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South Australian Association Of State School Organisations Inc.

Friday August 15, 2014

The Hon Jennifer Rankine
Minister for Education and Child Development
31 Flinders Street
Adelaide SA 5000

Dear Minister,

Re: NAPLAN - Special Needs 'Adjustments'

I am writing to alert you to reports that multiple public schools are failing to assist special needs students to participate in NAPLAN.

In the lead up to this year's tests, SAASSO heard from parents, upset that their special needs students receive no assistance to sit NAPLAN. Instead, parents report they are encouraged to not have their children take the tests.

Minister, such actions would breach the *National Protocols for Test Administration's Code of Conduct*. The code states, 'It is not acceptable to exert influence on parents to withdraw their children from testing'.

The Code of Conduct also requires, that all principals and relevant staff have read and understood the protocols. 'Failure to read or be aware of these protocols and documents is not a valid reason for breaching protocols'.

The Code of Conduct states that breaching these principles 'will lead to an investigation'.

You are, no doubt, aware that the *Disability Standards for Education* require that 'students with a disability are able to access and participate in education on the same basis as other students'. This includes participation in NAPLAN.

To achieve this, the Federal Government provides for 'adjustments' for special needs students to help them sit the national tests.

The *National Protocols* state that it is the responsibility of principals to ensure parents are informed about the adjustments available to their children and to provide students with disabilities the adjustments they require.

The feedback SAASSO received prior to this year's tests, indicates that many parents are not being informed of these rights and their children are not receiving the support to which they are entitled.

In response, SAASSO distributed a bulletin to members informing them of their rights and the responsibilities of SA's state schools to provide extra support to special needs students.

Parents were understandably upset they had not been previously informed by their schools and subsequently raised this issue with them.

Their frustration turned to anger when, despite being presented with this new information, some schools still refused to provide additional support to special needs students.

Some schools told parents they were aware of the requirements of the *Disability Standards*, but claimed they had no resources or funds to provide students with the 'adjustments'.

Minister, we received multiple reports of such conduct, ranging across the metropolitan area and into regional South Australia.

South Australia has a chequered history with NAPLAN; cheating, comparatively low participation rates and disappointing state-wide performances - but special needs students being denied rights protected under national protocols is unacceptable.

On behalf of the public school parents of South Australia, we ask that you act to ensure that for the 2015 tests:

- All parents of special needs students are informed of their rights
- All schools are familiar with the national protocols and aware of their responsibilities to support special needs students and their parents
- All schools are allocated the additional resources to fulfil their obligations to special needs students.

As always, we would be happy to assist in any way possible.

Yours sincerely,



Gino Amato
President