

Socialist Equality Party (Australia) Public Meetings in Sydney

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

25 May 2010

Teachers, parents, students—and all those concerned about the fate of public education—are invited to attend public meetings 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 resolve literacy and numeracy problems 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 May 6, the Australian Education Union (AEU) called off a national boycott of NAPLAN tests. Under a deal reached with Education Minister Julia Gillard, AEU and New South Wales Teachers Federation (NSWTF) officials will join a government “working party” that will ram through Labor's pro-market reforms, including NAPLAN testing.

The union's boycott threat was hollow from the start. 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 (backed by the NSWTF) 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.”

The union did everything in its power to prevent a genuine boycott of NAPLAN. They issued no call for meetings of parents and teachers to organise such action—even as Gillard threatened to use parents as “strikebreakers”—leaving it up to individual schools and individual teachers. As a result, the ground was cleared for Labor's Fair Work Australia to threaten teachers with massive individual fines of more than \$6,000 a day if they proceeded with a boycott. Similar orders were obtained from state Industrial Relations Commissions, by the Keneally Labor government in

NSW, by Labor governments in Victoria, Queensland and South Australia, and by the new Labor-Green Coalition in Tasmania.

The Rudd government'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, Labor and the Greens, who have fully endorsed the AEU's sell-out 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.

Wednesday June 2, 7.00 p.m.

Maroubra RSL

Downstairs Function Room

946 Anzac Parade, Maroubra

(Cnr Anzac Pde and Haig St)

Thursday June 3, 7.00 p.m.

Punchbowl Community Centre

44 Rossmore Avenue, Punchbowl

(Near Punchbowl railway station)



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact