

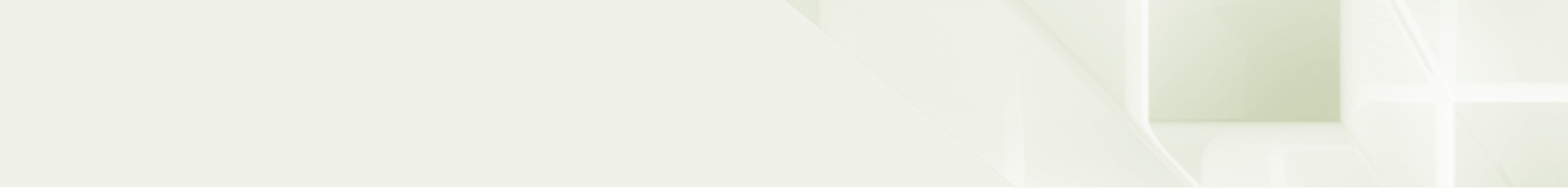


# The Experience of Education: The impacts of high stakes testing on school students and their families

## An Educator's Perspective

Ms Nicky Dulfer, Professor John Polesel, Dr Suzanne Rice

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# FOREWORD

In our Foreword to the literature review [January 2012] that preceded this present report, Professor Jack Keating and I wrote:

*There is so much wrapped up in schooling and seemingly so much at stake, that schools can become emotional cauldrons and the policies that shape them hotly contested.*

*It should come as no surprise then that the introduction of a national regime of standardised external testing would become a lightning rod of claim and counter-claim and a battle-ground for competing educational philosophies. The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is a substantial educational reform. Its introduction has been a source of debate and argument.*

That debate continues to rage.

NAPLAN tests have been conducted nationwide in years 3, 5, 7, and 9 in May each year since 2008. Testing reading, writing, language conventions and numeracy skills and knowledge, the program was introduced as an assessment tool within the broader 'Education Revolution' to address the academic gap emerging between students and the inequities evident in divergent outcomes between schools.

Professor Barry McGaw, Chair of the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), argues that other learning depends on building these fundamental skills and that NAPLAN "lets teachers and parents see each student's performance from a national perspective,"<sup>1</sup> informing parental choice and improving the quality of teaching. The launch of the My School website has made it easy to find statistics about school's NAPLAN results, enrolments and overall performance.

Others question the value of NAPLAN where the ability to locate statistical and contextual information about schools lends itself to ready manipulation in the creation of 'league tables' in spite of the explicit policy intent to avoid simplistic rankings. The fear amongst some has been that the broader context for implementing NAPLAN has been lost in league tables and 'test-driven schooling,' and its outcomes have become significant accountability indicators for schools in Australia by default. Indeed, despite the availability of more information on schools – including on My School – the picture on any particular school remains incomplete in several key aspects thereby defying easy comparisons.

Criticism has been forthcoming across the educational spectrum. Professor Brian Caldwell, a former dean of education at the University of Melbourne, told a Senate inquiry into NAPLAN this year that the program, and controversial My School website, should be 'phased out'. Others, like Dr Kevin Donnelly of the Melbourne-based Education Standards Institute have been more direct, criticising the model as "flawed, educationally unsound and moribund."<sup>2</sup> Professor Linda Darling-Hammond, educator and noted social scientist at Stanford University, has also been critical of the path NAPLAN is taking towards 'high stakes' testing. At a seminar organised by the Australian Education Union, the Australian College of Educators and Sydney University this year, she warned that Australia should be moving away from what has been educationally counterproductive in America (see Polesel et al. 2012).

Now in its fifth year of operation, NAPLAN has not been able to suppress the doubts, questions and outright opposition garnered since its inception in 2008. Media reporting continues to record exam boycotts and parents withdrawing their children. More than 130 academics from various fields signed a letter in June this year calling for the end of what they see as a high stakes testing regime.<sup>3</sup>

In such a charged environment the need for rigorous research that delves beneath the surface is paramount.

This report by Dulfer, Polesel and Rice does just that, seeking the views of Australian educators regarding NAPLAN. This nationwide survey of close to 8,500 educators probes both the impact of NAPLAN on testing, pedagogy and curriculum practice as well as the more difficult (and largely ignored) question of the impact on students' health and well-being.

It is a challenging report: their findings, based on this significant sample, will demand attention. The report suggests that the NAPLAN testing regime is plagued by unintended consequences well beyond its stated intent: it does represent a shift to 'high stakes' testing.

For the Whitlam Institute, it raises the larger question of the purposes of education.

As the NAPLAN results become linked with funding and policy decisions, pressure for improving scores has vastly impacted on teachers, their practices and the curriculum. Educators are increasingly speaking out of the associated work pressures, higher workloads, narrowing pedagogy and diminishing time for quality teaching and learning.<sup>4</sup> While for many schools NAPLAN acts only as a minor distraction from their regular teaching program, reports of 'teaching to the test' are clearly well-founded, as practising programs come to dominate the curriculum to the neglect of rich and important areas such as history, geography, physical education and music (Jones et al. 2003; Thompson 2012). Though further work is required, it is evident that the dramatic shift towards performance that NAPLAN has come to represent is having an impact on students, both in terms of their educational experience and, for a significant number, their personal well-being.

The report before you, *The Impacts of High Stakes Testing on Schools, Students and their Families: an Educator's Perspective*, is an important contribution to the current debate on schooling in Australia. It is part of a larger project that brings together the Whitlam Institute, the Melbourne Graduate School of Education and the Foundation for Young Australians with funding support from the Silicon Valley Community Foundation and the Hart Line Fund.

I recommend this report to you for your serious consideration.

Eric Sidoti  
Director  
With the assistance of Justine Chambers  
Whitlam Institute

1 <http://www.theage.com.au/national/education/naplan-the-case-for-20120504-1y431.html>. Accessed 11/10/2012.

2 <http://www.thepunch.com.au/articles/gillards-best-mate-obama-is-no-rap-for-naplan/>. Accessed 11/10/2012.

3 <http://www.literacyeducators.com.au/images/pdf/letter-of-support.pdf>. Accessed 11/10/2012.

4 A series of papers compiled by the 'Say No to NAPLAN' group explains the many problems associated with NAPLAN. See <http://www.literacyeducators.com.au/index.php/naplan>. Accessed 11/10/2012

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## THE SURVEY

- On 14 May 2012 an electronic survey was sent out to all members of the Australian Education Union and the Independent Education Unions in each state. Its aim was to gather educators' views about the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), and its perceived effects on students. Questions ranged across five key topic areas:
  - » The impact of NAPLAN reporting on school enrolments
  - » The impact of NAPLAN testing on children's health and well-being
  - » The impact of NAPLAN testing on curriculum
  - » The impact of NAPLAN testing on teaching approaches
  - » The impact of NAPLAN testing on children's learning.
- The survey was open for a period of six weeks between 14 May and 25 June 2012, and in that time garnered 8353 responses.
- The survey generated responses from every state and territory within Australia. The two states with the largest response rate between them were Queensland (3890 responses) and NSW (1681 responses). Proportionally, responses from Queensland and Tasmania were overrepresented in the survey, and responses from NSW, SA, Victoria and Northern Territory were underrepresented.
- The sample of participants who chose to take part in this survey is broadly representative of Australia's teaching workforce in terms of teacher gender, the year levels of the students they work with, and their years of teaching experience.
- Validity of the data in terms of the representation of the different states and territories was addressed by weighting the data to reflect the actual proportions of teachers in the different jurisdictions. Weighting made minimal difference to the responses to the items.

## TEACHERS' VIEWS OF THE PURPOSE OF NAPLAN

- The most commonly cited purposes of NAPLAN, as viewed by participants, was that it was either a school ranking tool or a policing tool.
- These purposes were ranked more highly than the purposes of informing parents about their child's progress, identifying schools in need of support, helping parents choose schools or providing information for teachers to use as a diagnostic tool.
- Proportionally more Principals believed that NAPLAN was a diagnostic tool for teachers, with two thirds agreeing that this was one of the purposes of NAPLAN. Teachers, however, had a different viewpoint with fifty-eight per cent believing that NAPLAN was not a diagnostic tool.

- Only forty-two per cent of primary teachers agreed that NAPLAN was a means of informing parents about the progress of their children, compared to just over half of the secondary teachers. Over sixty per cent of the Principals surveyed agreed that NAPLAN is a means of informing parents about the progress of their children.

## TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF NAPLAN REPORTING ON SCHOOL ENROLMENTS

- Ninety-five per cent of respondents felt that the publication of 'weaker than expected' results would negatively affect parental perception of the school.
- Ninety-five per cent also felt that poor NAPLAN results would negatively affect media reports about the school, and ninety-six per cent felt that weak results would damage the school's reputation in the community.
- Over ninety percent of participants believe that lower than expected results on NAPLAN would mean that a school would have trouble attracting and retaining students, and ninety per cent felt that there would be a negative impact on staff morale.
- Smaller proportions of respondents, although still the majority at seventy per cent, were also concerned that 'weaker than expected' results would lead to a negative student perception of the school.

## TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF NAPLAN ON CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

- When the respondents were asked to comment on how their students felt about NAPLAN, seven per cent of participants reported that all of their students had concerns about the test, forty-one per cent felt that most of their students had concerns, and a further forty-eight per cent spoke of some students having concerns.
- However, over forty per cent of respondents felt that some students were looking forward to undertaking NAPLAN. It is clear therefore that participants do not believe that all students regard NAPLAN as a negative experience.
- Approximately 90 per cent of respondents stated that at least some students reported feeling stressed – the most commonly reported issue. The least commonly reported reaction was crying, although over sixty per cent of participants stated that at least some students had reported this.



- In addition approximately 1200 respondents commented on avoidance behaviours (for example, absenteeism), physical health issues (for example, headaches and vomiting) and negative emotions like fear and confusion.
- Respondents report that an overwhelming majority of students sit the NAPLAN tests (and this is in keeping with ACARA data), but approximately half of the participants surveyed report at least one or two students being removed by their families.
- The reason that participants reported was most commonly stated by parents was a negative effect on their child's confidence. This was closely followed by sixty-one per cent of participants stating that at least some parents reported they had removed their children because they were opposed to NAPLAN.

## TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF IMPACT OF NAPLAN ON CURRICULUM AND TEACHING APPROACHES

- Given that ACARA recommends only that students be familiarised with the format and instructions of the tests, rather than being involved in “excessive test preparation”, the research investigated teachers’ views of preparation for tests.
- When asked to identify the students’ reactions to practising NAPLAN, the majority of respondents reported that some students felt more comfortable as a result and that the practice helped them achieve their best.
- However thirty-six per cent of respondents reported that only a small number of their students feel more comfortable after NAPLAN practice. One fifth of respondents reported that there were no students who felt more comfortable after NAPLAN practice. A majority of the respondents reported that practising for the tests simply amplified the self-doubt of at least some of the students.
- Roughly half of the respondents had facilitated their students practising NAPLAN tests at least three times in the weeks leading up to the tests, with a further third practising more than six times in the final weeks prior to NAPLAN.
- Thirteen per cent reported that they did not practise the test with their students.
- Primary teachers reported higher quantities of practice over both time periods, with ninety three per cent of respondents reporting at least one practice session in the two weeks prior to NAPLAN, and approximately one quarter reporting practising more than seven times in those two weeks.

- Over eighty per cent believed that NAPLAN preparation is adding to an already crowded curriculum, while fifty-nine per cent believed that NAPLAN is affecting the range of teaching strategies they used.
- A further three quarters of respondents believed that NAPLAN is impacting on the way in which school communities view curriculum areas, with subjects that are not tested reduced in importance relative to subjects that are. Just over two thirds of participants believed that the focus of NAPLAN on literacy and numeracy has led to a timetable reduction for other subjects in their schools.
- Teachers were fairly evenly divided in their views about whether NAPLAN information is useful or not, but just over two thirds of Principals believed the information was useful.
- Slightly more than half of the respondents surveyed were using the NAPLAN information to identify ‘surprises’, that is students who performed at a much higher or much lower level than expected.
- Slightly less than half used the information to identify any areas of weakness that were common to the majority of the class, and then make changes to their teaching practice in that area.
- Forty-six per cent of the respondents surveyed said their school as a whole spent time looking at ways to implement reform based on the NAPLAN data, and a third of respondents talked about year level teams and subject teams using the data to plan their teaching programs.
- About one quarter of respondents said the data did not change their teaching practice.

## CONCLUSION

Respondents’ perceptions of the purposes of NAPLAN and their views of what impact reported poor results could have on schools strongly suggest that NAPLAN is viewed by the teaching profession as ‘high stakes testing,’ confirming views already expressed by Lingard (2010) and Lobascher (2011).

These findings also suggest that NAPLAN may be having a detrimental effect in areas such as curriculum breadth, pedagogy, staff morale, schools’ capacity to attract and retain students and student well-being.

The concerns expressed in the international literature and also raised by teachers surveyed in this study suggest that further research is required to examine carefully the uses, effects and impacts of NAPLAN, as reported by a range of users, including systems, the teaching profession, parents and students.

# PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

In January 2012, the Whitlam Institute commissioned a literature review to investigate the impact of high stakes testing on school students and their families. The review concluded that there are “serious concerns regarding the impact of high stakes testing on student health and well-being, learning, teaching and curriculum” (Polesel, Dulfer and Turnbull 2012, p12). It argued that the publication of NAPLAN results on the My School website, with the associated publicity and impact on schools and students, means that NAPLAN may be defined as constituting high stakes testing.

However, it also noted that much of the research reviewed was from the international arena and that therefore further research needed to be undertaken in the Australian context. This report is the second in this series of papers about high stakes testing, and is focused on a National Teacher Survey undertaken during May and June of 2012.

In May 2012 all year three, five, seven and nine students in Australia sat NAPLAN tests. These tests assess students in the key areas of reading, writing, language conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation) and numeracy. On 14 May an electronic survey was sent out to all members of the Australian Education Union and the Independent Education Unions in each State. Its aim was to gather educators' views about NAPLAN, and its perceived effects on students. Questions ranged across the five key topic areas that had been previously highlighted in the literature review. These were:

1. The impact of NAPLAN reporting on school enrolments
2. The impact of NAPLAN testing on children's health and wellbeing
3. The impact of NAPLAN testing on curriculum
4. The impact of NAPLAN testing on teaching approaches
5. The impact of NAPLAN testing on children's learning.

