The Parents Guide to NAPLAN

A handy guide to NAPLAN with real tips from real parents, real teachers and the 3P Learning education team.
The Parents Guide to NAPLAN

Contents

What is NAPLAN ............................................................................................................................................. 03
Understanding NAPLAN results ................................................................................................................... 04
Putting NAPLAN into perspective ................................................................................................................ 05
How to explain NAPLAN to your child ......................................................................................................... 06
Supporting your child through NAPLAN .................................................................................................... 08
How much preparation is really required for NAPLAN? .............................................................................. 09
Come on... Convince Me: Your Guide to Writing a Persuasive Text ......................................................... 11
Your Guide to Narrative Writing .................................................................................................................. 12
What Teachers Really Think About Naplan .................................................................................................. 13
Helpful tips to prepare for NAPLAN ........................................................................................................... 15
Why kids are scared of NAPLAN and how to help them ........................................................................... 16
Navigating NAPLAN: supporting kids on test day ....................................................................................... 18
What is NAPLAN?

The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy, or NAPLAN, is a test that all students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 sit. The tests are diagnostic – that means they test children on the essential skills they are taught throughout their education, rather than simply making them recall information.

The NAPLAN tests are made up from the four main areas of:
• Reading
• Writing
• Language Conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation)
• Numeracy

In Years 3 and 5, students sit four tests, These cover numeracy, reading, writing and language conventions (spelling, punctuation and grammar). In Years 7 and 9, students sit 5 tests, covering all of the above but with 2 tests for numeracy – one where calculators are allowed and one where they are not.

Students sit the NAPLAN test in May each year and the test results and student reports are released in September. Test dates are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>NAPLAN Test Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>12 – 10 May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>11 – 09 May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>17 – 15 May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>16 – 14 May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>14 – 12 May</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you would like to find out more about the Australian Curriculum aligned setup of NAPLAN, visit www.nap.edu.au/naplan/australian-curriculum.html
Understanding NAPLAN results

The NAPLAN results are released as a report in September and summarises your child’s performance. Your child’s school will tell you when this report is ready.

These results give parents and students an understanding of how the student performed academically against the state. This will highlight if there are any areas that need attention. You may wish to discuss your child’s results and progress with teachers.

Each student’s results are reported against the NAPLAN assessment scale. It is important to note that:

• a common scale is used for years 3, 5, 7 and 9 which allows student achievement to be measured against the same scale throughout their schooling
• scaled scores range from 0 to 1000, and describe the development of student achievement from Year 3 through to Year 9
• reporting bands range from Band 1 to Band 10, the higher the band, the greater the complexity of skill assessed.

The diagram below shows the reporting band range for each year level. The ‘National Minimum Standard’ (NMS) is defined for each area as the second lowest Band for a year level. A student at the NMS has typically demonstrated the basic elements of literacy and numeracy needed at their year level.

For more information to help understand the score and scaling for NAPLAN, visit www.nap.edu.au/naplan-understanding-scale.html

NAPLAN results can be used in a number of ways including:

• Teachers, parents and students can use the results to address and work on any areas of weakness.
• Schools and teachers can use the results to identify the strengths and weaknesses in teaching programs and to set goals in literacy and numeracy.
• School systems and governments use results to review programs and support offered to schools.

For more information on results and reporting, visit www.nap.edu.au/results-and-reports/how-to-interpret.html
Putting NAPLAN into perspective

The main objective of the NAPLAN tests is to provide governments, education authorities, schools, teachers and parents with a standardised measure to assess the critical numeracy and literacy skills of young Australians. This helps identify national trends, highlight strengths and weaknesses in current education programs and identify areas to focus on in the future. NAPLAN is the only standardised test undertaken by young Australians and therefore is a useful measure for interested parties to gain a general sense of how the Australian education system is operating.

It is important for parents to remember that NAPLAN testing provides information at a specific point in time of a student’s progress in literacy and numeracy. While the tests are a national examination, they do not provide all information about your child’s numeracy and literacy skills. They are just one test your child will complete throughout their school life and are meant to complement other forms of school assessment.

