4

My School Website Launched

In the lead up to and following launch day on 28 January 2010, ACARA undertook a comprehensive communications campaign to inform the community of this new public information service.

Information was disseminated firstly to school communities, with principals gaining access to their school's page on the website 24 hours prior to launch. Principals also received written information packs and supporting material including a DVD. This was particularly aimed at providing a plain language explanation of how the ICSEA was developed and what its intended purpose was.

The information provided to the public was in the form of television commercials and a range of online fact sheets and Frequently Asked Questions. The television commercials were short-lived, perhaps demonstrating that the force of the Australian Government's and ACARA's public advocacy of the reporting agenda had itself provided substantial publicity.

Box 4.1 **Communication Strategy**

ACARA was responsible for developing a communication strategy to inform stakeholders of the purpose and functionality of the My School website in the lead up to the launch.

Key elements of the strategy included:

- identifying different audiences and their relationship to/interaction with My School, e.g. schools, parents, unions, media, the general community;
- identifying key stakeholders – Director Generals, School Principals, Peak Body representatives, education Ministers, Federal education department (DEEWR);
- developing key communication media, including media releases, press advertising, fact sheets, brochures, booklets, DVDs;
- identifying communication channels, e.g. Government and departmental websites, the ACARA website, press and television advertising;
- identifying key spokespersons;
- identifying key messages and tailoring these according to the audience;
- developing an issues and risk register;
- appointing a public relations advisor; and
- developing timelines and key activities and launch and final release dates.

Activities undertaken by ACARA and stakeholders leading up to the launch included:

- preview of My School landing page;
- My School presentation by the Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) at the principals' forum;
- promotion of My School and broader transparency and accountability policy through related forums, such as the DEEWR website, DPM media conferences;
- email to principals and teachers providing support materials and key messages;
- media interviews with key spokespeople;
- newsletter articles for School education bodies and education reports;
- development of key communication media, including brochures, FAQs, a DVD, fact sheets, etc;
- briefing of peak bodies;
- implementation of e-Alerts relating to the development and launch of the My School website accessed through a registration facility on the ACARA website; and
- provision of advance copies of communication material to state and territory education authorities.

The Chair of ACARA and the then Deputy Prime Minister held media briefings and toured to some schools to launch the website. At the time of the launch and in the days and months following it, there was significant media reaction, much of it positive, particularly in the theme of this kind of public information for parents being long overdue.

KEY FEATURES

The principal design elements of My School merit some repeating. For some policy analysts, it goes without saying that the school indicators used in public reports should be formed to permit direct comparisons between schools without regard to jurisdiction or ownership differences. My School also by design places schools in the centre of the scheme, rather than giving prominence to the indicators and listing all the schools in rank order under each one. And from the outset, the key design feature of My School has been to accompany school results with not just a suite of contextual indicators such as the influence of family background on school results, but also school income data. With these three kinds of data, any user of the website would be able to consider for themselves the key factors governing each school's services.

The main features can be summarised as these:

- It is the first time Australia has had a data repository of rich and detailed information on all schools in the country (some of which may be used for government and research purposes as distinct from the public reporting use).
- It provides a facility to publicly report nationally comparable information on all schools at the same time and in the same location.
- It allows comparison of schools which educate students from similar backgrounds through the ICSEA which for the first time shows the level of educational advantage or disadvantage for every school based on the same scale.
- It provides clear information on schools that are doing better or worse than would be expected based on their ICSEA value.

Through colour coding of NAPLAN results (green/dark green to indicate performing above/substantially above average of similar schools and all Australian schools, and red/dark red to indicate performing below/substantially below average of similar schools and all Australian schools), it highlights immediately and obviously instances of educational disadvantage where governments can target assistance and resources.

When the first version of My School was launched, the Australian Government identified and provided extra funding to 110 schools that were below both the national average and statistically similar schools but which were not already in receipt of additional funding assistance. In this way, the capacity of My School to provide the type of data that had been missing for successive federal education Ministers upon which to assess claims for additional funding can be seen.

There was an unprecedented and unanticipated demand for the website. The number of page views for My School for launch day was 30 million which, in Australia, is comparable to the number of pages served for the large news sites and popular reality television shows for a month.

In the early days following the launch of the site, some media outlets and other organisations copied the data from My School to create "league tables" ranking schools on their performance. There was considerable concern expressed by some in the schools sector that this reporting would damage school reputations.

While the Australian Government does not support the publication of simplistic league tables, it also does not support the use of legal controls to restrict the public, including the media, from publishing data obtained from the My School website.

A threat to the capacity of My School to report school performance outcomes came when the Australian Education Union (representing teachers) proposed a boycott of the NAPLAN tests scheduled to be administered in May 2010. While there is very strong support in the Australian community for NAPLAN, there remained concern by some stakeholders regarding the use of NAPLAN for the purpose of public reporting of the results via My School. A widespread boycott would have seriously impacted the efficacy of the information on My School, particularly in relation to the capacity with the 2010 data to calculate student growth in comparison to the 2008 school results for the same student cohorts.

