



A SUBMISSION

to

**DR BRENDAN NELSON,
FEDERAL MINISTER for EDUCATION, SCIENCE & TRAINING**

from

**AUSTRALASIAN ASSOCIATION of PROGRESSIVE and ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION
(AAPAE)**

Re: REQUIREMENTS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY BY PARTICIPATION IN
STANDARDISED ASSESSMENT PROGRAMMES

in Commonwealth Quadrennial Administrative Guidelines 2001-2004

Presented at a meeting with

Alan Tudge, Senior Schools' Advisor to Dr Nelson,

Juli Gassner-Gering, AAPAE Committee Member, Teacher, Kinma School, Sydney

Derek Sheppard, AAPAE Member, Elected Staff, The Booroobin Sudbury School Qld

Cecelia Bradley, AAPAE President

Wednesday 29th October 2003, Parliament House, Canberra.

Dear Dr Nelson,

Our association would like to thank you for the opportunities to meet with your advisors to discuss various educational matters. We have welcomed the chance to introduce AAPAE and articulate our philosophies, practices and processes and showcase the special regard we place on values in education such as freedom and honesty which you have recently been highlighting and encouraging. In this submission we focus on an area our members consider very important.

AAPAE requests:

1. That in the light of consistent choice by the parents and students of many AAPAE Member Schools, to refrain from participating in standardised testing, and ongoing national and international research, the educational place and value of standardised testing and aggregated reporting against literacy, numeracy, and other curricula areas performance measures and targets be reconsidered.
2. That member schools of AAPAE be granted, at the time of their registration and for the period of their registration, upon application, without penalisation to their funding,, whole school exemptions from the requirements for accountability by participation in standardised assessment and reporting aggregated literacy and numeracy performance.
3. That on enrolment at a Member School of AAPAE, parents will sign a form which grants exemption, for their child, from participating in standardised assessment and aggregated performance indicators in all curriculum areas, for the whole period of enrolment at the school, and that these exemptions do not penalise the school's funding or the educational status of the child."

(Please see APPENDIX 1 for a brief summary of AAPAE's position on Basic Skills Testing and National Benchmarking)

From 2002, arrangements whereby a whole school could apply to the Commonwealth for exemption from standardised assessment were changed to one whereby each child's parents in consultation with the school, could seek the exemption. AAPAE appreciates the recognition by the Minister and the government of the parents' right to make the decision whether to test in relation to their specific child. Where schools have the support of their parents, students and community to continue their preference to assess individually and be accountable in more holistic ways, we seek to have the right of exemption re-instated to the school as a whole. These same parents who are making the decision not to test are choosing our schools on the strength of stated values and practices. In the light of government and public belief in the efficacy of testing, long established schools, have appropriately reviewed and reaffirmed their principles of individual, non-comparative/competitive, student/teacher/parent determined assessment. In newly established schools they are a core value which many parents seek by coming to these school. The reality of having to address, communicate and debate this matter every year places a heavy use of energy, resources and time for all in the school communities. It also creates some uncertainty, stress and worry for the children which can effect their love of and process of learning.

We realise that governments want the full cohort of students to be accounted for in the reporting process but we urge you to consider the value of individual difference and diversity in education and take into account that our small numbers make our exemption statistically insignificant. Different forms could provide informative data on alternatives methods of assessment and accountability. This is an opportunity for innovative research and policy development in which we would participate with enthusiasm. During our discussion, your advisor, Alan Tudge, expressed a concern that we may be seeking to avoid administrative processes. We would like to assure the minister that this is not the case and to state again our willingness to be accountable in ways which enhance the learning of the students.

AAPAE schools are accountable to their communities and the governments who fund them and welcome this as an inclusive, informing process. They request choice in how they go about this process so that it is consistent with the needs of the individual students and the constitution or "charter" of the school. Our schools emphasise power being shared with the children as well as among adults, student participation in the decision making processes, negotiated curricula, individual and self- assessment, and co-operative, equal, caring relationships between adults and children and democratic governance.

The process of standardised testing and aggregated reporting has become almost an automatic part of the national and international education scenes. We understand the reasons for the development of this and how the government view it as a transparent, effective, system of accountability and sharing of information. We believe there are other than the quantifiable, comparative ways to provide this. We are concerned about the whole, short and longterm impact the processes have on the learning, life and well being of the individual students. Just as AAPAE schools are facing possibly the strongest pressure to conform to

these requirements, evidence from around the world is mounting that the effects of this process may be counterproductive to its aims and need to be questioned and debated.

