year 9 students finishing high school. "Students with poor Year 9 literacy and numeracy test results are also more likely to be unemployed, and if they are employed, more likely to earn a low wage."

SA's numeracy results were the weakest in the country in Year's 3 and 9 (excluding the NT, which recorded the lowest participation rates and therefore lowest average scores across the board):

- 93.1% of Year 3 students scored at or above the national minimum standards.
- For Year 9 students, it was 92.1%.
- SA students in Year 5 ranked equal bottom of the class in numeracy with QLD.
- However, in Year 7, our students have improved on scores received by last year's cohort and are now slightly above average in all measures bar spelling.

The Nation

Since the first NAPLAN tests in 2008:

- Year 3 literacy results have improved significantly in 3 of the 4 tested areas – reading, writing, and grammar & punctuation.
- Year 5 numeracy results have improved significantly at the national level.
- Year 7 reading results have also improved significantly across the country.

Overall:

- The latest results confirm the leading jurisdictions are the ACT, Vic and NSW.
- While, QLD and the NT have the lowest scores.

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- ACT students have outperformed most other Australian children in the 2010 tests, coming first in 15 out of 20 categories.
- QLD and WA have achieved the most substantial increases in mean scores from 2008 to 2010.

Participation

South Australia recorded one of the lowest participation rates in the country.

- SA consistently had one of the lowest participation rates across all year levels – and all disciplines.
- In SA, the Year 9 cohort had the lowest participation of the state, with just 89.5% of students sitting the numeracy test and 90.3% completing the writing section – with the national average being 92.5% and 93.2%.
- This is a considerable drop in the participation rates recorded last year, with more than 91% of Year 9 students completing all disciplines.
- SA also had the fewest Year 3 students take the tests, with 93.4% completing the writing component – compared with the national average of 95.5%.

State Education Minister Jay Weatherill said “this year's results are relatively consistent with previous results and South Australian students' scores are around the middle when compared with other States and Territories”. But with no obvious improvement evident – do we really want our state to achieve 'around the middle' – when this means thousands of SA children are either failing to meet minimum standards or only just meeting minimum standards?

The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), which is responsible for conducting and reporting the tests, will provide a more detailed report on student improvement and other aspects of NAPLAN in December. Individual school information will also be available on the My School website late 2010. ■