

Naplan week is almost here

NAPLAN week is almost here, and many parents (and kids... and even teachers) are feeling a little extra stress and anxiety. NAPLAN has a lot of critics, plenty of supporters, and a whole lot of parents and students who simply go along with it because 'it's just what we do'.

This article is designed to offer some general – and gentle – advice on what's coming.

What NAPLAN is

NAPLAN stands for the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy; a nationwide standardised test that almost every student in Grades 3, 5, 7, and 9 are about to sit. Its purpose is to provide information about how education programs are working, areas for improvement, and which schools need support in the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy. Some critics argue that it doesn't do this particularly well... but that's beyond the scope of this discussion.

What NAPLAN does well

When it works well, NAPLAN does three things:

- 1** NAPLAN results enable the identification of problems in the school system. And they point to places where education needs to improve.

For example, NAPLAN results have shown us education gaps for indigenous students, and for students in disadvantaged schools. We knew those gaps existed. But now we know the scope and range.
- 2** Literacy and numeracy results are made transparent at a national, state and territory, and school level. We now know that states and territories have different levels of achievement when they are compared on a like-for-like basis which NAPLAN allows.
- 3** NAPLAN shows us education trends over time.

What NAPLAN doesn't do well

NAPLAN doesn't give you a useful guide on how your child is doing academically. The test is done in March and we receive the results in the late part of the year. If you want to know how your child is doing, talk to their teacher. Great teachers can give you detailed information today about your child's progress.

NAPLAN doesn't give you any information about the quality of your child's character. It doesn't tell you anything about your child's ability to work in a team, to problem-solve, to show compassion, to be creative, engaged or resilient. It's not about your child's talents.

NAPLAN also gives us no information about the school your child attends in terms of approaches to discipline, school culture, school contribution to community, or the way it encourages students in areas not covered by NAPLAN.

And in some cases it has been reported that NAPLAN, while providing data, doesn't ultimately lead to governments providing schools (or parents) with the resources needed when issues arise.

What you should do

Based on everything I've outlined above, you'll note that much of NAPLAN's focus is oriented towards education at a school, regional, state, and national level. While there is some individual focus, it's not really an individual assessment tool. It's more about how the school, the state, and the country are doing. Therefore, I suggest parents keep the following in mind:

- Don't make NAPLAN a big deal. You barely even need to talk about it with your child
- Don't offer rewards to your child for doing well on NAPLAN. Research evidence shows this adds pressure, builds anxiety, and reduces children's creativity, motivation, and interest in real learning. (One mum I spoke to wondered if bribing her child with a puppy would be helpful. It's not.)
- Don't buy practice tests for NAPLAN. Your child doesn't need to rehearse for NAPLAN
- Don't worry about NAPLAN results. Leave that to the school

Instead, you might want to try the following:

- Do show an interest in your child's education, regardless of whether NAPLAN is on or not
- Do encourage your child to read every single day. Read to them. Read with them. Have them read alone. And do this regardless of whether NAPLAN is on or not
- Do have your child participate in sports, music, art, drama, and other enrichment activities to the degree that you have the time and money for them – regardless of whether NAPLAN is on or not
- Do give your child plenty of unstructured (screen-free) time to simply be kids – especially when NAPLAN is on

What your child should do

More than anything, your child will benefit from not being particularly interested in or bothered by NAPLAN. Life should be as close to normal as possible for your child.

It's true that some schools want to see NAPLAN results before they'll consider enrolling your child. It's true that some elements of NAPLAN feel like they matter a lot to us as parents because we want to see our children succeed. But please – PLEASE – remember:

Your child's NAPLAN score is not an indicator of your child's value, your child's potential, or your child's worthiness. It's just a number. And it's more meaningful to the school system than it is to you or your child.

When NAPLAN rolls around, treat it like a small, gentle wave at the beach. It rolls up the sand. It leaves a small, temporary mark. And then it disappears back into the ocean.



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