Last week on Foreign Correspondent on ABC TV there was a disturbing report of the consequences on many children through to their adult lives of a strongly competitive, comparative, exam oriented, strictly controlled, authoritarian education system and society of Japan. AAPAE was fortunate to have at our recent annual conference in Brisbane, Yoshiyuki Nagata,¹ a Senior Researcher with the National Institute for Educational Policy Research (NIER) in Japan. In an earlier work, published in the NIER book to which a Founder of an AAPAE Member School was also an invited participant, and discussed at the International Democratic Education Conference in New Zealand in 2002, he spoke of the problems confronting education in Japan and highlighted the fact that the Japanese Ministry of Education is responding to the fast growing school refusal issue with reforms aimed at promoting “diversity, individuality and freedom”. He examined the burgeoning of “free schools and “free spaces” which the alienated children are choosing to attend. We also had students and teacher representatives from these places sharing their real life experience with us.

At the AAPAE Conference in Brisbane, 2003, Yoshiyuki gave a briefing of his most recent research into funding, quality assurance and government attitudes to alternative schools which is soon to be published in English. His conclusions are pointing to the benefit of positive support and caring government administration in countries where the expression of democracy includes listening to minorities, less government regulation, no competition testing, less standardisation and alternatives are cherished. Denmark and Oregon (US) are examples of this. Denmark has 80% govt funding and less control, the govt attitude is supportive and caring, listening, non-competitive, with testing later in high school.

Recent studies by the National Teachers’ Union in UK² conducted by Cambridge and Warwick Universities concluded that tests distort the curriculum and educational experience available to children, especially low achievers, and they constrict the curriculum. There is no evidence that the tests have led to individual pupils reaching higher levels of attainment and substantial evidence that it hampers learning. So overwhelming is the evidence and the practical experience, that the teachers in the UK have voted to boycott the tests.

A research review drawing from studies across the world, conducted for the Government-funded Evidence for Policy and Practice Information Centre (EPPI), July 2003, examined 187 studies on the impact of repeated testing on pupils’ motivation and learning. The review’s findings are an indictment of the government’s approach. It found that ‘high stakes’ testing led to pupils asking not how much they had learnt but how well or badly they had

¹ Nagata Y&Kikuchi E (2002) *Sociology of Alternative Education* ‘Publicness’ Generated from Diversity in YNagata & R Manivannan (Eds) *Prospect & Retrospect of Alternative Education in Asia-Pacific Region*, Japan National Institute for Educational Policy Research
A copy of this book was forwarded to the former Minister with the compliments of the Booroobin sudbury School.

² Membership & Communications Dept of National Union of Teachers
–www.teachers.org.uk (2003) *The Case Against National Curriculum Tests*

done on the tests. The study found that the pupils saw schools as places for passing tests rather than places for learning”

The evidence is that pupils suffer detrimental effects from the pressure of National Curriculum tests...repeated testing has a de-motivational affect...reinforced low self image, led to high levels of test anxiety... pupils became more stressed, not less, as their experience increased.

A study by the Institute of Public Policy Research, found among many other findings, that pupils’ mental health problems were directly linked to pressures connected with testing. The University of Ontario evaluated national Literacy and Numeracy strategies and found that tests had created a situation where primary curriculum had narrowed to meet external targets.

The UK’s OFSTED Annual Report found that majority of head teachers reported a continuing squeeze on the curriculum.

A recent Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) Study, the PISA REPORT³ found that countries such as Finland, which was among the countries having the highest numbers of 15 year old students achieving well in literacy, have minimal framework for national curriculum and NO national tests. Countries which have the highest numbers of pupils achieving well do not have the burden of high stakes national tests, national targets and performance tables.

Research by King’s College team concluded that national tests are “useless as a measure of educational progress and are based on incorrect assumptions” There is an “Ill-judged confidence in the reliability of the short external tests which are a dominant instrument of public policy” The College’s research quoted 250 articles by researchers in several countries which concluded that there was firm evidence that formative assessment or assessment for learning produced quantitative evidence of significant learning gains.

Almost 60% of teachers in the Warwick University study disagreed that the National Curriculum tests reflected pupils’ achievement 8% agreed. 90% of teachers in the study believed that school performance tables should go
(Please see APPENDIX 2 The Case Against National Curriculum Tests for more comprehensive discussion of these issues.)