Most states and territories sought orders or directions for the teachers' union to desist from taking industrial action from their relevant industrial tribunal. In addition, the then Deputy Prime Minister was in regular contact with state and territory ministers to discuss progress on contingency planning to ensure that if the proposed bans went ahead, the tests could still be administered. This involved significant effort and resourcing by state and territory authorities in devising alternative implementation arrangements and ensuring that students would be given the opportunity to participate in the tests. In the end, the situation was avoided with the teachers' union calling off the proposed boycott.

The then Deputy Prime Minister also asked ACARA to form the My School Working Party with representation from the teachers' union plus a range of other stakeholders such as principals' organisations and literacy and numeracy specialists. The Working Party was in operation until August 2010 and provided advice on possible enhancements to My School.

MY SCHOOL 2.0

Following on from the initial website launch in early 2010, the second version of the website was released on 4 March 2011.

The updated website contained some significant reporting innovations and included for the first time comparable national data on school finances. Information on each school's recurrent income and capital expenditure, broken down by funding source, provides parents, teachers and governments with a clear picture of the resources provided to schools to support the education of students. To ensure that this information is robust and comparable, ACARA commissioned a detailed validation process, undertaken by a leading Australian accounting firm, Deloitte. Deloitte also reviewed the methodology for reporting school financial information. The methodology and assurance reports for the school income data are available at *www.acara.edu.au/myschool/more_information*.

The other major addition to My School 2.0 was school results showing student gain in literacy and numeracy measured through the NAPLAN tests. This was the first opportunity to present student progress information for students who undertook NAPLAN in both 2008 and 2010. This information provided an understanding of how the gain made by a school is related to its students' starting level of performance in 2008, thereby providing a measure of the influence of the school itself on student results.

The gain made by students in each school was displayed by averaging the 2008 and 2010 results for the following cohorts:

- Year 5 students who also sat NAPLAN in the same school in Year 3.
- Year 7 students who also sat NAPLAN in the same school in Year 5.
- Year 9 students who also sat NAPLAN in the same school in Year 7.

For My School 2.0, ACARA developed also a more accurate method of calculating ICSEA. Where available, school ICSEA values are based on direct student level data – that is, data collected directly from parents at the school, rather than national Census data. Modelling by ACARA has found that using direct student level data gives a 7% increase in the explanatory power of ICSEA. See Annex B for more information.

My School 2.0 featured new graphical methods of displaying NAPLAN data. NAPLAN results were moved from a school's profile page to separate pages to make room for extra information on the school profile, while a set of icons at the bottom of each screen provided easy access to the rest of the site.

Also in this update to the website, there were enhanced security features to ensure that data is used appropriately by those who access the site.

An explanation of each page of the website may be found in Annex A.

Box 4.2 **Data released on the first, second, third and future versions of My School**

OUTCOMES	CONTEXT	CAPACITY
Student learning	**Student home and personal background**	**Workforce**

• NAPLAN
  + Status by domain and year level
    - National and like school means
    - Distribution in bands
  + Like school comparisons
  + Student gain (for matched cohorts)
  + Student gain comparisons by school
  + Participation
• VET in school numbers
• VET in school enrolments and completions by level and industry area
• Senior secondary*
• Post school destinations*
• Tertiary entrance scores
	• SES of family
	  + ICSEA score
	  + School family SES distribution
	  + ICSEA to be based on direct parent data
	• Student
	  + Indigenous
	  + With a disability
	  + With a language back-ground other than English
		• Numbers of teaching and non-teaching staff
		• Numbers/proportions of teachers by level of expertise under new National Professional Standards for Teachers

School culture	**School profile**	**Finance**

• Student, parent, teacher satisfaction, e.g.
+ Student wellbeing
+ Parent engagement
+ Teacher development
	• Enrolments
	• Student attendance
	• School statement
	• School type
	  + Primary, secondary
	  + Year range
	  + Government, non-government
	  + Location
		• School recurrent income and capital expenditure

Black - data released on My School
Dark blue - data included in My School 2012 release
Light blue - data to be included in future releases
These indicators are currently not nationally comparable
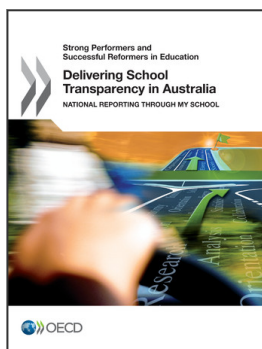
The third update to My School was released on 24 February 2012. The update made available four years of NAPLAN assessments (2008-11) and 2010 school funding information for every school. The key additions were a revised depiction of student gain in literacy and numeracy allowing for fair comparisons of schools based on the same starting NAPLAN score (that is, between students who achieved the same result when they sat NAPLAN two years previously); and additional Vocational Education and Training (VET) measures relating to course enrolments and completed qualifications by level and industry area. The new VET measures boost the secondary schooling indicators and provide a complement to NAPLAN results as additional outcomes indicators on the website.

THE FUTURE OF MY SCHOOL

Annual updates to My School are planned. As well as what is currently on the website ACARA is working with education authorities to develop further additional indicators including the numbers of students with disabilities, satisfaction of parents, students and teachers, and levels of teacher expertise.

Over time, the website will continue to evolve and expand as new and additional data becomes available. This will mean My School is able to continually enhance the richness of the information it makes available to parents, schools and the community.