This report does not contain the viewpoints of all NAPLAN stakeholders. Rather, it presents a teacher perspective, based on a survey of members of the major Australian teacher unions. This teacher perspective must be treated with caution and needs to be triangulated with the views of other stakeholders, such as parents and students, for a more complete understanding of the impact of NAPLAN on schools and students. This was not possible within the framework of the current study, but will, subject to funding, be explored in the next stages of this project.

Nevertheless, teachers constitute one of the most important stakeholders in the implementation of a testing program such as NAPLAN, and their voice carries legitimate authority in the debate.

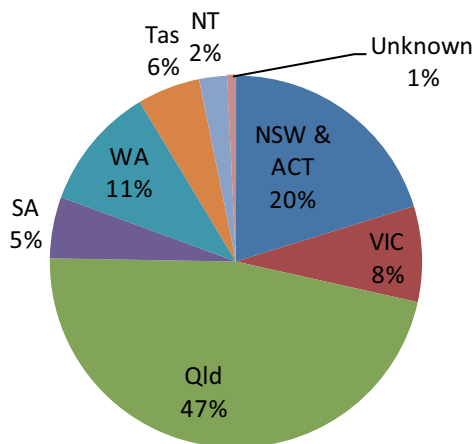
# PART TWO: THE SURVEY SAMPLE

The survey was open for a period of six weeks between 14 May and 25 June 2012, and in that time garnered 8353 responses. Most of the survey participants completed the entire survey, but there was a small number who either did not complete the whole survey, or who did not answer certain questions that were not applicable to them. Throughout this report, the numbers of respondents for each individual question have been identified in brackets e.g. (n=8353).

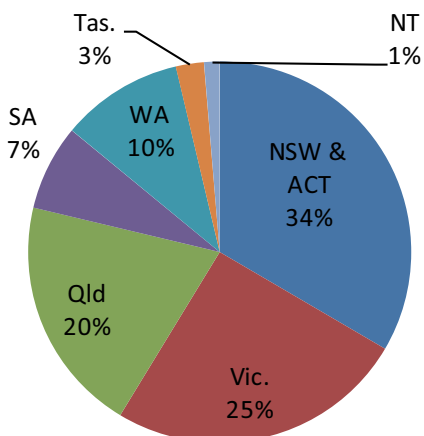
## THE STATES

The survey generated responses from every state and territory within Australia, although the responses from some jurisdictions were low. The two states with the largest response rate between them were Queensland (3890 responses) and NSW (1681 responses). Overall, proportionally, responses from Queensland and Tasmania were overrepresented in the survey, and responses from NSW, SA, Victoria and the Northern Territory were underrepresented. Figure 1 shows the home state of the respondents who took part in the survey, while Figure 2 shows the actual proportions of teachers across Australia within each state. In order to make the sample more accurately reflect the actual numbers of teachers in each state, the data were weighted and this is reflected in the analyses which follow this section.

**Figure 1: Teacher survey participants by state and territory (n=8353)**



**Figure 2: Percentage of teachers in Australia by state and territory in 2009 (ACARA, 2012)**



The survey participants were also asked for some background information (gender, role in the school, number of years teaching, year level taught) to establish if these different groups of teachers had common or divergent viewpoints. All of the responses were analysed by group, but these were only reported where group differences were apparent.

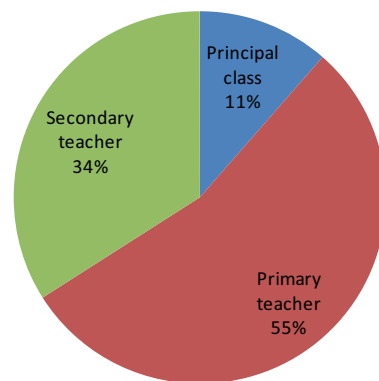
## GENDER

Approximately seventy per cent of the respondents in the survey were female, and thirty per cent male. These percentages closely reflect the gender division within the teaching workforce, which means that on a gender basis the sample group is broadly representative of the profession.

## PROFESSIONAL POSITION

Participants were asked about their role within the school. Detailed information was collected on the subjects taught and whether respondents were primary or secondary school teachers and whether they had a senior leadership role in the school. For the analysis, these roles were grouped into three main categories – primary, secondary and Principal class.

**Figure 3: Participant categories (n=8353)**



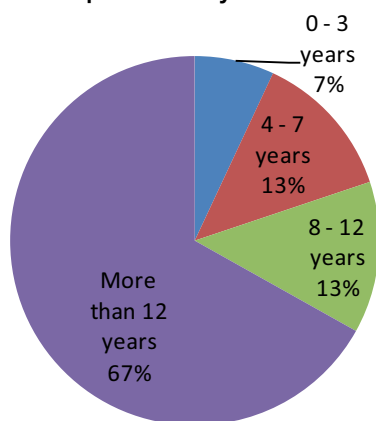
Fifty-five per cent of participants were primary school teachers, and a further thirty-four per cent were secondary school teachers. The Principal category is treated as a different entity as it consists of a mixture of both primary and secondary Principals/Assistant Principals. According to the National Report on Schooling (ACARA 2009) there are roughly equal numbers of primary and secondary teachers in Australia. This suggests that primary teachers are slightly over-represented in the sample. Respondents identifying as Principals were not asked if they were from a primary or secondary school.

## YEARS OF TEACHING

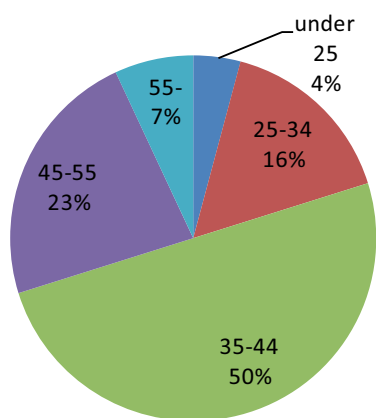
Seven out of every ten teachers who responded to our survey had been teaching for more than twelve years. We used the Australian Bureau of Statistics census of housing and population data to ascertain the age of those currently in the teaching

workforce. Unfortunately the data from the two sources measure different teacher aspects. Data for our sample indicated years of teaching experience but data collected through the census indicates the age of the teacher. We have therefore made an assumption that the majority of those teachers who are in the teaching workforce past the age of 35 have been teaching for more than 12 years. On this basis, our sample is once again approximately representative of the broader teaching workforce.

**Figure 4: Respondents' years of teaching (n=8318)**



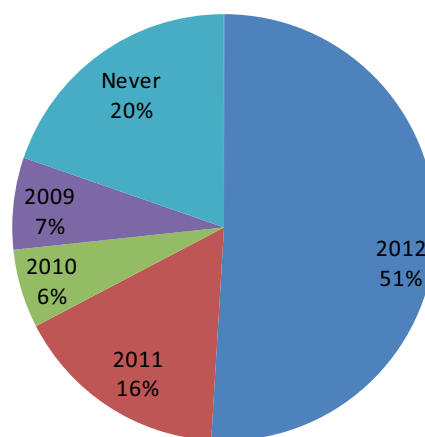
**Figure 5: Age of teaching workforce (ABS, 2001)**



## TEACHERS' NAPLAN EXPERIENCE

Of the 8353 participants who responded, approximately fifty per cent had prepared students for the NAPLAN in 2012. There were a further thirty per cent who had prepared students for the testing in previous years, and twenty per cent who had never prepared a student for NAPLAN testing. The study also allowed educators who did not directly prepare students for NAPLAN to participate, given that the effects of high-stakes testing extend to impacts on school curriculum and planning at broader levels

**Figure 7: Last preparation students for NAPLAN (n=8353)**



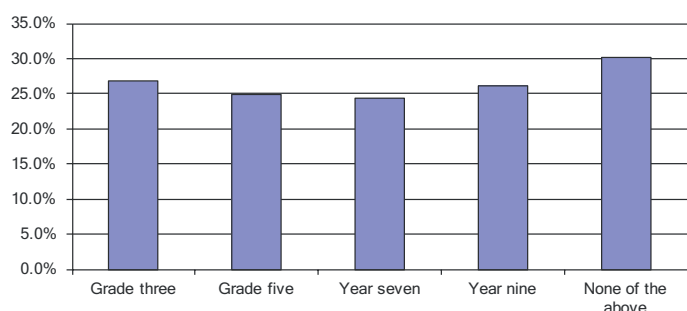
The survey asked respondents how many students they had prepared for NAPLAN tests and of the eighty per cent of teachers who had prepared students for a NAPLAN test in the last four years, approximately half had prepared one class per year, an eighth had prepared two classes per year, and some teachers reported preparing three or more classes per year. The first-hand experiences of many participants in preparing students for the NAPLAN test adds weight to their observations regarding how students and parents react to NAPLAN and its intended and unintended consequences.

## YEAR LEVELS TAUGHT

Respondents were asked which year levels they taught, with particular reference to the year levels most affected by NAPLAN. Figure 6 shows that the sample was spread evenly across the year levels.

**Figure 6: Year levels taught (n=8353)**

Do you teach any of the following year levels? (Mark as many as apply)



## THE VALIDITY OF THE SAMPLE

As shown in the above categories the sample of teachers who chose to take part in this survey is broadly representative of Australia's teaching workforce in terms of teacher gender, the year levels of the students they work with, and their years of teaching experience. Validity of the data in terms of the representation of the different states and territories was addressed by weighting the data to reflect the actual proportions of teachers in the different jurisdictions. It should be noted that weighting made minimal difference to the responses to the items.

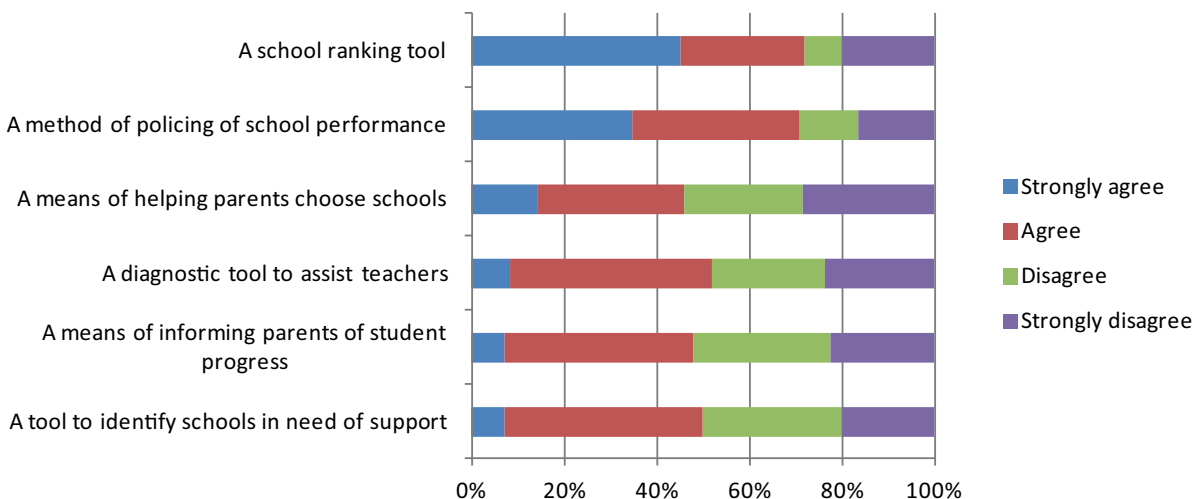
# PART THREE: THE PURPOSE OF NAPLAN

Implementation of standardised testing regimes is most often undertaken with several purposes in mind. Such regimes form an important accountability mechanism for systems and policymakers, providing evidence concerning the performance of schools relative to benchmarks, and allowing tracking of long-term trends. Another aim may be to raise achievement across the board, and more specifically in sites or among student groups demonstrating low achievement. From a systemic perspective, state or nationwide standardised tests may work to focus school attention and resources more intently on levels of achievement. In Australia, ACARA states that one purpose of NAPLAN is to help schools identify issues within their teaching programs, and to assist individual students. Parents can also use the results to “discuss progress with teachers, and teachers can use the results to identify ‘outliers,’ that is, students who may need extra support, or more challenging material.” ACARA also points out that the “community can see the NAPLAN results on the My School website” ([http://www.nap.edu.au/NAPLAN/Parent\\_Carer\\_support/index.html](http://www.nap.edu.au/NAPLAN/Parent_Carer_support/index.html)) and notes that systems can utilise the results to review programs and target support to schools.

There is considerable evidence in the literature which suggests that there are also unintended outcomes of high stakes testing, with reported negative impacts on curriculum, pedagogy, learning, student well-being and school enrolments (Macmillan 2005; Booher-Jennings 2008). However, the intended outcomes are largely concerned with accountability, identifying students and schools in need of support and providing parents with information about their children’s schools.

Participants in the current study were asked what they believed were the purposes of NAPLAN. They were offered a series of statements and asked to indicate agreement on a 4-point Likert scale (‘Strongly agree’, ‘Agree’, ‘Disagree’, ‘Strongly disagree’). The most commonly cited purpose of NAPLAN was as a school ranking tool with over seventy per cent of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing that this was a purpose of NAPLAN. The majority of respondents also agreed or strongly agreed that NAPLAN was a policing tool. These purposes were ranked more highly than the purposes of informing parents about their child’s progress, identifying schools in need of support, helping parents choose schools or providing information for teachers to use as a diagnostic tool.

