



Grapevine

LEAGUE TABLES

Everyone agrees that assessment and accountability are critically important, but many educators say the Commonwealth government's MySchool website and the league tables it enables are a bad idea. According to Australian Education Union Federal President Angelo Gavrielatos, 'The approach the Commonwealth government is taking to accountability will see schools judged on a single test undertaken once a year by a limited number of students. These (National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy) NAPLAN tests were never designed for this purpose. They are neither an accurate or valid measure of school performance.' Gavrielatos says the MySchool website will allow the media to create school league tables. 'These league tables,' he says, 'present a damaging and misleading picture of school performance and inevitably involve naming and shaming schools in disadvantaged areas.' In an open letter to Deputy Prime Minister and Commonwealth Minister for Education Julia Gillard last November, Gavrielatos and Australian Council of State School Organisations President Peter Garrigan, Australian Government Primary Principals Association President Norm Hart, Australian Parents Council Executive Director Ian Dalton, Australian Secondary Principals Association President Andrew Blair and Independent Education Union of Australia Federal Secretary Chris Watt urged the Minister to reconsider her approach. 'Allowing student data to be inappropriately or mischievously used for the creation and publication of league tables could exacerbate the difficulties of the communities concerned, narrow the school curriculum and risk the testing process itself becoming corrupted,' they wrote. Her response? 'We will have access to a comprehensive, accurate and balanced picture of how different schools in different communities perform,' she said in her address in November to the fourth annual Australian National Schools Network Forum in Canberra. Greg Whitby, the executive director of schools at the Catholic Edu-

cation Office in Parramatta says national test data will become the primary indicator of school performance for media outlets, despite the fact, he says, that the data only tells a fraction of the whole story about how an individual school is really performing. Way back in June last year, meanwhile, the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) quietly launched its own state register. According to a VRQA media statement, 'The state register is a valuable source of information for anyone choosing a provider' – aka a school. The VRQA state register publishes measures of school performance by combining teacher assessments from the Victorian Essential Learning Standards, the results of NAPLAN tests and results from the Victorian Certificate of Education. The state register includes all Victorian schools, but 'performance summaries' are currently only available for government schools. What are these? According to the VRQA website, 'Each performance summary provides overall results of students and how the school compares with other Victorian government schools, taking into account its student intake.'

LINKS: www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/sreg

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE

'We can easily forget that Facebook needs to build a profit with our friendships,' Michael Agger warns in the *Slate*, agreeing for a moment with techy-superstar-hasbeen and early contributor to *Wired* Jaron Lanier, who argues that, 'The...whole idea of fake friendship is just bait laid by the lords of the clouds to lure hypothetical advertisers.' Reviewing Lanier's *You Are Not a Gadget*, though, Agger says yearning for the good ol' days of the 1990s internet is plain, old-fashioned snobbery. In truth, says Agger, the Web 2.0 or whatever is a democratising technology that, through Flickr, Twitter, Facebook and the rest, enables production, not just consumption. Mind you, the lords of the clouds appear to have lured some actual advertisers: Agger's 'The geek freaks' article is accompanied by 'The shocking truth

about Australia's hottest diet' and 'Two easy rules to a ripped body.'

WE REPORT, YOU DECIDE

According to a MyFoxNY.com report, a teacher at Madison Park Elementary School in New Jersey in the United States told a Year 3 student that the *Bible* was not appropriate reading material for the class private reading session and ordered the student to put it away. The school's principal said the teacher had made a mistake, and that the *Bible* is acceptable in the school's private reading policy.

RUBBER ROOMS

Over the way in New York, Cindy Mauro and Alini Brito, two teachers from James Madison High School in Brooklyn, became the targets of the likes of David Letterman and Conan O'Brien after allegedly being involved in what the New York *Daily News* called 'Sapphic shenanigans.' As *CBS News* reported, New York City Department of Education spokesperson Marge Feinberg said the school was investigating 'an incident of employee misconduct' and the teachers 'have been reassigned, pending the outcome of the investigation.' James Madison High student Nicole Solovey immediately set up a Facebook account called 'Bring Cindy Mauro and Alini Brito back to Madison!' Reassignment means being sent to one of the department's 13 'temporary reassignment centres,' commonly called 'rubber rooms' by teachers. According to Steven Brill, writing in the *New Yorker* in August last year, about 600 teachers – a 0.2 per cent of New York City's teachers – attend temporary reassignment centres while allegations of misconduct or incompetence are investigated. Those 600 teachers, according to Brill, 'have been in the rubber room for an average of about three years, doing the same thing every day – which is pretty much nothing at all.' No prizes for guessing why these places got the name.

The Grapevine is written by Steve Holden, Editor of Teacher.