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To whom it may concern

I have been teaching mathematics and science in Queensland since 1984. I have specialised in Mathematics B and C. I have acted as a HOD of Mathematics for a number of years and have been a member of the Mathematics C panel.

When it comes to the current method of assessing students, numerous discussion with my peers left me have no doubt that not everyone understands the situation the same way. The system is so vague and clumsy it is open to many different interpretations. If we could not agree with how the system should work, how can we expect parents and the public to have any chance.

Criteria based system

Although I can understand an argument for big wordy criteria sheets in assessing student learning, when considered in full context, there is place for it in our education system.

Even assuming that they are implemented correctly by a knowledgeable person, they are ridiculously time consuming to create, use, interpret, moderate, record and discuss with parents. They are easy to misuse, manipulate and hide lacklustre performance.

Marks, on the other hand, use far less time and allows teachers to get on with teaching. They can still be manipulated but it is harder to do so.

A correctly written paper with graded questions and more marks allocated to the harder questions allows all students to demonstrate what they can and cannot do. Moderating these against other schools is not able to be validly done unless both schools have not seen the paper in advance.

In summary, the current ludicrous assessment methods (and any method which believes valid comparisons can be made between schools without a common test), are something for this state to be ashamed.

They promote.

- Concentrate on teaching only the things that are on the test (because no test can test everything)

- giving the students a practice test which looks remarkably like the real test (and let the word get around that if you can do the practice test you should be right).
- Put some difficult questions on the test so it compares with other schools (but teach our students exactly how to handle this sort of question so they can get it right on test day)

This still wasn't producing good enough results so we use assignments to count toward the final grade. This helped to improve results because now

- The students could get help from Mum, Dad, a tutor or an online assignment doing business.
- We could give the students the assessment item that was to go to panel and another cheat sheet which was not going to panel (that will make panel think my kids are good).
- We can allow the students to hand in draft after draft, continually sneaking up on a perfect result. (The effort by the student here, is commendable but are they worth that A+?)
- Give two assignments in the tough semesters as they have to be weighted equally with other assessment instruments like tests. This takes the pressure off having to perform in a test.

I am sure that the way we measure maths and science in Queensland schools is ridiculous. If we really want students to learn and their assessment reflect their true level of knowledge, we need a total change. There is definitely some students, teachers and schools who cheat the system.

The cost extends to beyond the current students as when the current farce is replaced, many good teachers will have left and younger teachers won't know any other way.

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