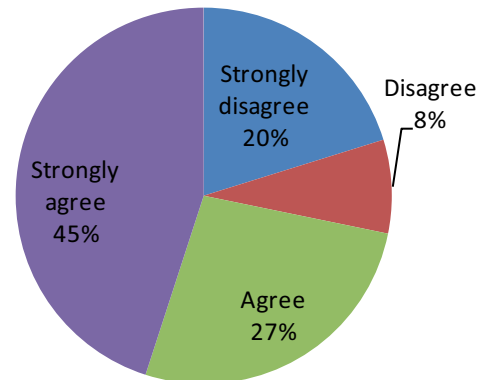
**Figure 8: Perceived purposes of NAPLAN (n=769)**



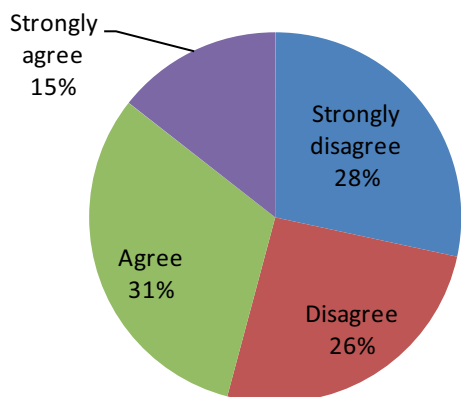
## RANKING TOOL, AID TO PARENTAL CHOICE

Whilst ACARA has taken a great deal of care to make sure that there are no ‘League Tables’ attached to the NAPLAN, participants still demonstrated a strong belief that the NAPLAN is a school ranking tool. Almost three out of four respondents agreed or strongly agreed that one of the purposes of NAPLAN is to rank schools. This is particularly interesting when placed alongside the purpose of helping parents choose schools. Whilst seventy-two per cent of respondents believed that NAPLAN is a ranking tool only forty-six per cent of them believed that NAPLAN assists parents in choosing a school for their child. This may be due to the fact that not all parents have the skills or resources to utilize school performance data such as that provided on the My School website – other research indicates that middle-class parents are more adept at marshalling their resources to take advantage of this additional information, whereas parents with less social and economic capital have less capacity to use this information to their advantage (for further discussion see Ball 2008 or Howe et al. 2001).

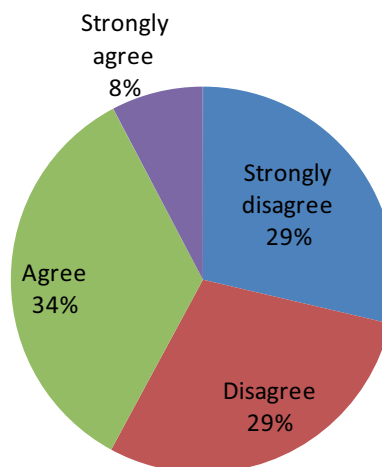
**Figure 9: Purpose of NAPLAN - school ranking tool (n=7710)**



**Figure 10: Purpose of NAPLAN - assist parent choice (n=7636)**



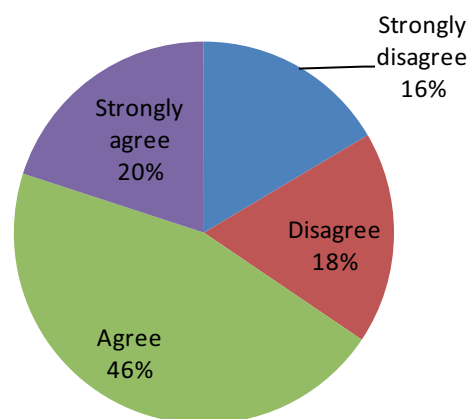
**Figure 11: Purpose of NAPLAN - diagnostic tool – teacher responses (n=6560)**



## DIAGNOSTIC TOOL TO ASSIST TEACHERS

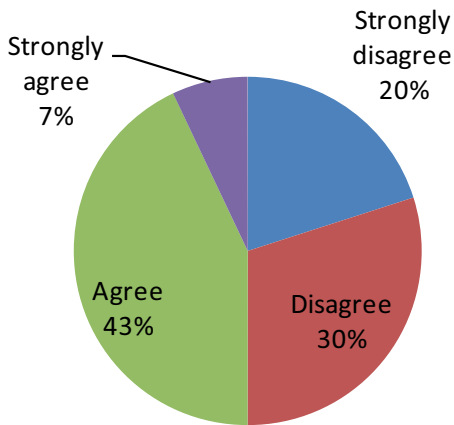
Forty-five per cent of survey respondents believed that NAPLAN was a diagnostic tool to assist respondents, with fifty-five per cent disagreeing that this was a purpose of NAPLAN. This level of ambivalence is not unexpected given the time delay between NAPLAN administration and the provision of student results to schools. A number of the submissions reviewed for the recent Senate Inquiry into NAPLAN spoke of the need for an improvement in the time it took to turn around NAPLAN results if they were to be of any use to individual teachers. Interestingly, these figures shifted significantly when broken down by the categories of teacher (primary or secondary) or Principal class (Principals and Assistant Principals). Proportionally more principals believed that NAPLAN was a diagnostic tool for teachers, with two thirds agreeing that this was one of the purposes of NAPLAN (Figure 12): “As a whole staff we spend some time looking through data & determine if we should change what we are doing.” Teachers, however, had a different understanding. Fifty-eight per cent believing that NAPLAN was not a diagnostic tool. As one teacher posited “Results come out too late in the year to make a significant impact during that year. The following year, it is 9 months since the test and many problems have been addressed, the students having since studied that particular area.” It may be that at the school level, aggregate NAPLAN data can point to areas of the curriculum where average student achievement is low (with implications for Principals as they work to determine professional learning directions for their school) and are thus seen as useful by school leadership. In contrast, at the level of the individual student, the delay between testing and results makes the data less useful for teachers working to ensure individual students are developing in each of the areas covered.

**Figure 12: Purpose of NAPLAN – diagnostic tool – Principal/Assistant Principal responses (n=1137)**

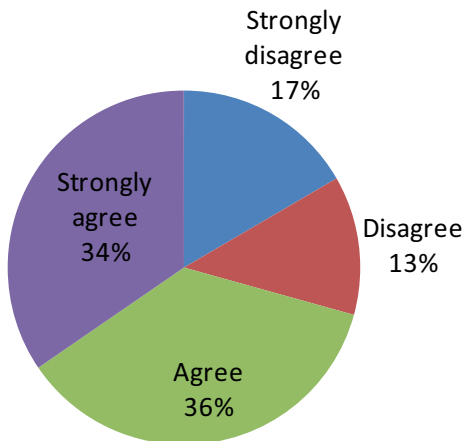


## POLICING OR IDENTIFYING SCHOOLS IN NEED OF SUPPORT

**Figure 13: Purpose of NAPLAN - identify schools needing support (n=7647)**



**Figure 14: Purpose of NAPLAN - policing schools (n=7685)**

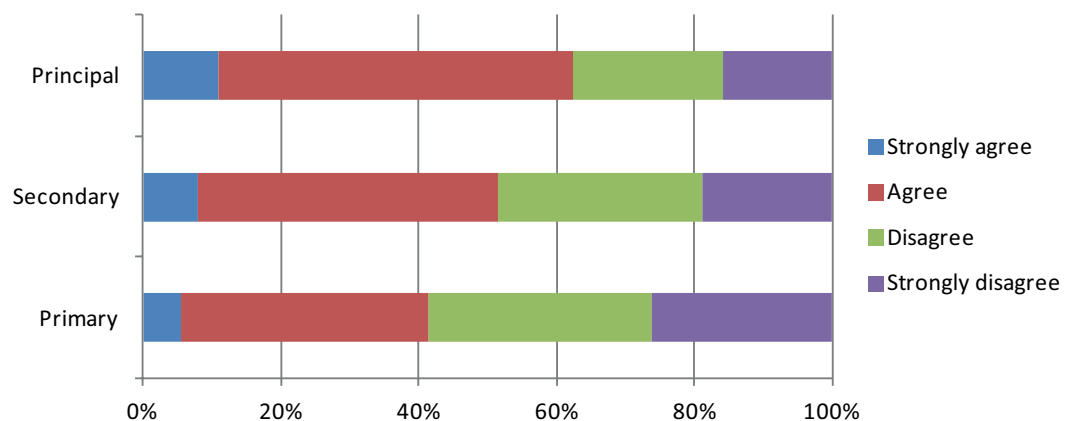


Almost half of those surveyed believed that NAPLAN was a tool to identify schools in need of support (Figure 13). Significantly, Principals were more likely to agree with this statement, with sixty per cent of Principals responding that they believed NAPLAN helped identify schools in need of support. All respondents were also asked if they believed that NAPLAN was a method of policing school performance. Seven out of every ten respondents believed that NAPLAN is a method for policing school performance (Figure 14). Given that ACARA states that one of the key roles of NAPLAN is to “perform an accountability function” ([http://www.nap.edu.au/About/Why\\_NAP/index.html](http://www.nap.edu.au/About/Why_NAP/index.html)) this response is unsurprising. However, of the various options offered to participants, this was the most negative view available. There was no significant difference in the responses of either the teachers or the principal class when the two categories were analysed separately.

## INFORMING PARENTS ABOUT STUDENT PROGRESS

Just over half of the survey respondents did not agree that NAPLAN was a means of informing parents about student progress. When this data is analysed according to the role of the respondents (Principal, primary teacher and secondary teacher), there are differences between various sub-groups. Only forty-two per cent of primary teachers agreed that NAPLAN was a means of informing parents about the progress of their children, compared to just over half of the secondary teachers. Over sixty per cent of the Principals surveyed agreed that NAPLAN is a means of informing parents about the progress of their children. Primary teachers often have more frequent direct contact with parents than secondary teachers and their responses suggest that they may depend more on these opportunities for informal reporting to parents through general feedback than on formal reporting through NAPLAN. This data suggests that respondents believe that teachers who have the closest relationships with parents remain unconvinced that NAPLAN is informing parents about their student’s progress.

**Figure 15: Purpose of NAPLAN - informing parents (n=7677)**



# PART FOUR: THE IMPACT OF NAPLAN REPORTING ON SCHOOL ENROLMENTS

Participants were also asked to consider what impact 'weaker-than-expected' NAPLAN results would have on a school. They were asked to estimate the impact of poor NAPLAN results on six areas (see Figure 16). The results were emphatic, with participants indicating that poorer than expected results would impact negatively or very negatively on all the items listed. In particular, they perceived a strong potential negative impact of poor results on media reports about a school, the school's reputation, parental perceptions of the school, the school's ability to attract and retain students, and staff morale.

Ninety-five per cent of respondents felt that the publication of 'weaker than expected' results would negatively affect parental perception of the school. Ninety-five per cent also felt that poor NAPLAN results would negatively affect media reports about the school, and ninety-six per cent felt that weak results would damage the school's reputation in the community.

A further significant proportion of participants, seventy per cent, were also concerned that 'weaker than expected' results would lead to a negative student perception of the school, and ninety per cent maintained that there would be a negative impact on staff morale. These results strongly suggest a high level of concern among the teaching profession that 'weaker than expected' NAPLAN results are having a range of impacts on schools which may hinder rather than facilitate their work.

**Figure 16: Impact of poor results (n>7780)**

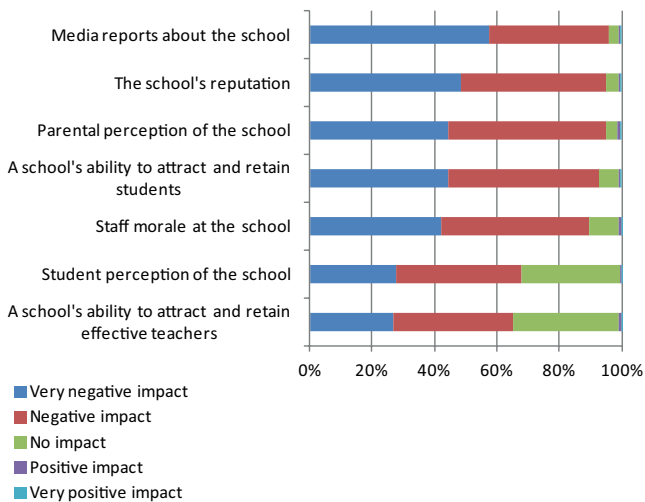
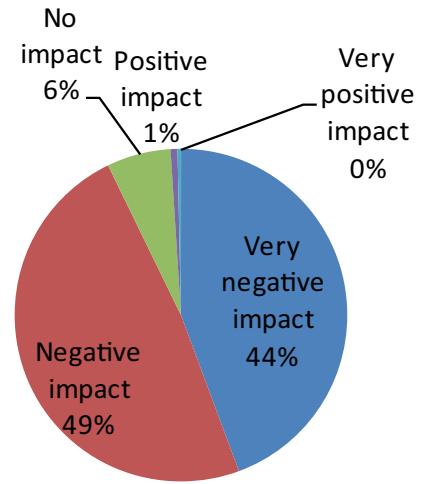
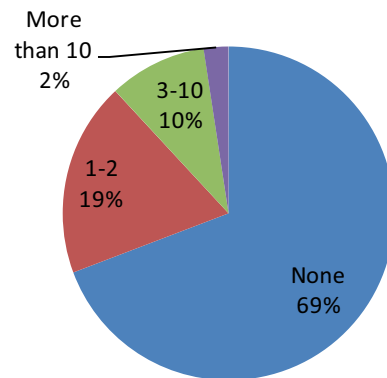


Figure 17 demonstrates that over ninety percent of participants believe that lower than expected results on NAPLAN would mean that a school would have trouble attracting and retaining students. Participants were also asked if they knew of any students who had transferred schools due to relatively poor NAPLAN results. Approximately 1400 participants reported that they knew at least one or two students who had moved school, 703 reported knowing between three and ten students who had moved school, and a further 178 reported knowing more than ten students who had changed school as a direct result of relatively poor NAPLAN results. Although the proportions of participants reporting this kind of movement are a minority, they nevertheless represent over thirty per cent of respondents. This suggests that some schools may be experiencing the loss of some students as a consequence of NAPLAN results. Whether this is because parents have lost confidence in the school or because schools are wishing to remove low achieving students cannot be determined.

