

ACARA Head Admits There is Little Evidence for Reporting School Results

Save Our Schools
Trevor Cobbold
October 2009

There is little research evidence to show that reporting school results leads to better student performance according to Peter Hill, the newly-appointed chief executive of the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority.

He told a forum on league tables in Sydney last Friday that the evidence is mixed, with some studies showing increases and some showing decreases in student achievement. He said that the effects are small.

Hill went on to say that it is very difficult to find significant positive conclusions in education research on any policies and programs. This is because it is difficult to account for all the variety of factors that influence results and it is difficult to conduct 'pure' experiments.

This is a stunning admission from the executive charged with implementing Australia's new curriculum and reporting system. It reveals the shallow basis on which the Federal Government's case for reporting school results rests.

The Federal Education Minister wants schools to be open and transparent about their performance but she has been totally unwilling to subject her scheme to full public scrutiny. It is now clear why. Even her own appointed official says that there is no conclusive evidence to support her claims that publishing school results will improve performance.

Hill was part of a panel of speakers at a forum for education stakeholders sponsored by the Daily Telegraph. The other speakers were Verity Firth, NSW Minister for Education, and Andrew Blair, President of the Australian Secondary Principals' Association.

Hill's comments were made in a response to a question to Verity Firth from Trevor Cobbold, National Convenor of Save Our Schools. Cobbold had summarised research evidence showing that reporting school results does not improve student achievement and questioned the Education Minister on what research evidence she had to support reporting school results.

Hill intervened, saying that it was unfair to expect a Minister to be able to cite research studies in support of a policy. Hill stated that he disagreed with Cobbold's reading of the research. However, he did not cite any studies himself.

Verity Firth chose not to answer the question after Hill's intervention. She was thereby exposed as not knowing of any evidence to support her endorsement of reporting school results and her aggressive criticism of opponents of the scheme.

Hill's admission demands that a full independent national inquiry be held into whether the new reporting scheme should go ahead. It is time the full costs and benefits of the scheme were fully examined before it is too late. In addition, the NSW Parliament should immediately investigate the basis for the NSW Government's support for the scheme, given the failure of Verity Firth to respond with a statement of the evidence to support her claims.