Keeping this in mind, students should not be worried or anxious about sitting the NAPLAN tests, nor should they be disheartened or discouraged by their NAPLAN results. Instead students should think about NAPLAN primarily as a learning experience, and secondly as a way to gain hands-on experience in exam conditions – a crucial skill to take into their final exams in Year 12.

NATIONAL NUMERACY STUDY

A recent study of over 8,000 Australian schools has shown a number of key insights into the benefits of using Mathletics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study finding 1</th>
<th>Study finding 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spending as little as 30mins/week on curriculum activities, schools can gain a potential advantage of more than 9%.</td>
<td>Students with longer-term usage (&gt;2yrs) saw an even greater jump in NAPLAN results.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mirella and Charlene are teachers and education consultants who met in 2012, growing close over a shared love of Ellen Degeneres and The West Wing. Their professional concern for wanting to “do more” for mathematics education led them to create Education Equals – a pioneering educational space.

Learning is most effective when students feel that they are a creative force in their own education. It is often the case that children feel that learning just happens to them, rather than growing from them, especially if conversations about their learning are absent.

Whether we’re a fan of NAPLAN or not, it exists as a significant element in your child’s education. But do they really know what it’s for? Do they know how it relates to their own education or even what each test is about? Hopefully these sorts of discussions happen in their classroom, but having a conversation with you is all the more personal and powerful.

Here are a few ways to discuss NAPLAN with your child.

WHAT IS NAPLAN?

NAPLAN is like a snapshot in time, showing teachers, parents and students what skills and abilities each student has in numeracy, reading, writing and language. Just like we have photos to record moments in our lives that we can look back on and see our growth, NAPLAN is one way to record and watch how individuals, schools and Australia are growing in their education.

Teachers and parents can then look at these snapshots to help them make decisions about how to best help students learn more and how to gain the most from their education. Teachers and parents won’t use only NAPLAN to help students learn, but it’s useful to have a common starting point that students all around the country have used.

WHAT IS EACH TEST ABOUT?

NAPLAN only focuses on the areas of numeracy, reading, writing and language. Each of these are thought of as the important and foundational skills that students need to be successful in all areas of learning.

The Numeracy test is not really a maths test. Instead the test aims to see how well students can work, think and solve problems with numbers and mathematical ideas. There are many questions that are similar to school maths tests and these are used to measure what sorts of skills students know well or need to improve. There are also questions that measure how well students can fit pieces of information together to solve problems.

The Reading test aims to measure how students think about what they read and how students navigate different styles of writing. During the test there are a few different articles to read in the Magazine, with questions to measure how well students can interpret meaning and context in what they have read.

The Language test looks at how well students can work with the building blocks of the English language, which includes skills like spelling, using punctuation and constructing sentences.

The Writing test gives students an opportunity to demonstrate how well they can present their ideas in writing. Students are given an idea or topic to write about and the aim is to see how well they can communicate their thoughts and construct their thinking.
WHY DO I HAVE TO DO NAPLAN?

An important part of the educational journey is to measure where students are starting from in their learning, how much progress they’ve made and where there is still room for growth and development. There are many tools that can be used to take these measurements, and NAPLAN is just one of them.

NAPLAN isn’t about testing how smart students are, it’s about testing how well students are learning and how well they’re developing the foundational skills. The data and information gathered from these tests helps parents, teachers, schools and the government make decisions to improve education for everyone. The information is more useful and valuable when every student sits the tests and tries their best.

Sitting down with your child to discuss NAPLAN and why it is useful to them in their own education journey might just be the most valuable thing you can do in the upcoming weeks to help them get in the right mindset. Often the fear around NAPLAN stems from the unknown, and discussions like these can help your child understand what it’s all for and why it is helpful to them and their learning.

Mirella is a Mathematics Teacher and Education Consultant and her mission is to help parents raise mathematically confident and competent children through her site www.educationequals.com.
If your child is sitting NAPLAN tests this year, here are some steps that will help them prepare for an introduction into formal school testing.

Supporting your child with NAPLAN testing is important as it is often a big part of their introduction to formal exam style tests that they will continue to face as they enter adolescence, including their School Certificate, driver license and pre-employment tests.

The NAPLAN test often receives criticism in terms of the pressure it puts on children to perform. We suggest that with the support of their parents and teachers, children can build their resilience and rise to the challenge, developing these key skills from an early age. With this in mind, we recommend that parents encourage students to see the NAPLAN tests as a great learning experience which allows them become accustomed to new environments and challenges, whilst extending and demonstrating their knowledge, rather than a high pressure ‘be all or end all’ test.

With practice and preparation, children can see NAPLAN as a way to become accustomed to examination environments and develop skills such as reading the question and time management as they learn to think laterally and face new questions. It is suggested that perhaps one of the most important things to be learnt from NAPLAN is not in the answers to the questions, but in the understanding and development of skills for examinations.

Have you tried Mathletics test prep?
Students can take control of their own learning in 3 simple steps

1. Find out what you know
2. Fill in the gaps
3. See how much you've improved

Learn more at www.3plearning.com/testprep
How much preparation is really required for NAPLAN?

There is a lot of uncertainty surrounding whether or not preparation is necessary for student confidence and success in NAPLAN. Parents and teachers alike aren’t sure whether they should spend time helping students prepare for tests, and if they do decide to help they’re not really sure of the most effective strategies or activities to employ.

There are many sensationalised stories of kids spending hours and hours sitting practice tests, refusing to go to school and experiencing sleepless nights from the worry and stress caused by the very thought of NAPLAN.

The good news is that there is a middle ground and the following is some advice parents and teachers can use to plan some useful NAPLAN preparation.

PREPARATION CAN BE MORE INFORMATIVE THAN THE TEST ITSELF

In the classroom some of the best learning opportunities come from the preparation and revision we do in the lesson or two before a test than from the actual test itself. It is on these occasions that students can reflect on their learning, identify the skills and techniques they’ve been using and see their learning as a journey rather than a series of isolated lessons.

When I had my Year 7 classes complete a selection of questions from a past NAPLAN Numeracy paper, many of these useful opportunities presented themselves. We were able to discuss strategies for solving some of the problems and we were able to analyse why some of the multiple choice options seemed viable when really they were there to test common misconceptions. The students enjoyed having an “insider’s” view to NAPLAN as well as having a guided discussion on how and where they could prepare themselves further.

WHAT PREPARATION HAS YOUR CHILD DONE AT SCHOOL?

Before deciding what preparation your child could benefit from at home, take the time to find out what types of preparation activities they’ve been engaged with at school.

We’ve all heard of the schools that spend nearly all of Term 1 “teaching to NAPLAN” and doing endless practice questions and tests. Of course this is ineffective and detrimental to learning. Learning snippets of information in isolation, rather than units of work as a whole, is never going to result in a successful education. Similarly, practising questions without the important discussion and analysis of the solutions also leaves students unable to identify where they need to further focus and improve.

A discussion with your child and their teacher can help you gauge what sort of preparation has been initiated and where some further supplementation might be useful.
A FEW PRACTICE TESTS AREN'T A BAD THING

The image of young Year 3 students being made to sit at desks poring over practice papers is certainly not an image we want to associate with education in Australia. As mentioned, the endless practise of questions isn’t meaningful preparation, and yet working on a few practice papers can be useful when conducted educationally.

Why did I give my Year 7 students a practice paper to work on when this will be their third year of NAPLAN?

Firstly this will the first year in the Numeracy test where they will sit a calculator section and a non-calculator section and I wanted to help them see the different style and type of question that will be asked in each section.

Secondly students often feel that the way questions are worded or the content presented will be completely foreign and separate to what they learn on an everyday basis. By working on some practice papers my students could see that while the Numeracy paper doesn't address just one topic (as their usual class Topic Tests do), the concepts and skills being tested are still familiar and based on what they’ve been learning over the last 18 months.