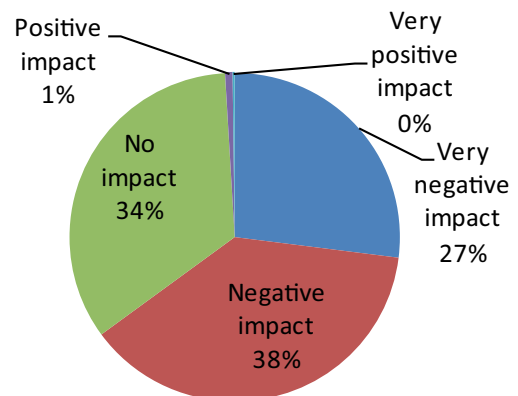
**Figure 17: Impact of poor results on a schools' ability to attract and retain students (n=7805)**



**Figure 18: Teacher experience of students being removed due to poor NAPLAN results (n=7408)**



**Figure 19: Impact of poor results on a schools' ability to attract and retain teachers (n=7788)**





# PART FIVE: THE IMPACT OF HIGH STAKES TESTING ON CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

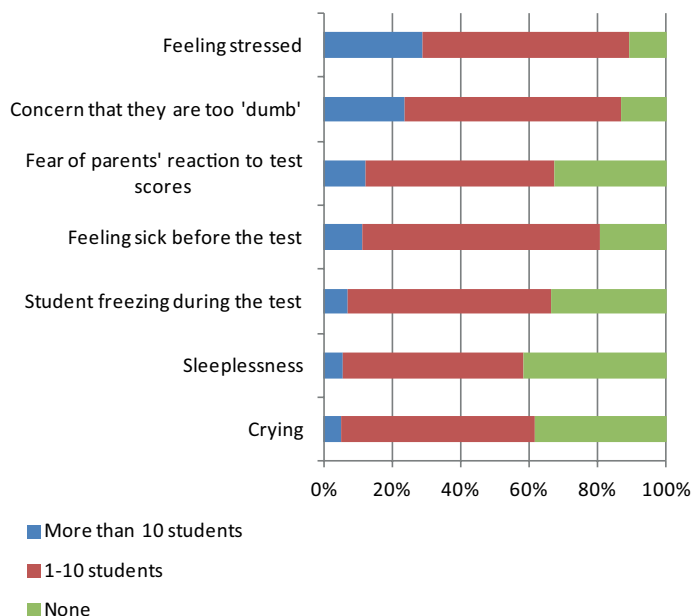
Research by Paris and McEvoy (2000) discusses students 'freezing', experiencing anxiety and suffering physical distress as a result of high stakes testing programs. Flores and Clark (2003) reported that some students demonstrated an inability to sleep, headaches or vomiting in response to high stakes testing. Using themes that the literature raised, the survey asked respondents to comment on the numbers of **students who had directly reported particular problems** to them in association with NAPLAN tests. 7814 participants responded to a variety of statements, and approximately 1300 of these provided individual responses to the open-ended item.

We also asked respondents to comment on the number of **parents who had directly reported particular problems** to them as a result of NAPLAN, using the same categories identified in the literature. This also yielded a high level of individual response with over 400 respondents citing 'other' issues.

The evidence from the data suggests that a large proportion of educators are reporting that at least some students are suffering health and well-being issues as a result of the NAPLAN. Difficulties include physical responses such as crying, sleeplessness, and feeling sick, as well as psychological responses such as an inability to cope emotionally, feelings of inadequacy, and concerns about the ways in which others might view them. Respondents also reported significant numbers of parents raising concerns about the impact of the tests on their children's well-being. Future research seeking the views of students and/or parents could throw further light on this subject.

Participants were then presented with a number of potential negative impacts of high stakes testing drawn from the research literature and asked if any of their students had reported these issues to them, and to indicate the number of students. An overview of their responses is given in Figure 21.

**Figure 21: Students reporting health and well-being issues (n=7836)**



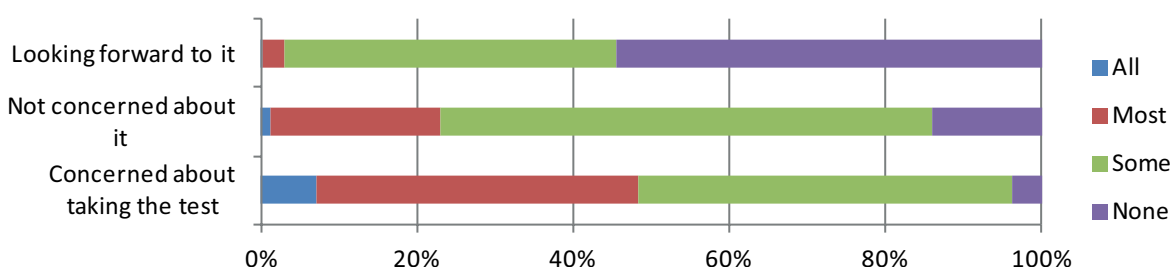
Approximately 90 per cent of respondents stated that at least some students reported feeling stressed. This was the most commonly reported issue. The least commonly reported reaction was crying, although over sixty per cent of participants stated that at least some students had reported this. In addition approximately 1300 respondents gave a response to the 'Other' in the survey. Comments included reports of avoidance behaviours (for example, absenteeism), physical health issues (for example, headaches and vomiting) and negative emotions like fear and confusion.

It is important to note that respondents were asked to state whether students had reported to them any negative effects of NAPLAN on their health and well-being. This means that the data are a secondary source of information and as such this information should be treated with caution.

## AN OVERVIEW

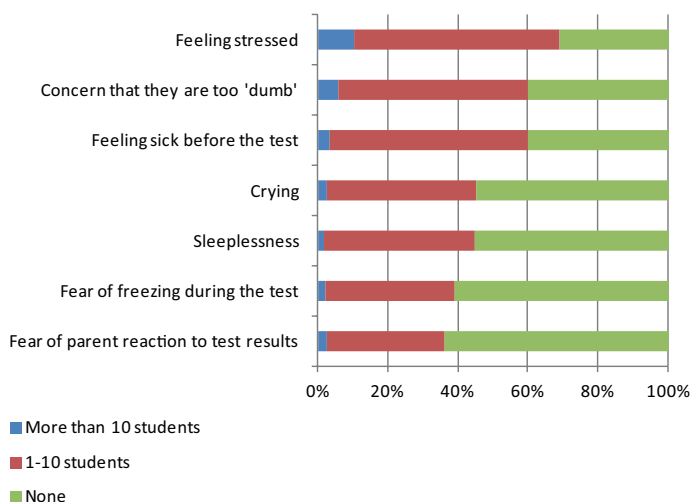
We began by asking participants to comment on how their students felt about NAPLAN – 'looking forward to it,' 'not concerned about it' or 'concerned about taking the test.' The results are reported in Figure 20. They show that seven per cent of participants reported that all of their students had concerns about the test, forty-one per cent felt that most of their students had concerns, and a further forty-eight per cent spoke of some students having concerns. However, over forty per cent of respondents felt that some students were looking forward to undertaking NAPLAN. It is clear therefore that participants do not believe that all students regard NAPLAN as a negative experience.

**Figure 20: Students perceived feelings towards NAPLAN (n=7950)**



The survey then asked participants to indicate how many parents had reported to them the same negative reactions to NAPLAN by their children. Whilst the data discussed below has been aggregated it is important to note that in every instance teachers of primary aged children were more likely to have parents reporting health and well-being issues, than secondary teachers. The reported concerns of parents were at a lower level of frequency than those of the students. This is not surprising given that teachers have less frequent contact with parents than they do with students. Also, the ranking of the factors was somewhat different. Although stress was most commonly reported by both groups, other behaviours were regarded differently by the two groups. For example, participants reported students crying less frequently than parents did.

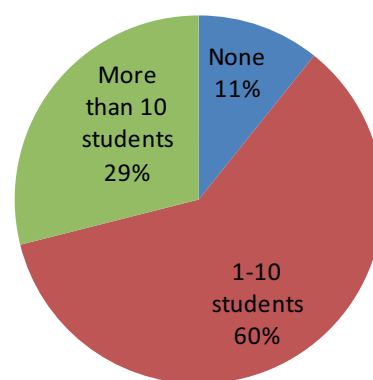
**Figure 22: Participants reporting parent concern about health and well-being (n=7836)**



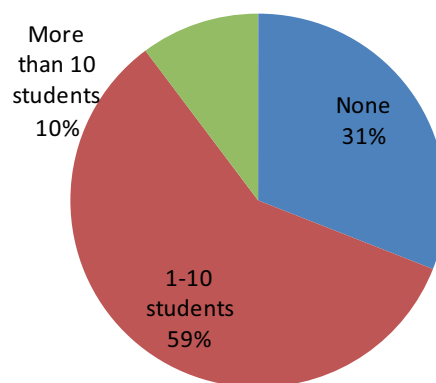
Notwithstanding this, many participants noted that students who already have notable barriers to their learning, in the form of language difficulties, special learning needs, or low prior attainment now have an additional stress leading up to NAPLAN.

The number of parents who participants reported as having concerns about stressed children was also high, with approximately two thirds of participants reporting hearing from individual parents about stressed children. This appears to support the findings in the international research literature.

**Figure 23: Students reporting feeling stressed to teacher (n=7632)**



**Figure 24: Parents reporting students feeling stressed to teacher (n=7620)**



## STRESS

Stress was the most commonly reported problem. Roughly one third of participants reported that more than ten students had told them that they felt stressed in the lead up to NAPLAN. In fact only eleven per cent of participants were able to report that they had not had students claim that they were feeling stressed about the NAPLAN. However, there were some participants who viewed testing as simply a part of normal life. One representative's comment was that:

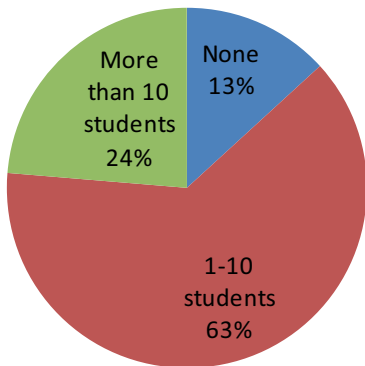
*"While test anxiety is of concern, NAPLAN testing has in no way created hysteria beyond what would be expected of any test situation. Being anxious about a test is quite normal and probably a useful emotion that all humans experience as part of life's great tapestry. To mount a case that somehow NAPLAN is damaging a generation of children says more about parenting than it does about the test itself. I am yet to be at a school that doesn't make every effort to support children through NAPLAN in a positive and encouraging manner."*

## SELF-ESTEEM

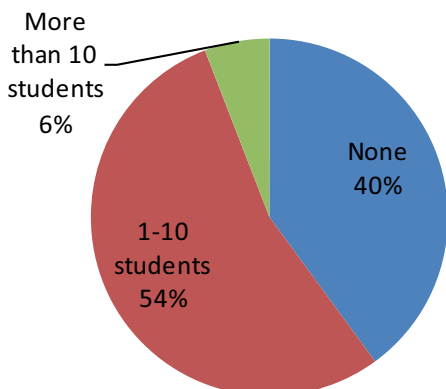
Another aspect of high stakes testing is its potential effect on student self-worth. We asked if students ever reported any concerns about being 'too dumb'. Approximately one quarter of the respondents stated that more than ten students had reported this concern. Only thirteen per cent of respondents registered having no-one report this issue. As one teacher put it in the verbatim comments, some students have a "belief that they are viewed as dumb by the community." Another teacher reported a student saying before a NAPLAN maths test: "I'm going to fail because I'm 'bad' at maths."

Respondents were less likely to report that parents had raised with them the problem of their children feeling lack of confidence regarding the NAPLAN – forty per cent of participants had never heard this concern raised by parents. This could indicate that students are hiding these self-doubts from their parents, or that they simply don't have them, or may once again reflect the lower level of contact that teachers have with parents than with students. Further research is needed to clarify this issue.

**Figure 25: Students' self-esteem concerns (n=7756)**



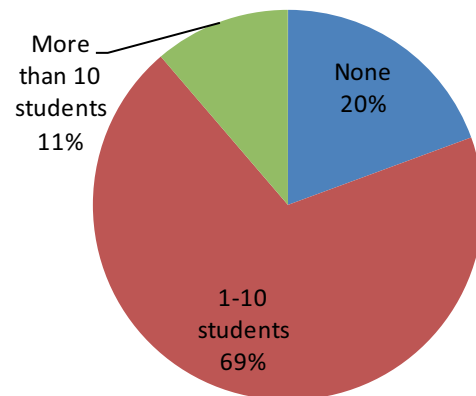
**Figure 26: Parental reports of student self-esteem concerns (n=7740)**



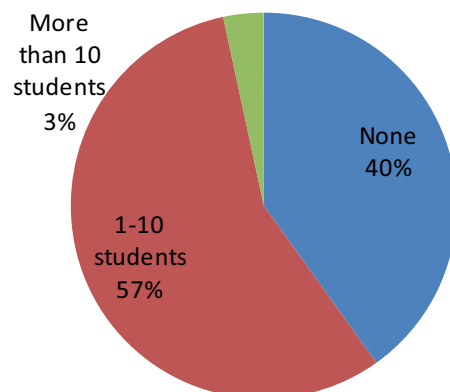
## PHYSICAL HEALTH

Eighty-one per cent of the participants reported having at least one student say they felt sick before the NAPLAN and eleven percent of respondents stated that more than ten students had complained of feeling unwell. Only nineteen per cent of participants stated that no students had complained of sickness. Again, the majority of participants reported at least some students suffering from this problem. Forty per cent of participants had never heard from parents regarding problems of students feeling sick before the test, but thirty-six percent had, with almost one quarter of participants surveyed reporting that multiple families had identified this issue. Sixty-five of the open-ended responses within this question spoke of students vomiting before, during or after the test. There were also a number of participants who spoke of students saying that they felt sick in order to stay home and avoid having to take the tests.

