Socialist Equality Party (Australia) Public Meetings

# NAPLAN testing and My School: Rudd's free market education agenda

**23 April 2010**

Teachers, parents, students—and all those concerned about the fate of public education—are invited to attend a public meeting being convened by the Socialist Equality Party to discuss the Rudd Labor government's historic assault on public education.

In January this year, Labor launched its *My School* web site. The web site ranks schools nationally, based on their performance in standardised literacy and numeracy tests (known as NAPLAN). The purpose of *My School* is not to provide "transparency and information for mums and dads", as the Labor government claims. Its real aim is to unleash a divisive struggle between schools.

Rudd has declared that Labor's "education revolution" will create an "education market place". Like any market place, there will be winners and losers. Schools that "underperform" in NAPLAN will face sanctions and closure, while teachers who fail to "value add" by lifting their students' test scores will face intense pressure, and, ultimately, disciplinary action.

NAPLAN testing is high-stakes testing because the results determine the school's entire future. In Britain and the United States similar reforms have produced a disaster. They have been used to victimise and sack teachers, subordinate curricula to the productivity requirements of business and close hundreds of public schools. Under the Obama administration's "Race to the Top" program, funding is being tied to the adoption of "teacher performance" measures. In the state of Delaware, teachers who fail over a three-year period to lift test scores will be fired.

NAPLAN tests will do nothing to improve Australia's high rates of illiteracy and innumeracy that are the outcome of poverty and growing social inequality. To help overcome them, schools need more teachers, better resources, and increased funding. But none of this is on offer from the Rudd Labor government, or any of the capitalist parties, including the Liberals, Nationals and Greens.

On April 12, the Australian Education Union (AEU) announced a national boycott of NAPLAN tests. But the AEU's boycott is a hollow threat. The teacher unions—including the New South Wales Teachers Federation—have already made clear that they accept the entire framework of Labor's pro-market reforms, including NAPLAN testing.

Under a plan submitted to the Rudd government in March (entitled *My School and League Tables: an AEU proposal*) the union offered no principled objection to school league tables, only to the "misuse" of test data by tabloid newspapers and other media outlets. Not only does the AEU support Labor's *My School* web site, which is essentially a government-sanctioned league table, it has also recommended that additional comparative data be added tracking individual student performance with a graph that would "show the national average and the percentage of students above the average and the percentage below."

Since the adoption of its boycott motion on April 12, the AEU has issued no call for meetings to organise such action, leaving it up to individual schools and individual teachers. As a result, the ground has been cleared for Labor to threaten teachers with the full force

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of the law. On April 12, Education Minister Julia Gillard warned that industrial action by teachers would "not be protected" under state awards. "Fines and penalties will apply," she said. Since then, Labor governments in NSW and Queensland have sought rulings against the boycott in their respective industrial relations commissions.

Labor's education revolution is part of a wider agenda to slash all aspects of social spending. While billions—and trillions —of dollars are made available by governments to bail out the banks and financial institutions, money for schools, hospitals, welfare and public infrastructure is to be gutted. In April Gillard announced plans for a My University and My Hospital that will publicly rank health and tertiary education on the basis of "efficient service delivery."

No area of social spending will be exempt from the full blast of the market and the Rudd government's "higher productivity" restructuring program.

Teachers, parents and students who oppose the deepening assault on public education need to strike out on a new political road, independent of the unions, the Labor government and the Greens, who have fully endorsed the AEU's proposal for a deal with the Rudd government. To the extent that teachers and parents remain trapped within and tied to these organisations the assault on education and all areas of social spending will continue and deepen.

League tables, NAPLAN tests and pay for performance, cannot be fought in a piecemeal fashion but must be rejected in toto. The defence of education requires not only a political struggle against the Rudd government but the turn to a socialist program which will fundamentally restructure society and make spending on education, health and other vital areas of social life the first—not the last—priority.

**Melbourne**
Tuesday May 4, 7.00 p.m.
Dandenong Community Arts Centre
Walker St Gallery
Corner Walker and Robinson Street (entrance via Robinson St)
Dandenong

**Sydney**
Wednesday May 5, 7.00 p.m.
Parramatta Town Hall
Jubilee Hall
182 Church Street Mall
(200 metres from Parramatta rail & bus station)

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