And finally, working individually on NAPLAN questions and then coming together as a class to discuss solutions was an excellent opportunity for sharing mathematical thinking and identifying areas of weakness. It is always useful for students to hear and compare other means of approaching and answering a question. It is also beneficial for students to identify what types of questions or skills need further attention and revision.

FOLLOW UP ON AREAS OF WEAKNESS

After working through some typical NAPLAN problems and marking the responses, it’s time to reflect on areas of weakness and address these in an ongoing educational plan.

Perhaps your child finds the questions involving money or currency difficult or confusing in their practice of Numeracy questions. Some real life role-play and practice might be useful here.

It might be the case that your child tends to make the same punctuation errors in their practice of Language Conventions questions. This might be due to a misunderstanding or misconception of the grammar involved and can be easily rectified.

If your child has difficulty explaining metaphors or identifying their meaning while attempting some Reading questions, then some age appropriate poetry and discussion could help with their progress.

With a proactive, constructive and positive approach to preparing for NAPLAN, it doesn’t need to be an ordeal nor a chore. Instead it can be the opportunity for some powerful and meaningful learning and an impetus to guide future learning goals.

Mirella is a Mathematics Teacher and Education Consultant and her mission is to help parents raise mathematically confident and competent children through her site www.educationequals.com.
Since 2015, there has been one writing task for Year 3 and 5 students, and another task for Year 7 and 9 students. Students are provided with a prompt and asked to write a response in a particular genre – either narrative or persuasive.

To help with these text types, we thought we would put together a simple “how-to” guide on each. We’ll start with persuasive writing.

**WHAT IS A PERSUASIVE TEXT?**
A persuasive text is any text where the main purpose is to present a point of view and seeks to persuade a reader. A persuasive text can be an argument, exposition, discussion, review or even an advertisement.

**HOW IS A PERSUASIVE TEXT STRUCTURED?**
A persuasive text is organised to include a ‘statement of position,’ ‘arguments’ and a ‘reinforcement of position statement’

The statement of position gives an overview of the argument and reveals the position to be argued.

Next is the arguments section which is a series of points with supporting evidence. Here is where you try to convince the reader into believing your point of view on a particular issue. As a basis, you should have at least three main argument points and can include more if necessary.

After you have put forth your arguments you then need to sum up. In this section you will strongly repeat what you believe in with a summary of your argument points.

**GRAMMAR AND LANGUAGE CONVENTIONS USED**
- Words with **high modality**, that is, words that show a high degree of certainty. For example – must, ought to, shall, has to. In comparison to words such as may, might, could and would that have low modality and show less certainty.
- **Emotive**, descriptive words that appeal to the emotions. For example – wonderful, horrible, cruel, amazing, frightening, perfect.
- A **formal** voice that is more authoritative and has more power of persuasion.
- **Repetition** of words or phrases and concepts to push your point of view.
- **Connectives** that help sequence your argument. For example – Firstly, Secondly.
- **Present tense**

**USE SAMPLES TO INCREASE UNDERSTANDING**
If you are able to, find sample persuasive texts, grab a highlighter and start scanning them for main argument points, high modality words, emotive words and connectives. Working through a sample text is a great way to help you understand the general structure and sequence of a specific text.

Once you have deconstructed a sample text try writing a persuasive text yourself. You might want to have a friend write the opposing argument and you can compare afterwards.
Your Guide to Narrative Writing

WHAT IS A NARRATIVE?
Narrative writing tells a story. The main purpose of a narrative is to entertain a reader, but stories can also contain a universal theme or moral, or teach the reader a lesson. The stories can either be imaginative or realistic.

Narrative text types include, for example, fairy tales, adventures, legends, myths, mysteries and fables.

HOW IS A NARRATIVE STRUCTURED?
A narrative is made up of four main sections: ‘orientation’, ‘complication’, the ‘sequence of events’ and the ‘resolution’.

The orientation sets the scene, mood and introduces the characters. Try to include ‘When’, ‘Where’, ‘Who’ and ‘What’ in this section to explain to the reader what the story is going to be about.

Complication is when a problem or a dilemma disrupts the normal life or comfort of the characters and sets off a sequence of interesting events.

The complication, often in the form of an obstacle (physical or emotional) that needs to be overcome, creates tension or excitement for the reader of the story and usually needs a response from the main character.

This leads to the resolution, where the problem is resolved. This section will include a description of the final outcome or ending.

Some writers like to include what is called a coda to the end of their narratives. A coda underlines how the character has changed and what they learnt as a result of the experience they went through. A coda is purely optional.

GRAMMAR AND LANGUAGE CONVENTIONS USED
- **Nouns**: To refer to or describe the particular people, animals and things that arise in the story.
- **Adjectives**: To build noun groups to describe the people, animals and things in the story.
- **Verbs**: Saying and thinking verbs can be used to indicate what characters are feeling, thinking or saying.
- **Adverbs**: Use in conjunction with adverbial phrases to locate the particular incidents or events.
- **Connectives**: Use time connectives to show a sequence of events through time.
- **Tense**: Use past tense (usually) except when there is dialogue (present).

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT
To keep up your new-found narrative writing skills try to read other well-formed narratives, such as classic story books. Additionally, keep writing your own narratives and let your family or friends read over them for feedback and advice. Students can practice writing different text types using Writing fun in Spellodrome. Through Writing Fun, students can select text types and receive the frame work and helpful tips and directions for their chosen writing method.
What Teachers Really Think About Naplan

When it comes to NAPLAN we know that parents are usually in one of three groups: unconvinced that NAPLAN is worthwhile, indifferent to NAPLAN or they can see that it has some benefits. But what do teachers really think about NAPLAN?

We, at Education Equals, are both high school Mathematics teachers, and we’ve seen many students sit NAPLAN, so we thought we’d answer a few of the most common questions we’ve been asked.

DO STUDENTS FIND NAPLAN REALLY STRESSFUL?

In our experience the answer is no. By the time students are in secondary school, they are so used to the rigours of testing for all their subjects that by the time May comes around, they’re taking it all in their stride. If anything, they’re glad to have a test involving multiple choice for a change, and they’re glad to have tests they don’t have to study for.

There are some students who do experience test anxiety, and this is for any test, not just NAPLAN. The key to overcoming this is familiarisation with testing environments and how to prepare. At a high school level they get a lot of practice and are even used to balancing preparation for a few assessments on the same day or within the same week.

WHAT, IF ANYTHING, DO TEACHERS USE NAPLAN FOR?

We agree that as it currently stands, it is difficult for teachers to use NAPLAN in a meaningful way due to the significant lag time in receiving the results. Again, as high school teachers, within our departments we work as a team, so together we identify which students will need extra support or extra extension the following year. We also use NAPLAN to identify what areas of maths might need greater focus for the entire cohort.

The main benefit of NAPLAN in our experience is during the intake of new students, especially those starting secondary school in Year 7. These students come from many different primary schools and we need to place them in ability appropriate classes to enable their progress and success. We don’t know what level of mathematical understanding they’ve achieved or what an A grade signified at their primary school. NAPLAN is the only common assessment and gives a good overview of how well they’ve mastered certain skills and concepts. It is the best tool we have to make good decisions about initial class placements.

In Western Australia, achieving a certain level in Year 9 NAPLAN (from this year onwards) will mean students have already fulfilled one requirement for secondary school graduation. Students who don’t achieve that level will need to continue to sit literacy and numeracy tests until they do meet the standard. For those students who fall below the standard, we will use their NAPLAN results to see where and how we can support them and help them leave school with better literacy and numeracy foundations.
HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT NAPLAN PREPARATION?