**Figure 27: Students reporting feeling sick before NAPLAN (n=7750)**



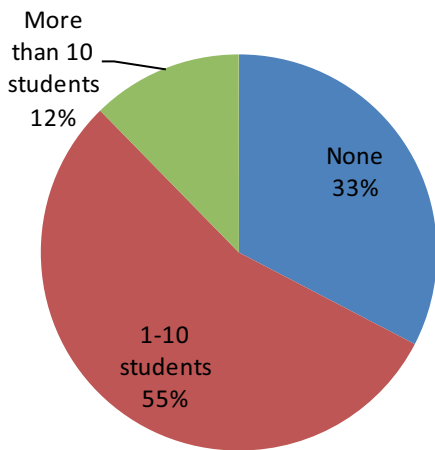
**Figure 28: Parents reporting students feeling sick before NAPLAN (n=7728)**



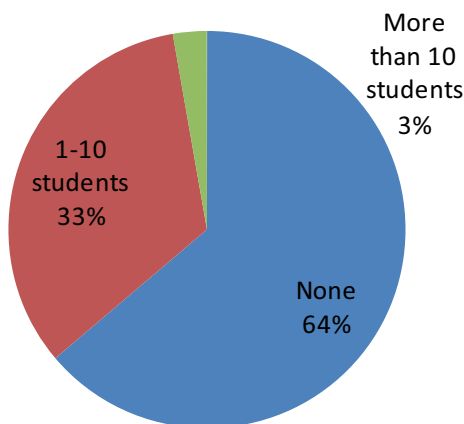
## PARENTAL REACTION

As in the area of self-worth, respondents were more likely to indicate that students had reported fear of their parent's reaction to their test, rather than parents articulating this problem to their child's teacher. Participants reported hearing from two-thirds of students that they were concerned about their parents' possible reaction to NAPLAN test scores, as compared to just over one-third of participants indicating that parents had highlighted this concern to them. Again, without speaking to the parents directly, it is not possible to gauge whether their level of concern is lower than that of their children.

**Figure 29: Student fear of parent reaction to NAPLAN results (n=7726)**



**Figure 30: Parent reports about student fear of parent response to NAPLAN results (n=7674)**

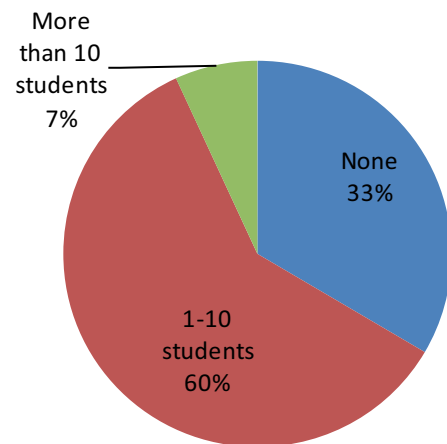


## FEAR OF FREEZING

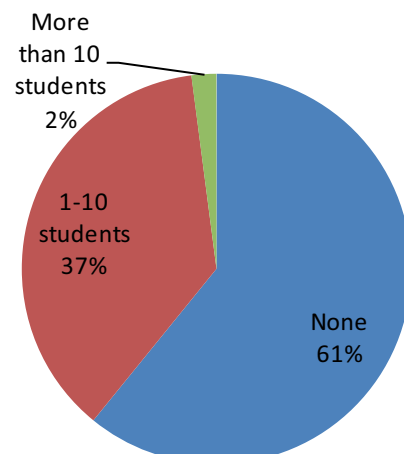
Roughly two thirds of respondents reported students saying that they feared that they would 'freeze' during the test. Freezing can be highly detrimental as the students are then unable to demonstrate all of their knowledge and understanding.

This phenomenon has been identified in the literature, with a number of researchers suggesting that students do not perform at their best in examination conditions (Paris and McEvoy 2000, Harlow and Jones 2004), or that they are fearful of how they might react in such conditions. At least one-third of the respondents identified this as a concern for multiple students in their classes. Once again respondents reported fewer contacts with parents about their children's fears. It is difficult to ascertain whether students are not reporting these issues to their families, or families are not reporting them to the schools.

**Figure 31: Students' fear of 'freezing' due to NAPLAN (n=7669)**



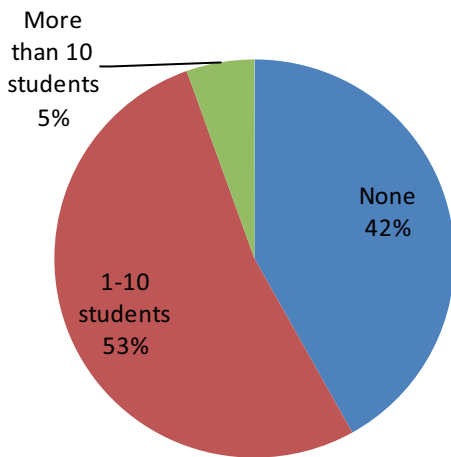
**Figure 32: Parents reported children fear of 'freezing' due to NAPLAN (n=7673)**



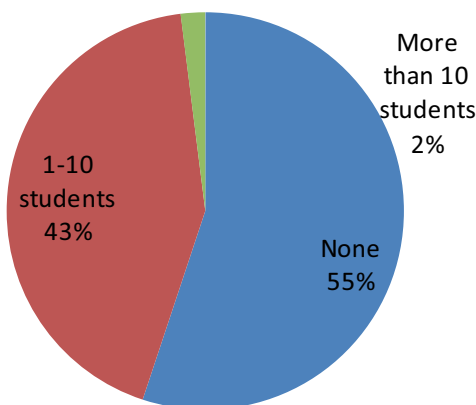
## SLEEPLESSNESS

Approximately forty percent of participants responded that none of their students reported sleeplessness as a result of NAPLAN. However, more than half of the participants responded that between one and ten students said that they suffered sleeplessness as a result of NAPLAN, with a further six per cent reporting that more than ten students had complained of sleeplessness due to NAPLAN. When it came to the issue of sleeplessness as a problem raised by parents just over half of the participants had never had a complaint. It is concerning, however, that over forty per cent of participants reported having had concerns raised by parents regarding their child's ability to sleep as a consequence of NAPLAN .

**Figure 33: Students report sleeplessness as a result of NAPLAN (n=7669)**



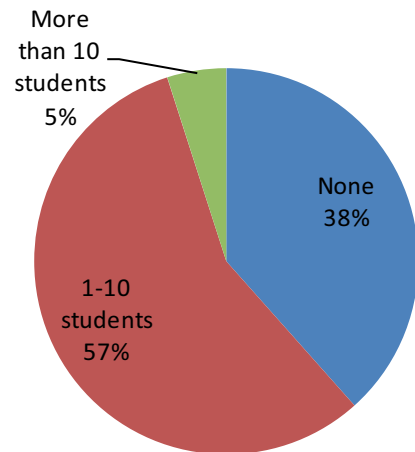
**Figure 34: Parents report student sleeplessness as a result of NAPLAN (n=7703)**



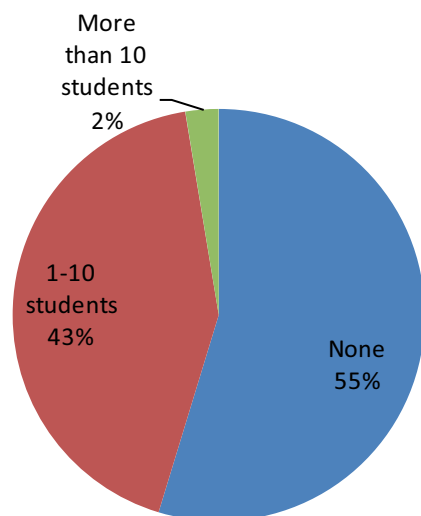
## CRYING

Participants reported fewer incidences of students complaining about crying than any other issue, but reported that parents had raised this issue more often than fear of freezing or fear of parents' reaction. It is almost identical to their response regarding sleeplessness. Given that both of these issues, crying and sleeplessness, are more likely to be evident in the home environment, it would be expected that parents would report them more often than teachers. Forty-five per cent of participants had heard from parents regarding issues of crying in response to NAPLAN.

**Figure 35: Students reporting crying due to NAPLAN (n=7713)**



**Figure 36: Parents reporting students crying due to NAPLAN (n=7681)**



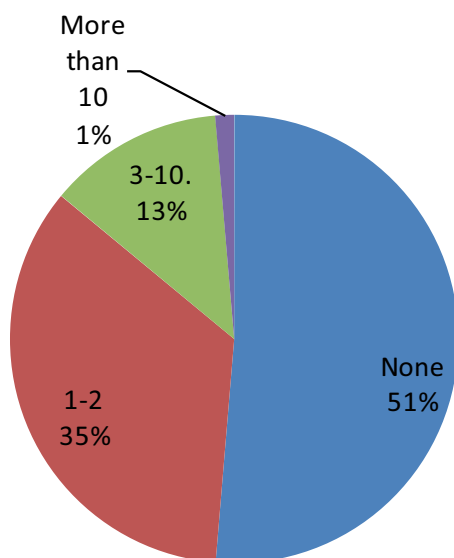
## THE REMOVAL OF STUDENTS

Participants were also asked to comment on students who were officially 'removed' from taking NAPLAN. NAPLAN is not compulsory for all students, as teachers and parents are able to recommend that particular students do not undertake the tests. Students who have particular learning, intellectual or behavioural needs can be officially removed.

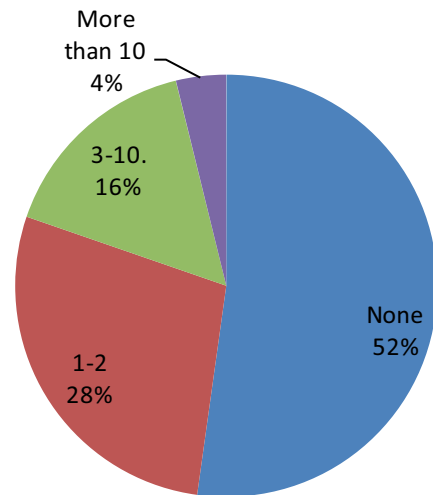
For this reason, participants were asked a number of questions regarding the removal of students from NAPLAN. How many parents had asked for their children to be removed from NAPLAN? Had they ever recommended that students did not undertake NAPLAN? What types of reasons had been given by families for the removal of their children? And what would cause a teacher to recommend that a student did not sit the test?

It appears that an overwhelming majority of students sit the NAPLAN tests (and this is in keeping with ACARA data), but the survey results suggest that approximately half of the participants surveyed report at least one or two students being removed by their families. Principals and teachers do not have the right to remove students from testing without their parents' consent, but a number of comments made by the respondents highlight that participants recommend certain children do not undertake NAPLAN, and that parents have responded by removing their children from the testing program.

**Figure 37: Students removed from NAPLAN by parents (n=6213)**



**Figure 38: Teacher recommending students removed from NAPLAN (n=7777)**



ACARA's guidelines indicate: "Consideration for exemption can be given to students: newly arrived in Australia (less than a year before the test) and with a language background other than English, with significant intellectual and/or functional disability. Exemption must be discussed with the school Principal" (ACARA 2012, <http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/languagesupport/naplan/consent/english.pdf>).

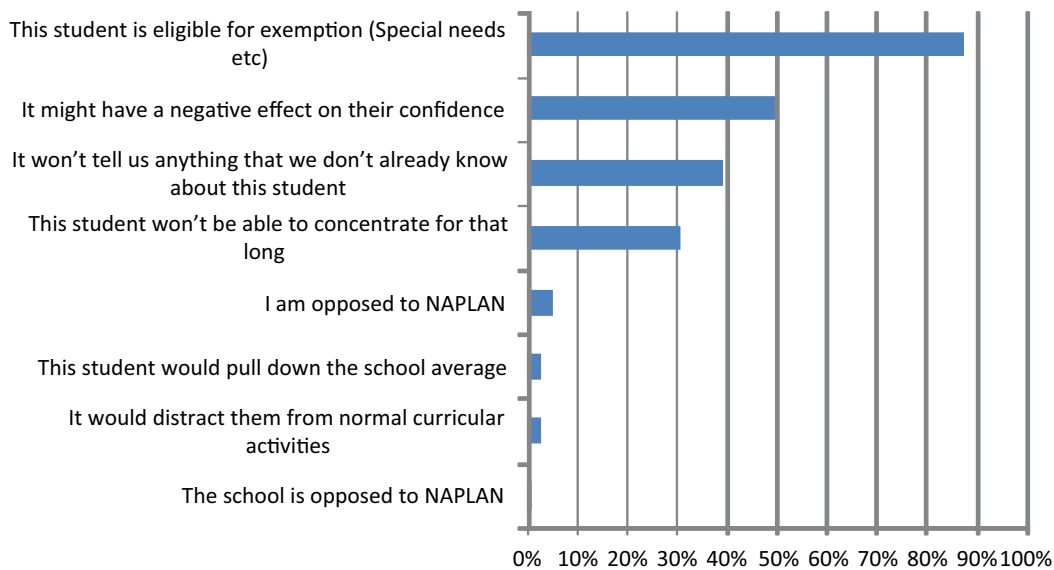
Approximately fifty per cent of the participants surveyed had recommended that students be removed for a number of reasons. Participants were able to nominate multiple reasons for this, with a large representative noting that their students were eligible for exemption.

Of those who stated that they had recommended a student abstain from NAPLAN, eighty-seven per cent had done so because the student either had less than one year of English language background, or significant intellectual or functional disability. Fifty per cent of participants had recommended that certain students not sit NAPLAN as it might have a damaging effect on their confidence. As one teacher commented, they were trying to prevent "Students who have been progressing slowly and seeing this progress in school assessments having to do a test which is above their level having their self esteem completely blown away by a very poor result in these tests and from then on seeing themselves as 'dumb' and dropping their bundle and not trying any longer."

Approximately forty per cent of the teachers recommending students abstain from NAPLAN indicated that there was no advantage for the student, as it would tell them nothing new. Written responses suggest that other assessments within the school are designed to gather this information and therefore the NAPLAN was simply not helpful.

There was a view amongst approximately one-third of the respondents recommending removal of particular students for the reason that they simply would not be able to concentrate for the length of the test. This does not vary very much between primary and secondary teachers.

**Figure 39: Reasons teacher recommended removal of children from NAPLAN (n=3397)**



Only three per cent of participants responded that they had recommended certain children be removed from NAPLAN testing, as having the child sit the test would pull down the school average.