A similar story is happening in the United States. The experience with high stakes testing shows how far the power of testing in education may take us and is contrary to our search for a fair, equal and just education. When 500 students were pushed out of the Birmingham Alabama School in order to boost test scores, The World of Opportunity (WOO) was founded to provide a way for these students and others in similar situations to continue their education.

³ **Home Knowledge and Skills for Life - First result from PISA 2000**
Literacy Skills for the World of Tomorrow - Further results from PISA 2000,

Educational consultant and psychologist Dr David Cohen⁴ with years of experience as teacher, professor in education, senior education bureaucrat in Victoria and NSW and member of the founding team of many alternative schools in Australia, has exposed the 'sacred cow' that parents prize academic success highest over all educational outcomes. He has shown that groups of parents, teachers and students consistently value and rate getting along with others, self esteem, showing and receiving affection, critical thinking and problem solving rather than memorisation and testable cognitive/knowledge related tasks. (See APPENDIX 3 Cohen, D. *Perils and Pitfalls of Standardised Testing*, the Keynote Address at AAPAE Annual Conference, Adelaide 2002)

Dr Martin Covington,⁵ Professor at University of California, Berkeley, and a main contributor to the California Task Force's academic report on the relationship between self esteem and failure at school and a leader in understanding why kids fail at school, reports that the relationship between shame and blame and school failure is intense and unmistakable. Shame, triggered by belief that they are stupid or not smart enough to do well leads to poor performance, then to feeling demoralised. Achievement is linked to brilliance and ability, not to effort. Students motivated by the threat of intense shame, avoid working hard. Many do not get relief when they do well. They are perfectionists, expecting that the only the very highest quality performance will demonstrate that they do not deserve scorn for not being smart enough. Even some students in the top 2% on standardised tests think they deserve shame for not being as smart as their most intelligent peers. A cruel dilemma occurs, either you work hard and feel ashamed or do not work hard and feel guilty. Covington goes on to state that the one of the broad social influences leading to this shaming is competition with others which creates the conditions for shame and demoralisation. He recognises the difficulties of changing the traditional morality and dominant paradigm of reward and punishment in all its subtle and obvious forms, so as a positive solution, he advocates a school system which adds an alternative basis for motivating students. He promotes learning for learning's sake, for the joy of learning.

As educators, teachers parents and students and founders of independent alternative, progressive, democratic schools, we know that there is an over emphasis on testing. Many of our concerns and worries about the re-emphasis on testing regimes since the late '80s are being confirmed. We urge you to reconsider this matter and to value the special character of AAPAE schools and work with us to continue to provide joyful learning. We value other forms of assessment and accountability and want to give valuable time to forms which relate to the skills, talents and interests of our learners.

⁴ Cohen,D. (1992) *Liberating Curriculum from Sacred Cows*. Sydney, Australian Education Network Inc. p16

⁵ Martin V. Covington *Goal Theory, Motivation, and School Achievement: An Integrative Review* Annual Review of Psychology. Volume 51, Page 171-200, Feb 2000
www.google.com/u/berkeley?q=martin+covington&sitesearch=berkeley.edu&domains=berkeley.edu www.berkeley.edu/calparents/letterhome/2003/spring/facprofile.html

AAPAE's members' views about assessment are as diverse as are our schools and the individuals involved. We believe that the student is the key person in the assessment process and that all else flows from this. Some accept that the best person to know about progress and assessment is the teacher. This is also confirmed by the UK research. Most of us believe that this is a combined process between the learner, the 'teacher' and the parents. We would like to see more explicit provision for alternative means of assessment, communication and accountability that fit the specific philosophy of the individual school, and its consequent day-to-day practices, in which parents have enrolled their children.

In conclusion, we present a Proposal for the Future.

AAPAE schools are community based, small in number and size and we value the unique and diverse place and role we play in the education of the people who choose to be part of our communities. Parents and children search out and want small schools, where the environment, relationships, staffing, governance and resourcing is more attuned to real, organic, democratic and holistic learning. Implicit in this would be the right to assess and report in ways consistent with these values.

In some countries such as New Zealand and Denmark democratic education is publicly funded.

AAPAE requests that the minister begin to consider the possibility of an integrated system. and that AAPAE member s be considered as schools with special character, with different needs and considerations from the majority of other Non State Schools.

New Zealand has a category SCHOOLS of SPECIAL CHARACTER which are part of the government system and receive full funding.