We both agree that there is a happy medium to be struck between focusing too much on NAPLAN practice and ignoring the occurrence of the tests altogether. In our experience there is simply not enough time to spend during class on sitting endless past papers – we have too much curriculum to teach and too many mathematical ideas to develop and explore!

Having said that, it’s important to find the time to talk to students about NAPLAN and where it fits into their overall learning journey. It’s healthy for them to understand the importance of literacy and numeracy in their lives, and as for all tests and tasks, we need to make it clear to them that we want and expect them to apply their best efforts. Doing the best you can do is all we ever want from our students, and we'd like to think that this is a consistent message they receive from all their teachers and their parents.

For us then, NAPLAN preparation usually involves spending maybe one or two lessons discussing the Numeracy paper with our class and having them sit a practice paper, maybe giving them a second one to try at home. We then take the time to discuss the questions in the paper, especially those involving problem solving skills, where we find it a useful learning opportunity for students to hear from each other the various ways they could approach the problem.

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE FUTURE OF NAPLAN?

As we know, NAPLAN will be online from 2017 on an opt-in basis of two to three years, and will also be much more closely aligned with the Australian Curriculum. These are both great things to look forward to, and will mean a more useful standardised test.

Being online will be useful for a few reasons. Firstly it will mean automatic, computer-based marking, which should in turn mean a much faster turnaround in receiving results. This will make NAPLAN more immediately useful to a child’s teacher.

Secondly, the planned strategy for online testing will also mean that students don’t all sit the exact same test. Instead, the test will be responsive. What this means is that students will all start with the same block of say 8 questions, and then depending on how they go, they will sit the next block according to their ability level. This will mean weaker students will have the ability to demonstrate the level they have achieved, rather than feeling hopeless throughout the entire paper, and higher ability students will have more challenging problems to attempt, also giving them an opportunity to demonstrate their skill. And of course there will be all the levels in-between. This will be great for students, parents and teachers alike.

And finally, having the questions aligned with the Australian Curriculum, rather than the initially agreed upon Statements of Learning, will mean both teachers and students will find it relevant to their everyday teaching and learning.

Leaving politics and emotions aside, the fact is that NAPLAN exists and is here to stay. It is in no way perfect, and in fact continues to evolve. The most important thing is to find ways to use NAPLAN for enriching learning and improving what we do each day. Then again, with the many obstacles in a teacher’s way, this is what we always aim to do.

Mirella is a Mathematics Teacher and Education Consultant and her mission is to help parents raise mathematically confident and competent children through her site www.educationequals.com.
Here are nine helpful ideas to share with your children or to consider yourself when helping children to prepare for the NAPLAN test:

1. **Gauge your child’s response**  
Most children are not overly worried by these tests. If your child isn’t worried about them, neither should you. Try to see them as an opportunity for them to grow and learn and try not to create unnecessary angst for you child by incessantly talking about or worrying about the test.

2. **Familiarise your child with the test format**  
Looking over some example tests with your child will help to prepare them. Focus on things like reading the questions, where to write their answers and checking their answers if they get time, rather than whether their answers are correct.

3. **Don’t focus on the results, but rather the process**  
If your child is anxious about the tests, encourage them to just try their best and to become comfortable in the exam environment. More of a ‘better to learn exam skills such as time management and reading/answering the question now, than when you’re about to sit the HSC’ attitude.

4. **Encourage your child to talk about their concerns**  
If your child is nervous about NAPLAN, find out what’s worrying them and have empathy towards their concerns. Maybe talk to them about a time you were worried about a test. Try something along the lines of “I remember I was a bit nervous when I started having tests at school, but don’t worry it will get easier with time and it will ask similar questions to what you’ve been learning about at school.”

5. **Give your child perspective and encourage them to try their best**  
If your child is excessively anxious about NAPLAN, help give them some perspective by asking them “what’s the worst thing that could happen? You’re unsure about an answer—just guess. The sun will still rise tomorrow and we will be proud of you for just trying your best.”