When these reasons for recommending removal of students were broken out according to primary teachers and secondary teachers, there were only minor changes in the percentages for each reason. It does appear, however, that primary teachers are more likely to recommend that a student does not undertake NAPLAN, with seventy-five per cent of the participants who recommended the withdrawal of students coming from the primary school sector. The reasons for this are unclear.

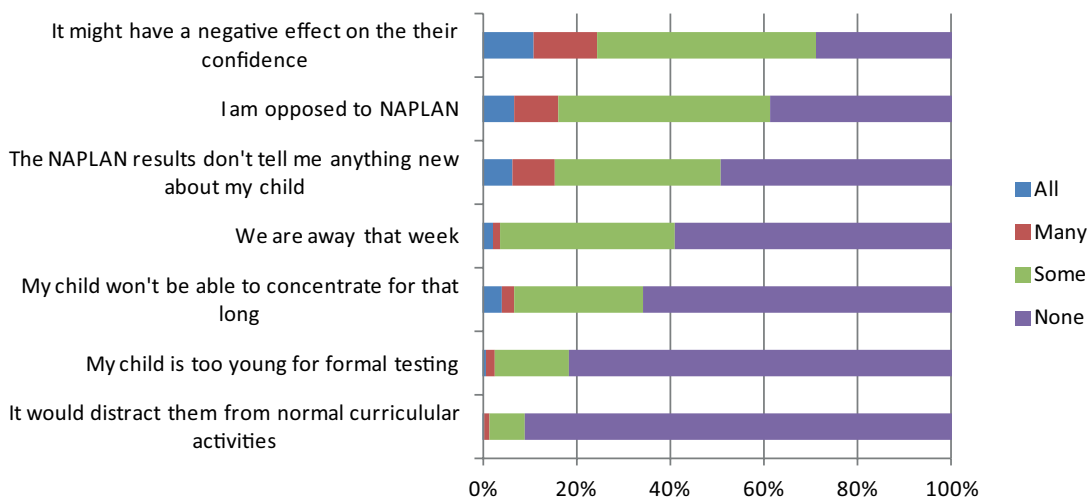
Participants were asked if they had ever had students withdrawn from NAPLAN by their parents and, if so, what were the reasons given. The reason most commonly stated by parents was a far of a negative effect on their child's confidence. One teacher reported a parent saying, "My child doesn't need to be told AGAIN that they are failing at something."

This was closely followed by sixty-one per cent of participants stating that at least some parents reported they had removed their children because they were opposed to NAPLAN. Comments from the survey and newspaper reports (Topsfield, 2012) suggest that a small number of schools in the past have encouraged parents to remove their children from the NAPLAN to demonstrate this opposition.

Essentially the participants' reporting of the parent responses was very similar to the teacher recommendations. Indeed, three of the four highest reasons given pertaining to negative effects on student confidence were learning nothing new about their child/student, and a lack of ability to concentrate.

591 of the respondents also provided reasons for the removal in the 'other' category. Many participants who responded to this question with written text spoke of unofficial removal of students from NAPLAN. There were reports of parents who simply kept the child at home for the week, or children who absented themselves by truanting or feigning illness. Participants did not provide comments on why these children had abstained from the test.

**Figure 40: Reported reasons parents removed their children from NAPLAN (n=2835)**



# PART SIX: THE IMPACT OF TESTING ON CURRICULUM AND TEACHING APPROACHES

In this section of the survey, participants were asked to comment on the impact high stakes testing has on the curriculum itself. Some researchers have indicated concerns that high stakes tests could in fact be reducing the range of curriculum content by concentrating on specific areas (Au 2008, Abrams 2004), rather than encouraging creativity, encouraging problem solving skills, and supporting group learning situations (Ravitch 2010). In the case of NAPLAN, the key areas of focus are reading, writing, numeracy and language conventions.

## NAPLAN PRACTICE

Some research on high stakes testing suggests that it influences teaching practices including through the allocation of time spent practising for tests (Macmillan 2005). It should be noted that ACARA recommends only that students be familiarised with the format and instructions of the tests, and states that “excessive test preparation is not useful” (Ref website [http://www.nap.edu.au/Information/FAQs/NAPLAN\\_General/index.html#\\_9](http://www.nap.edu.au/Information/FAQs/NAPLAN_General/index.html#_9)).

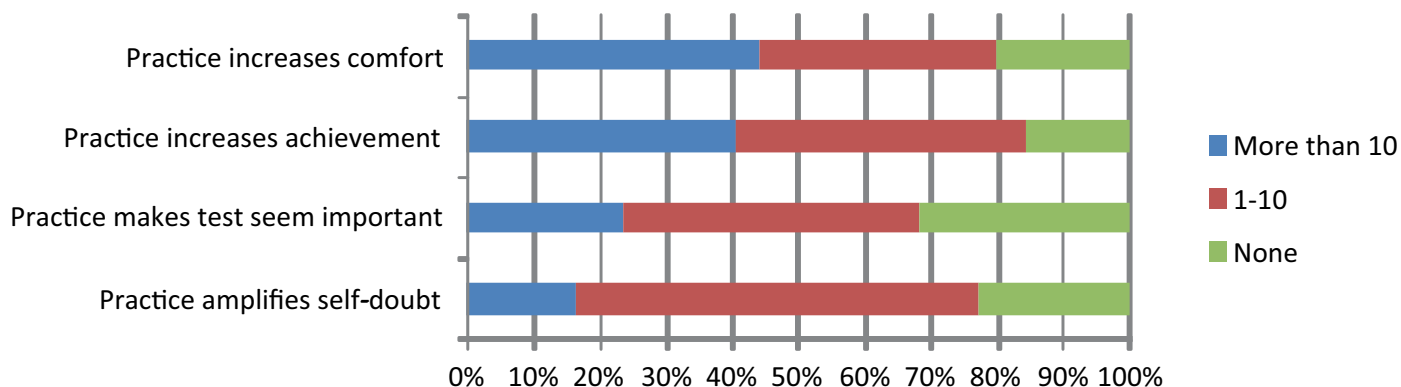
For this reason, it is important to know if teachers in Australia are spending time ‘practising’ for NAPLAN. To investigate this issue, the survey respondents were asked how often they spent on NAPLAN practice in two different time periods prior to NAPLAN. ACARA provides some sample questions for the purpose of helping teachers and students understand the test and has made the following comments:

*“These are provided for teachers and students to obtain a sense of the ‘look and feel’ of the tests and to understand what types of questions are asked. **NAPLAN tests are not tests students can ‘prepare’ for and previous NAPLAN tests are not available on this website. NAPLAN tests skills in literacy and numeracy that are developed over time, through the school curriculum.** Students should continue developing their literacy and numeracy skills through their school curriculum because the tests contain questions similar to those that are undertaken in regular classroom learning and assessment.” (ACARA [http://www.nap.edu.au/NAPLAN/The\\_tests/index.html](http://www.nap.edu.au/NAPLAN/The_tests/index.html))*

The ACARA recommendations suggest that schools should go through the process of familiarising their students with the NAPLAN test format, but that literacy and numeracy skills should simply be developed over time through the general curriculum.

When asked to identify the students’ reactions to practising NAPLAN, the majority of respondents reported that some students felt more comfortable as a result and that the practice helped them achieve their best. However, one-fifth of respondents reported that there were no students who felt more comfortable after NAPLAN practice. A majority of the respondents reported that practising for the tests simply amplified the self-doubt of at least some of the students.

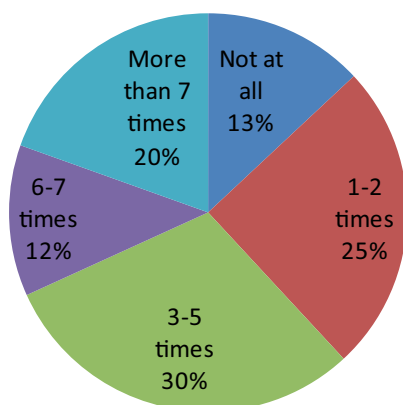
Figure 41: Teacher view of NAPLAN practice - effect on students (n=7060)



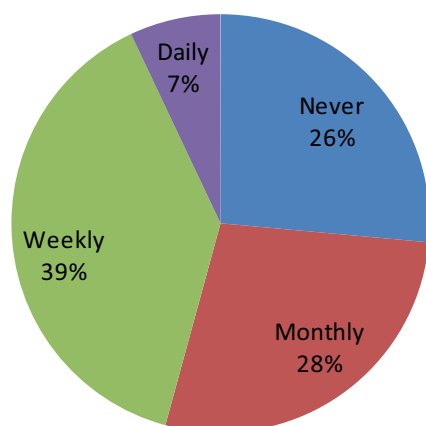


Thirteen per cent of participants reported that they did not practice NAPLAN with their students prior to the test (Figure 42). This could be interpreted in a number of ways. It is possible that these teachers don't believe that practice will increase their students' achievement. Alternatively, they may want a realistic reflection of what their students can do, or they believe it might harm their students' confidence. One teacher commented about the problem of "parents who put so much effort into their child before NAPLAN by over working the child to ridiculous lengths. Many of these parents are doing this as they have to use these results to get their child into a 'good' private school." A number of participants reported that parents were concerned that NAPLAN hadn't been practised sufficiently in the lead up to the tests.

**Figure 42: Frequency of NAPLAN practice two weeks prior to testing (n=7330)**



**Figure 43: Frequency of NAPLAN practice in the five months prior to testing (n=7310)**



Roughly half of the participants had facilitated their students practising NAPLAN tests at least three times in the weeks leading up to the tests, with a further third practising more than six times in the final weeks prior to NAPLAN.

Additional comments by participants about practising for NAPLAN highlighted two themes. One group of respondents felt that use of NAPLAN results by schools in the past had led to lower motivation to succeed: "Due to school use of past NAPLAN tests as assessment items 3 to 4 times before the actual test students feel bullied and harassed. This leads to low motivation for doing their best." A second group emphasised that excessive practice led to boredom and lowered motivation: "The majority of students get bored when practising for NAPLAN and they do not worry much about the tests on the days because they know that the result will not affect their semester reports." Neither of these views suggests that respondents believe that consistent practice of the tests is beneficial for students. Why, therefore, do participants report such high levels of test practising in the months leading up to NAPLAN (as shown in Figure 42)? In the five months leading up to NAPLAN thirty-nine per cent of our respondents indicated weekly practising for NAPLAN, and a further seven per cent reporting that NAPLAN practice is undertaken daily (Figure 43). Given that the majority of participants have responded that NAPLAN practice has had to be added to an already crowded curriculum, this raises the question of what NAPLAN practice has replaced within the curriculum. Figure 46 demonstrates that ninety-nine per cent of this practice is happening in class time; however sixteen per cent of participants reported setting NAPLAN practice as homework.

When the data about practice is broken down by primary and secondary levels, it becomes apparent that there are some differences in the ways that practice is approached. Primary teachers report higher quantities of practice over both time periods, with ninety three per cent of respondents reporting at least one practice session in the two weeks prior to NAPLAN, and approximately one quarter of the respondents reporting practising more than seven times in those two weeks.

Figure 44: Practice two weeks prior to NAPLAN by primary and secondary level (n=6272)

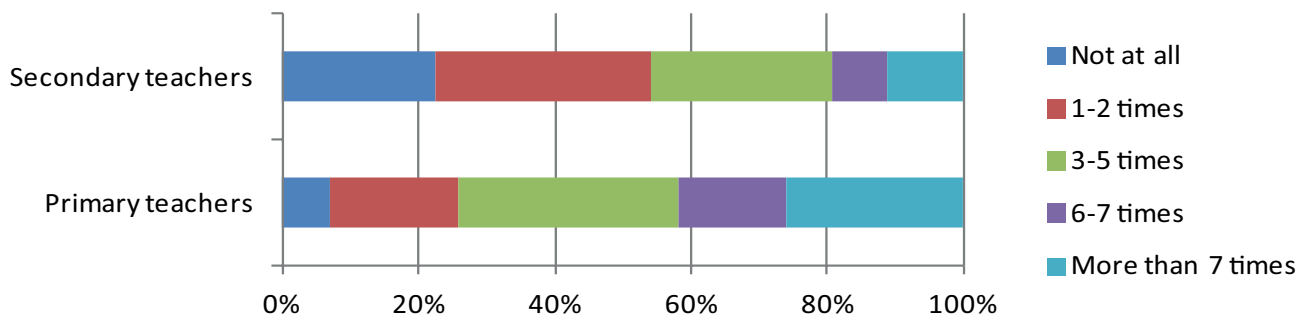


Figure 45: Practice five months prior to NAPLAN by primary and secondary level (n=6255)

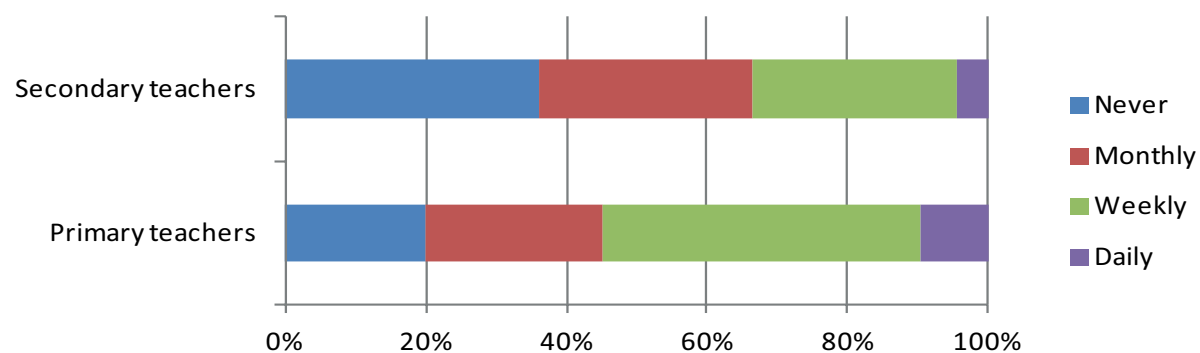
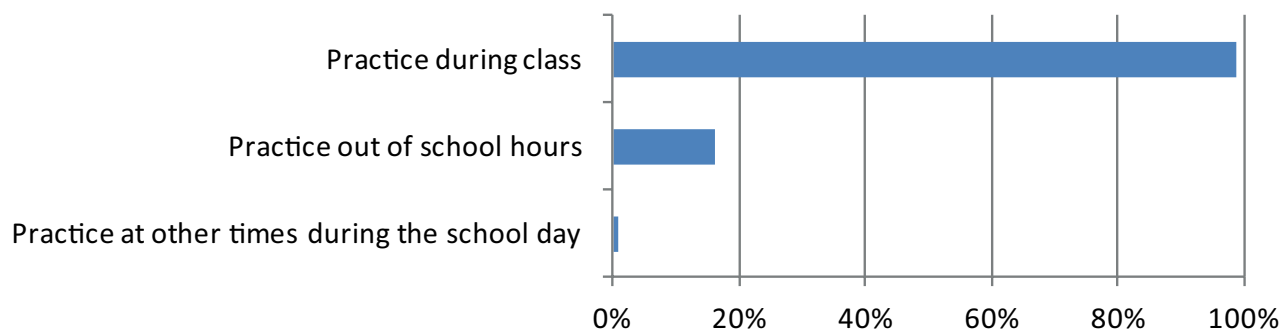


