

ACT BOARD OF SENIOR SECONDARY STUDIES
2019
Reporting on Data

A just and fair approach

This year the Board of Senior Secondary Studies decided to change its approach to the release of information. The shift was from reporting on individual school data to system wide data. We believe it removes the 'winners' and losers' interpretation but still preserves information in the public domain that is accurate and relevant.

Previously the BSSS published the following Year 12 data for individual schools:

- Number of Senior Secondary Certificates awarded
- Number of Year 12 students awarded a vocational certificate qualification
- % of Senior Secondary Certificate Receivers awarded TES
- Median ATAR
- % of Tertiary Entrance Statement (TES) eligible students with an ATAR ≥ 60.00

The Board is committed to ongoing improvement through reviewing its policies and procedures. Following a detailed review of the end of year media communications the Board established a direction that focusses on celebration of all students and all schools, at the expense of none.

The new information published is Year 12 system wide data and includes:

- Number of ACT schools with students with ATAR > 95
- Number of students with TES
- Number of students graduating with M courses
- Overview of results for indigenous students
- Number of ACT schools with ASBA students
- Numbers of ASBA students
- Numbers of external VET qualifications on the ACT SSC
- Number of students completing an H course
- List of new courses studied by students
- Number of students awarded the ACT SSC.

Leading educational researcher Kenneth Rowe argues that the publication of data on individual schools has potentially adverse outcomes on an education system. It is not possible for readers to know whether differences between schools are due to the quality of teaching, to differences in the populations they serve, or other reasons. Reporting data for individual schools including the median ATAR potentially marginalises diverse learners. The publication of individual school data, in particular the median ATARs, was feeding a misconception that a high median ATAR is a ranking of educational 'quality' or 'merit'.

Other consequences of the BSSS reporting on individual school data such as the median ATAR may include:

- fostering a climate of rivalry as opposed to cooperation
- generating negative publicity by classifying schools as either effective or ineffective based on data that does not provide this information
- distortions in the education marketplace whereby schools feel pressured to introduce selectivity in enrolments with the sole purpose of improving school's ranking based on individual school data such as the median ATAR
- potential reduction of educational opportunity to students through limiting subject choice in order to manufacture results irrespective of student interest, learning, or well-being.

The Board's position to publish Year 12 system wide data will not cause harm to schools or the wider Canberra community. Schools receive all the information about their students' achievements. Parents, carers and students are free to contact schools to discuss their values, the subjects and programs they offer, and previous Year 12 achievements.

This decision was widely supported by Board members and school principals. The BSSS student forum, a voice for students from across the ACT senior secondary sector, conveyed a clear desire for a system that was based not on competition and comparison but support for the learning and well-being of every individual student in every school, across all sectors.

The reporting on system wide data rather than limited to comparative data on individual schools is a significant reform that is aimed at uniting the territory to work in unison to provide a high-quality education that is focused on students' needs and interests.

The Board has initiated a change for the better. A change that focusses on what is important rather than what divides - in the public interest.

Roberta McRae OAM
BSSS Board Chair

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