

# MySchool Website: questions of evaluation and equity

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# MySchool

- ◆ Introduced after agreement in 2008 between Ministers (federal and state) and Schools Assistance Act 2008 – i.e. Tied money flows from federal to state education
- ◆ Responsibility located with ACARA  
<http://www.acara.edu.au/>
- ◆ enables you to search the profiles of almost 10,000 Australian schools, showing test results and comparisons with ‘like schools’.



- ◆ Enfield High School, Enfield, SA
  - ◆ Gundaroo PS, rural NSW with same ICSEA rating as Kings School
- What can we predict already from reading school statement?
- ◆ School statement: provided locally with link to school website.
  - ◆ Rest is filled in by data providers – NAPLAN results, ICSEA rating



# Claims and rationale for MySchool

- ◆ Improve literacy and numeracy and school performance by comparison, indications of areas of relative performance with like schools
- ◆ Guide government funding decisions
- ◆ Allow parent choice
- ◆ ‘transparent’ and ‘accountable’



- ◆ Part of the high stakes testing movement through publication of league table data
- ◆ Claims of evidence-based but lack of evidence for the approach



# ICSEA

- ◆ <http://myschool.edu.au/Resources/pdf/My%20School%20FACT%20SHEET%20ABOUT%20ICSEA%20100120.pdf>
- ◆ The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) attributes each student with the average SES of their home area rather than the SES of their family; it is based on 2006 census data



# ICSEA does NOT produce 'like schools'

- ◆ Understates govt school DISadvantage
- ◆ Overstates 'private' school disadvantage

Because based on census collection districts,  
assuming relatively homogenous  
communities yet all research shows  
heterogenous communities

(ABS researchers: Baker & Adhikari 2007; ACER  
researchers (Ainley & Long)



# NAPLAN tests

Margaret Wu, UniMelb: NAPLAN results are **NOT** suitable for measuring

- ◆ **Student achievement level** -beyond a rough “lower”, “average”, “higher” groups
- ◆ **Student progress**
- ◆ **Teacher effect**
- ◆ **School performance**

<http://www.appa.asn.au/index.php/appa-business/news-items/733-interpreting-naplan-results-for-the-lay-person->



# Plays into old discourses

- ◆ **Biological deficits** - blame the individual victim/their family
- ◆ **Group/Cultural deficits** - poverty treated less as social and economic attribute but an attribute of a person or sub-culture
- ◆ **Social class location** -working class and underclass economically vulnerable
- ◆ **Compounded forms of structural inequality**  
- links to range of other forms of inequality



## ‘State arithmetic’

*Many of the modern categories by which we think about people and their activities were put in place by an attempt to collect numerical data. The idea of recidivism, for example, appears when the qualitative study of crimes began in the 1820s. Thanks to medical statistics a canonical list of causes of death was established during the nineteenth century. It is perpetuated to this day. The classification demanded by the World Health Organization is based on that devised for the (England and Wales) Registrar General's office, run by William Farr. In most parts of the world it has long been illegal to die of anything except causes on the official list - although the list of causes is regularly revised. It is illegal, for example, to die of old age. (Hacking 1991: 81-82)*



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# PRIOR ASSUMPTIONS

1. 'Ability' is unequally distributed in the population
2. Ability can be measured adequately
3. Schools are supposed to create competition
4. Measurement is always 'solid' (reliable and valid)
5. Assumption that testing increases performance



# By-products of MySchool

- ◆ Creation of fear-mongering about schooling
- ◆ Governmental initiatives become self-perpetuatingly connected to test results, “like schools” etc.
- ◆ Increased competition and marketing positioning by schools (time away from other leadership tasks)
- ◆ Difficulty for government school ‘systems’ to work together
- ◆ Risk of circulation of ‘at risk’ students or loss altogether
- ◆ Creation of ‘sink’/ghetto schools and communities
- ◆ Market of teachers willing to work in difficult schools reduces
- ◆ School segregation by SES and other markers of difference



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# Cont..MySchool HARMS schooling

- ◆ Teachers teaching to test
- ◆ Narrowing of curriculum – reduces time for non-tested subject areas
- ◆ Reduces collaboration between schools
- ◆ Works against both high and low performing students by focussing on those on the borders of benchmarks