(See APPENDIX 4 which is part of a speech given by Hon. Maurice P. McTigue, a former member of the New Zealand Parliament and currently distinguished visiting scholar at George Mason University's Mercatus Centre. He headed several Cabinet Ministries during New Zealand's dramatic political and economic reforms of the past 20 years. He spoke in Portland and Salem on March 3 & 4, 2003 for Cascade Policy Institute of Portland.)

Thank you for listening and considering our submission and please convey our best wishes to the Minister and hopes that he will take in account the unique role of AAPAE Schools in the life of Australian Education .

Believing we can improve schooling by more tests is like believing you can grow taller by measuring your height Robert Schaeffer of Fairtest

Not everything that counts can be counted and not everything that can be counted counts
 .Albert Einstein

If more testing was the solution to problems in our schools, testing would have solved them long ago Bill Goodling ex Chair House Education Committee

The 4th grade MCAS is longer than the Massachusetts Bar Exam

APPENDIX 1

A Brief Summary of AAPAE's Position on Statewide Testing and National Benchmarking.

AAPAE values the longstanding support in Australia for respecting the rights of parents, and we include students and teachers, to choose the what, where, how, when and why of their education and that this choice is enabled through some access to public funding.

Participating in comparative, competitive, standardised testing is contrary to the long held and publicly stated philosophies, constitutions and educational processes of many AAPAE schools which many informed parents and children have selected

Parents and students choose our schools in the full knowledge that, and often because, we do not base our education on standardised, comparative, competitive assessment and examinations.

We value other forms of assessment and want to give valuable teachers and staff time to work with forms which relate to the individual skills, talents and interests and learning styles of our learners.

AAPAE schools work to create conditions which promote learning. Considerations such as learner's individual needs, interests and learning styles, conducive, communal learning environments and significant others who join the learning process are paramount to effective learning. AAPAE is concerned about the potential for negative effects on love of learning, self esteem, resilience and student wellbeing inherent in competition and standardised testing which create stress and anxiety and thereby hinder learning in the short term and inhibit lifelong learning.

AAPAE believes, and mounting evidence shows, that tests discriminate in many ways and do not account for diversity and differences in children's learning rates and styles, language, concepts, culture, and resources for coaching and outcomes that are both financial and educational.

Tests measure narrow aspects and they take little or no account of creativity, self-confidence, self-esteem and resilience, self-management, self-direction, community participation skills and the expression and communication of ideas and emotions.

Curriculum becomes narrow and test-focussed.

Teachers and as a result, their students may become test - focussed, stressed, worried and defensive, all counter- productive to effective educational relationships.

Reporting of results by governments and media fosters stereotypes and inaccurate generalisations and comparison and send mixed messages about the availability of follow up resources.

APPENDIX 4 - Part of a speech given by Hon. Maurice P. McTigue, a former member of the New Zealand Parliament and currently distinguished visiting scholar at George Mason University's Mercatus Centre. He headed several Cabinet Ministries during New Zealand's dramatic political and economic reforms of the past 20 years. He spoke in Portland and Salem on March 3 & 4, 2003 for Cascade Policy Institute of Portland.

As, next to parenting, education is the most important influence on a child's future, a significant debate was initiated on parental rights regarding education. The outcome was parents have an absolute right to choose the school at which their children will be educated. The consequence: good schools with good teachers get more students, less capable schools with less capable teachers get fewer students, e.g. less money and fewer teachers are employed at that school.

Private schools may get state funding equivalent to public schools. To do so they must make an application to the Minister of Education to integrate. This process requires them to prove their buildings, grounds and facilities meet the code standards. About 15 percent of all schools are private, and to date about 90 percent of these schools have integrated.

Once integrated, schools have the right to maintain their special character (normally religious education and ethics), though they must teach the core curriculum and be open and actively teaching the students for the prescribed number of days each school year. For this they get identical funding to public schools including capital. They may compete to educate any children. This is a process started in the 1970's. It is now non-controversial.

As large quantities of money had been freed up by the elimination of bureaucracy, a decision was made that all of this money would remain a part of education spending. This decision allowed:

Major investment in classroom technology.

Significant investment in teaching aides.

Bringing all maintenance projects up to date.

Oregon and New Zealand are half a world apart, but our citizens share a common interest: a good education for our youth. New Zealand's policies have shown that parental control, choice, and accountability are key to providing a quality education.