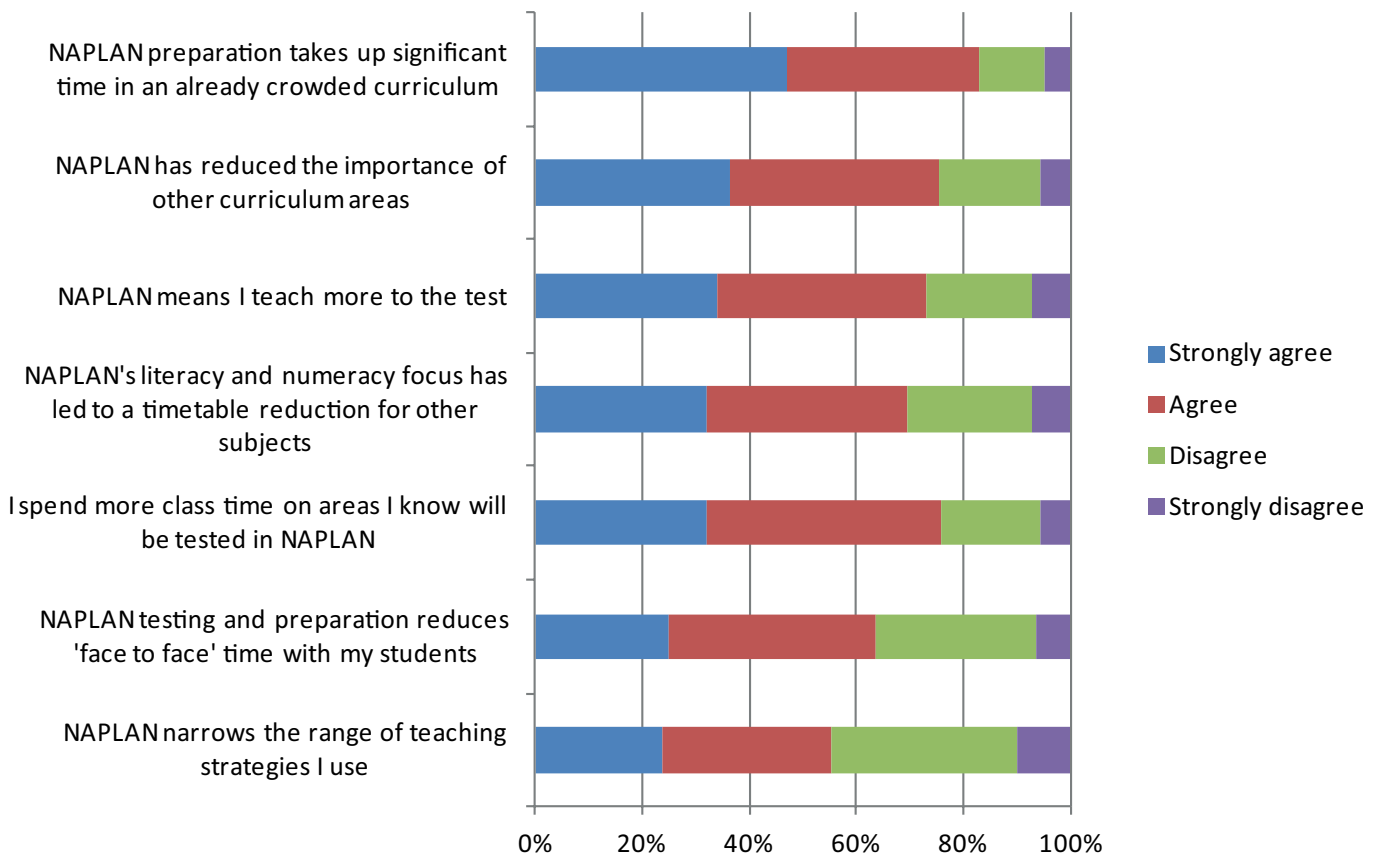
Figure 46: NAPLAN Practice times (n=6482)



## IMPACT ON CURRICULUM AREAS

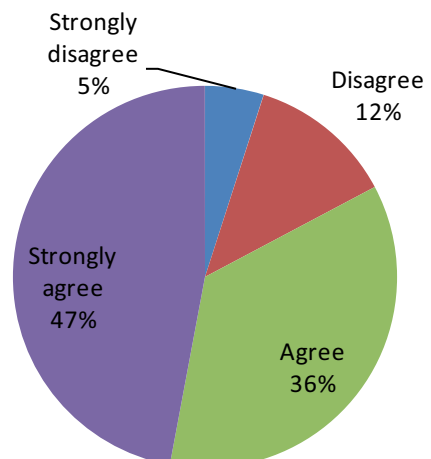
Participants were asked to report on their experience of the impact of NAPLAN on the curriculum offered and on teaching practice (Figure 47). For every statement the majority of participants reported that NAPLAN was having an impact. Over eighty per cent believed that NAPLAN preparation is adding to an already crowded curriculum, while fifty-nine per cent believed that NAPLAN is affecting the range of teaching strategies they used.

**Figure 47: NAPLAN impact on curriculum and teaching practice (n>7345)**

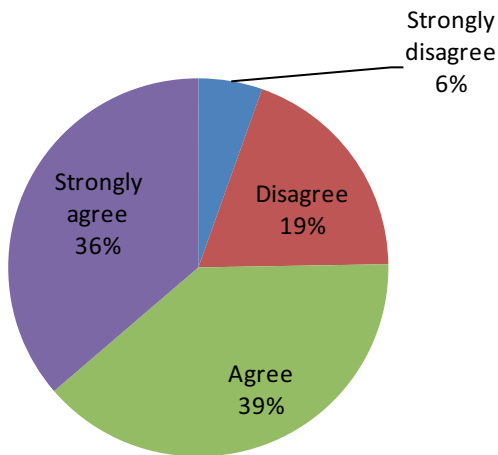


Given that schools have limited time to cover the curriculum, additions in one area are always likely to lead to reductions in time spent on other areas. High stakes tests have been found to impact on time spent on various areas of the curriculum in the US (Jones et al. 2003) and the UK (Reay and William 1999). A further three quarters of respondents believed that, similarly to the UK and US, Australia's NAPLAN is impacting on the way in which school communities view curriculum areas, with subjects that are not tested reduced in importance relative to subjects that are. It seems likely, therefore, that through regular test practice, or a focus on specific skills needed for the NAPLAN, the tests may be impacting on the breadth of curriculum that Australian students experience.

**Figure 48: Impact in already crowded curriculum (n=7375)**

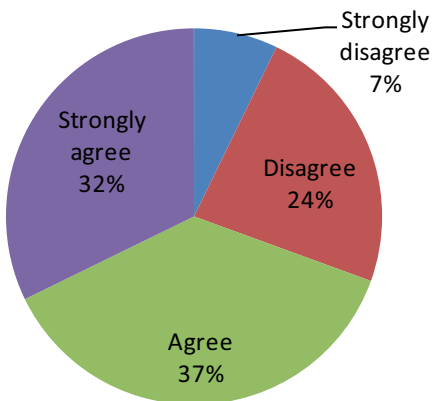


**Figure 49: Impact on perceived subject importance (n=7371)**



Just over two thirds of participants believed that the focus of NAPLAN on literacy and numeracy has led to a timetable reduction for other subjects in their schools. This is a significant concern raised in much of the international research and literature (Abrams 2004, Madaus et al. 2009, David 2011).

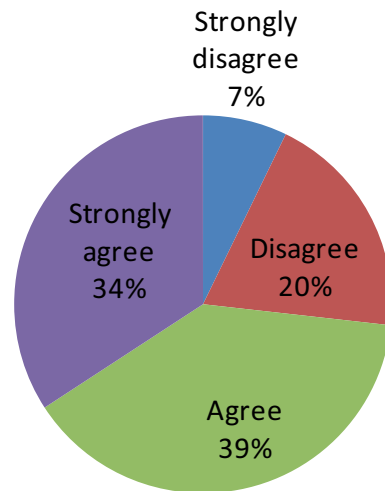
**Figure 50: NAPLAN has the effect of reducing the timetable of teaching for subjects not specifically tested (n=7385)**



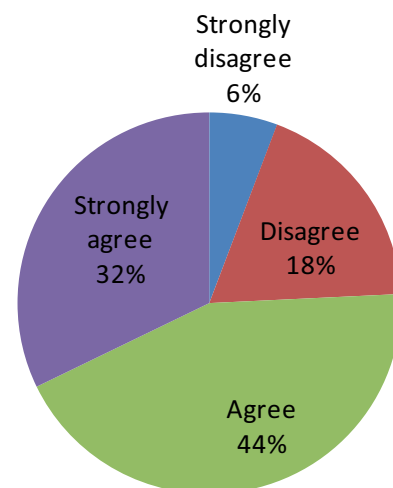
## IMPACT ON TEACHING PRACTICE/PEDAGOGY

Participants were asked to comment on whether their own teaching practice had been altered to emphasise areas covered by NAPLAN, and whether they taught to the test. In both cases approximately eighty per cent of participants either agreed or strongly agreed that this was the case (Figures 51 and 52).

**Figure 51: Teach to the test (n=7360)**



**Figure 52: Emphasis on NAPLAN content (n=7319)**

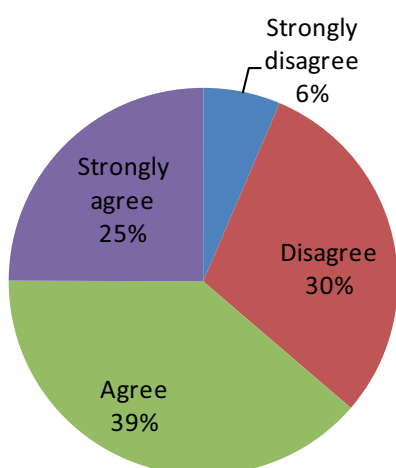


A strong argument could be made that one of the purposes of NAPLAN is to place an emphasis on numeracy and literacy skills. According to this view, without these key skills students are unlikely to achieve to their full capacity.

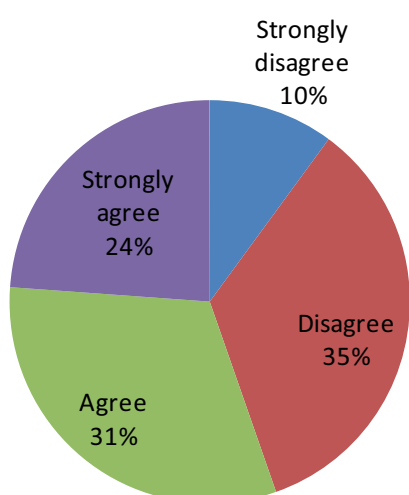
We asked participants whether NAPLAN testing and preparation reduced the 'face-to-face' time that they had with their students. Roughly two thirds of participants responded that NAPLAN had led to a reduction in 'face-to-face' time. This figure did not change significantly when only taking into consideration the responses of teachers who did not teach maths or English.

Participants were also asked whether NAPLAN had narrowed their range of teaching strategies they used within the classroom. Almost sixty per cent felt that this was the case. These results strongly indicate that NAPLAN is having an effect on pedagogy in Australian schools as well as on the curriculum.

**Figure 53: Reduction of 'face to face' time with students (n=7360)**



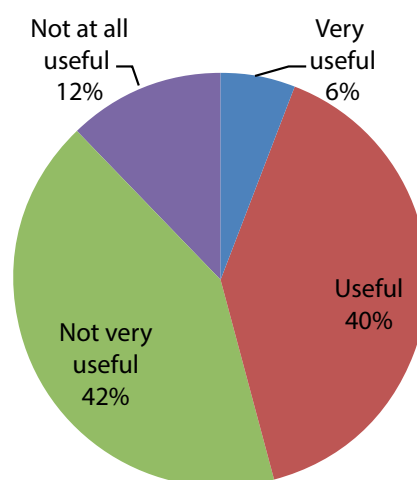
**Figure 54: Narrowing of teaching strategies (n=7345)**



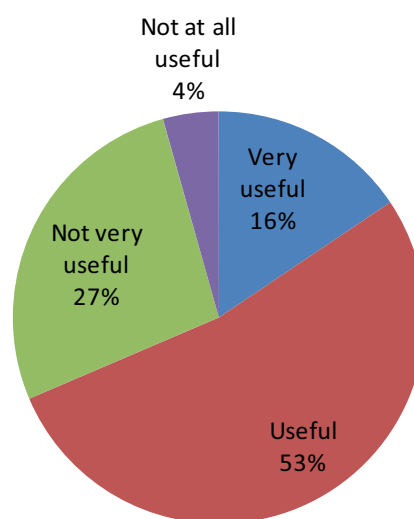
## TEACHER USE OF NAPLAN INFORMATION

The survey began with a general question about the 'usefulness' of NAPLAN and ended with a series of questions about how participants use NAPLAN results to inform their teaching. Teachers were evenly divided in their views about whether NAPLAN information is useful or not. However, just over two-thirds of Principals believed that the information provided by the NAPLAN was useful.

**Figure 55: Usefulness of NAPLAN information - teachers (n=6333)**

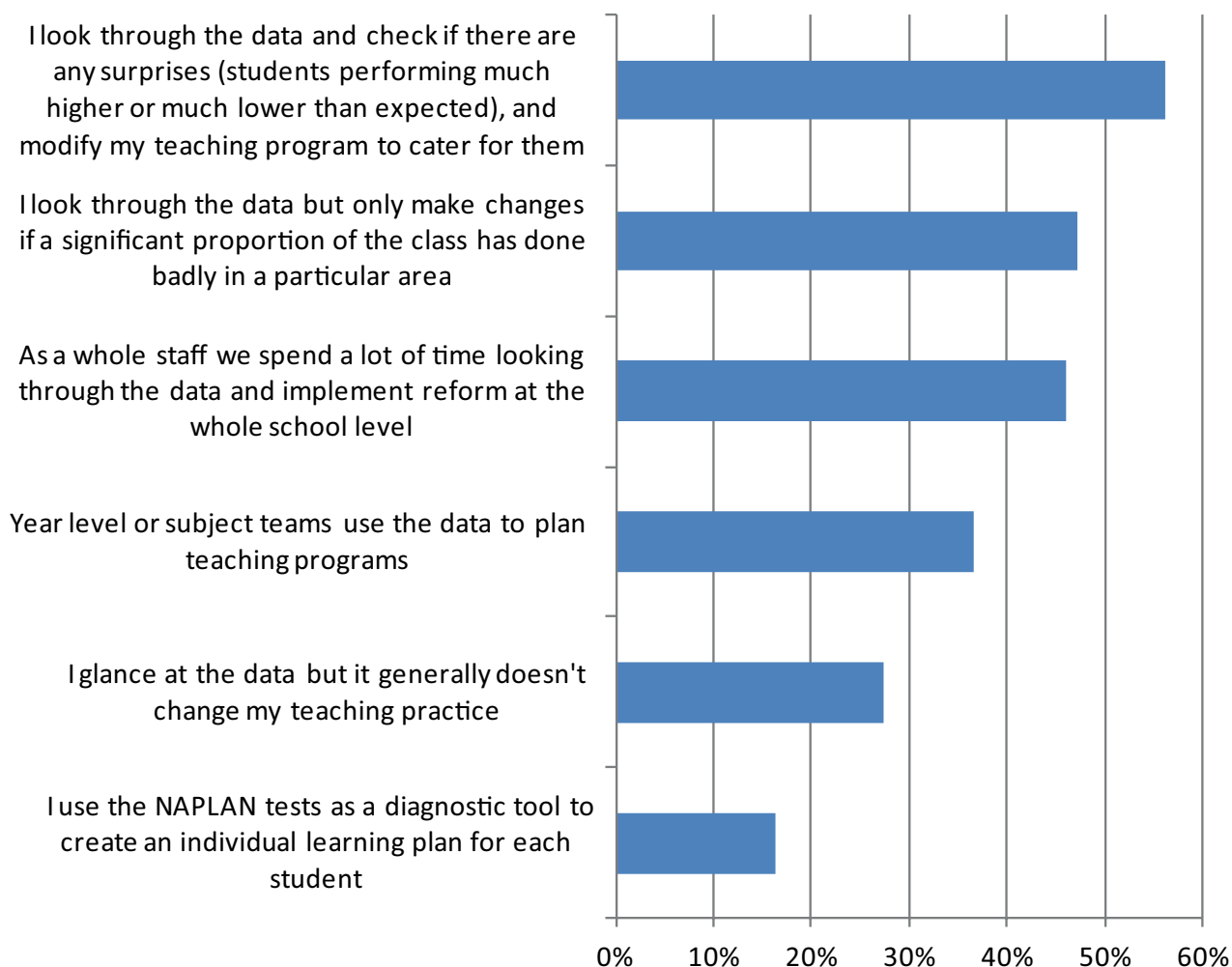


**Figure 56: Usefulness of NAPLAN information - Principals (n=1072)**



We also asked participants how they used the information that they received to inform their teaching.

Figure 57: Use of NAPLAN data by teachers (n=7422)



Slightly more than half of the participants surveyed were using the NAPLAN information to identify 'surprises'; that is students who performed at a much higher or much lower level than expected. Slightly fewer than half used the information to identify any areas of weakness that were common to the majority of the class and in response modify their teaching practice in that area. Forty-six per cent of the participants surveyed said their school as a whole spent time looking at ways to implement reform based on the NAPLAN data, and a third of participants talked about year level teams and subject teams using the data to plan their teaching programs. About one quarter of participants said the data did not change their teaching practice. Written comments indicated that some felt the data did not adequately represent their students' potential:

*"We ignore it and it doesn't impact on us because all our students fail because they are indigenous students from a remote community and English is their second language and they do not have sufficient skills in English to be able to show their true potential on the tests."*

Many felt that "The results don't get back in time to be useful." Only sixteen per cent used the data to create individual learning plans, with one of the respondents commenting:

*"How can you use the NAPLAN test to create individual learning when you don't get the results until the end of the year?... The data is used to prioritise the following year's key learning area focus. Quicker return of results would be beneficial."*

# PART SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS

The results from the survey indicate that Australian teachers and school leaders believe that NAPLAN tests are having a number of important impacts on students, schools, curriculum and teaching.

To begin, participants' perceptions of the purposes of NAPLAN and their views of what impact reported poor results could have on schools strongly suggest that NAPLAN is viewed by the teaching profession as 'high stakes testing.' This is surmised from teachers' perceptions that NAPLAN performance may negatively impact on the public's view of their schools, their enrolments and students' movements. This confirms views already expressed by Lingard (2010) and Lobascher (2011) and discussed in our previous review of the international literature (Polesel et al. 2012).

Participants' views of the usefulness of the NAPLAN testing and its impact on students and curriculum are not uniformly negative, but suggest significant concerns. On the one hand, NAPLAN is supporting an increased focus on literacy and numeracy skills in schools; such skills are vital if students are to gain full access to the broader curriculum, to higher levels of education, and to full civic participation following schooling. Aggregate NAPLAN results are also helpful in supporting schools to identify professional learning needs and areas for the improvement of teaching practice. Delays in the reporting of results to schools mean that there is less capacity for teachers to use student results to target areas of individual student need, as students have moved on from skill levels attained some months previously by the time teachers have access to results.

However, the results from the study also indicate serious matters of concern. According to these surveys, NAPLAN tests are heavily impacting teaching practices, with a potential narrowing of teaching strategies and of the curriculum offered to students. Survey participants also identified a range of potential negative impacts from NAPLAN tests on student health and well-being, and participants also overwhelmingly believed that poor NAPLAN results can potentially impact on a school's reputation, and its capacity to attract and retain more capable students and staff.

A degree of caution needs to be exercised in interpreting these last results. It is important to bear in mind that the findings on student well-being are limited to teacher reports, and, in turn, highly dependent on the accuracy of teacher perceptions. Further research with parents, students and other stakeholders is needed to confirm the survey results on well-being, and to indicate the best directions for policy and practice.

Moreover, these findings suggest that testing programs of the kind which NAPLAN represents cannot form the cornerstone of educational reform in themselves. Teachers have expressed clear concerns about the usefulness of NAPLAN in achieving such aims.

These findings also indicate a further and more serious concern – that NAPLAN is not only limited in itself, but that it may be having a detrimental effect in areas such as curriculum breadth, pedagogy, staff morale, schools' capacity to attract and retain students and student well-being.

NAPLAN represents a relatively new initiative in student assessment in this country. However, the concerns expressed in the international literature regarding systems which have much longer histories of high stakes testing raise serious concerns. Some of these concerns are also raised by teachers surveyed in this study, notably around issues of impact on schools' ability to attract and retain students, impact on teachers' pedagogical behaviours, impact on breadth of curriculum offerings and impact on students' well-being. They suggest that further research is required to examine carefully the uses, effects and impacts of NAPLAN, as reported by a range of users, including systems, the teaching profession, parents and students.

# APPENDIX ONE

**\*1. We need each survey to have a unique identifier for data analysis purposes. Please create this in the box below by entering your postcode (4 figures) then the last 6 digits of your mobile or home phone number (6 figures).**

**\*2. Gender**

- Male       Female       Other

**\*3. What is your role in your school? (Mark as many as apply)**

- Principal / assistant principal  
 Primary teacher (with own grade)  
 Specialist primary teacher (eg Art, PE, LOTE)  
 English secondary teacher  
 Maths secondary teacher  
 All other subjects secondary teacher

**4. How many years have you been teaching?**

- 0 - 3 years  
 4 - 7 years  
 8 - 12 years  
 More than 12 years

**\*5. Do you teach any of the following year levels? (Mark as many as apply)**

- Grade three  
 Grade five  
 Year seven  
 Year nine  
 None of the above

**\*6. When was the last time you prepared students for NAPLAN testing?**

- 2012  
 2011  
 2010  
 2009  
 Never



**\*7. How do you feel about NAPLAN?**

Very negative    
  Negative    
  No opinion    
  Positive    
  Very positive

**\*8. What do you believe to be the purpose of NAPLAN?**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
A diagnostic tool to assist teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A tool to identify schools in need of support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A method of policing of school performance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A school ranking tool	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A means of helping parents choose schools	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A means of informing parents of student progress	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**\*9. What impact do you believe that the publication of weaker-than-expected results for a school has on the following?**

	Very negative impact	Negative impact	No impact	Positive impact	Very positive impact
A schools ability to attract and retain students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A schools ability to attract and retain effective teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The school's reputation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student perception of the school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parental perception of the school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Media reports about the school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Staff morale at the school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**\*10. Some researchers claim that NAPLAN can impact on student health and wellbeing. From your own experience as a teacher, have you ever had any students report the following problems as a result of NAPLAN?**

	None	1-2 students	2-10 students	More than 10 students
Sleeplessness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feeling sick before the test	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Freezing during the test	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Concern that they are too 'dumb'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fear of parents' reaction to test scores	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Crying	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feeling stressed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

**\* 11. Based on your observations, what proportion of your students felt the following ways about NAPLAN?**

	None	Some	Most	All
Looking forward to it	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Not concerned about it	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Concerned about taking the test	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**\* 12. Have you had any parents/guardians complain of the following problems for their children as a result of NAPLAN?**

	None	1-2	2-10	More than 10
Sleeplessness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feeling sick before the test	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fear of freezing during the test	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Concern that they are too 'dumb'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fear of parent reaction to test results	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Crying	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feeling stressed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

**\* 13. How many students did you prepare for the last NAPLAN?**

- 0
- 1-30
- 31-60
- 61-90
- 91+

**\* 14. In the last NAPLAN, were any students in your class removed from NAPLAN testing by their parents/guardians?**

- None
- 1-2
- 3-5
- 5-10
- More than 10

**15. If parents removed their children from NAPLAN what reasons did they give?**

	None	Some	Many	All
My child won't be able to concentrate for that long	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
We are away that week	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It would distract them from normal curricular activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child is too young for formal testing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It might have a negative effect on their confidence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am opposed to NAPLAN	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The NAPLAN results don't tell me anything new about my child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

**\* 16. How many students have you ever recommended be removed from NAPLAN testing?**

- None
- 1-2
- 3-5
- 5-10
- More than 10

**17. What were your reasons for recommending that the student or students be removed from NAPLAN testing? (Tick as many as are applicable)**

- This student won't be able to concentrate for that long
- It might have a negative effect on their confidence
- It would distract them from normal curricular activities
- It won't tell us anything that we don't already know about this student
- This student is eligible for exemption (Special needs etc..)
- This student would pull down the school average
- I am opposed to NAPLAN
- The school is opposed to NAPLAN

**\*18. Are you aware of students who have been transferred in or out of a school by their parents in response to perceived poor NAPLAN results?**

- None
- 1-2
- 3-10
- More than 10

**19. In the two weeks prior to NAPLAN, how often do you practise NAPLAN tests/questions with your students?**

- Not at all
- 1 - 2 times
- 3 - 5 times
- 6 - 7 times
- More than 7 times

**20. Across the five months prior to NAPLAN, how often do you practise NAPLAN tests/questions with your students?**

- Never
- Monthly
- Weekly
- Daily

**21. Based on your experience how many of your students have the following reactions to practising for NAPLAN?**

	None	1-2	2-10	More than 10
They feel more comfortable on NAPLAN day	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
They feel practice helps them to achieve their best	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students believe that NAPLAN is very important and they don't want to let anybody down (teacher, parents etc..)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It amplifies their self doubt	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**22. When is this practice done?**

- In class time
- At other times during the school day (lunch, recess)
- Out of school hours (before or after school classes, homework)

**\*23. How useful is the information provided by NAPLAN?**

- Very useful
- Useful
- Not very useful
- Not at all useful

**24. Some researchers claim that NAPLAN has a negative impact on curriculum in schools. To what extent do you agree with the following statements.**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
NAPLAN's literacy and numeracy focus has led to a timetable reduction for other subjects	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
NAPLAN testing and preparation reduces 'face to face' time with my students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
NAPLAN has reduced the importance of other curriculum areas	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
NAPLAN means I teach more to the test	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
NAPLAN narrows the range of teaching strategies I use	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
NAPLAN preparation takes up significant time in an already crowded curriculum	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I spend more class time on areas I know will be tested in NAPLAN	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**\*25. Does the information provided by NAPLAN change your teaching practice? If so how? (Tick as many as are applicable)**

- I glance at the data but it generally doesn't change my teaching practice
- I look through the data but only make changes if a significant proportion of the class has done badly in a particular area
- I look through the data and check if there are any surprises (students performing much higher or much lower than expected), and modify my teaching program to cater for them
- I use the NAPLAN tests as a diagnostic tool to create an individual learning plan for each student
- Year level or subject teams use the data to plan teaching programs
- As a whole staff we spend a lot of time looking through the data and implement reform at the whole school level

Other (please specify)

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