6. **Be positive**  
Approaching new opportunities and challenges your child faces with a positive and caring attitude is one of the best influences you can have on your child. Being apprehensive and nervous is a natural part of life, so helping them to deal with these feelings will help them cope with new situations like; moving schools, joining a new club or sitting tests.

7. **Help them to relax**  
Provide your child with some relaxation strategies and remind them that feeling nervous is okay. Simple techniques like taking three deep breaths, having a drink of water and rereading questions are useful for everyday circumstances, as well as for their NAPLAN test.

8. **Prepare them for the day**  
Having a good nights sleep and a good breakfast will help your child to concentrate and try their best.

9. **Encourage them to do their best and try hard**  
Choose your words carefully and focus squarely on the effort rather than the result.
Why kids are scared of NAPLAN and how to help them

The other day I asked the students in one of my Year 7 classes "who’s a bit worried about NAPLAN this year?"

About 70% of the students’ hands went up and a few students had genuinely worried faces.

I then asked them to explain to me and the class what they were worried about. Their responses provide insight into student perceptions of NAPLAN and what we can do to help them feel more confident and self-assured this time around.

Here are some of the common responses and ways in which we can help our children overcome their fears.

“I’m scared I won’t know how to do any of the questions.”

The fear of the unknown is very real and although students who have sat NAPLAN tests before know what the tests look like, there’s still the fear of being unprepared. Students worry that they might not understand what they’re being asked or that they’ll forget what they know and have a “brain freeze” on the day. We’ve all had these fears ourselves, and usually they manifest in our dreams the night before an exam.

Luckily this is probably the easiest worry to address. To eliminate some of the fear of the unknown it is only necessary to expose kids to NAPLAN papers at their current year level. Your child’s school will no doubt have resources that you can access and more likely still, they’ve already given your child at least one paper to look over.

In my class, I asked my students to work on some of the questions from a previous NAPLAN and we then went through the solutions together and discussed how we felt. The common response from the class was “I knew how to do a lot more of those questions than I thought I would.”

“I’m worried that my mark will let the school down.”

Kids get older they know something about the My School website and the publishing of NAPLAN results and they worry that they’re “letting the team down.”

A discussion about what NAPLAN is for, and how it fits into their personal education journey, is important.

“I’m worried about having to concentrate for so long.”

For students in primary school in particular, NAPLAN is often the longest period of time that they have had to sit at one desk, concentrating on one task without input or assistance from their teachers or peers. Students in secondary school are far more used to the rigour and regularity of timed assessments.

For younger students it is no wonder that they report feeling very anxious and concerned about NAPLAN. Imagine how different and bewildering it feels to be told to sit and work without any help from the teacher and to work in complete silence. All we need to do is take the opportunity to model to children a test-taking environment. You can do this at home, even if you’ve never done it before. Set up a work area with a clock and a selection of NAPLAN questions and act as the examiner for your child. If they are familiar with how NAPLAN will feel, it won’t seem as alien or fill them with as much anxiety on the day.
“I’m scared about what my parents will say when they see my dot on the graph at the end of the year.”

When parents receive school reports for their children, there is a lot of information, most of which is provided in writing. When parents receive NAPLAN results, the impact of a diagram and a dot on a graph indicating their child’s achievement can pose more questions than it answers and kids are scared of these questions coming their way.

It has been shown that high parental expectations are important to improved educational outcomes for kids. Of course there is a balance between having positive, helpful expectations and being overbearing and accusatory. Letting your child know that you expect them to do their best at all times is an important first step.

Mirella is a Mathematics Teacher and Education Consultant and her mission is to help parents raise mathematically confident and competent children through her site www.educationequals.com.
Navigating NAPLAN: supporting kids on test day

Kate is a mum of 4, blogger and running enthusiast living in country Victoria. With 2 kids doing NAPLAN this year, she’s being kept busy preparing her children for the experience.

Even the most easy-going of children can feel nervous when the day of NAPLAN testing arrives. Some will genuinely not be at all phased by the event, while others will require additional support beforehand.

Regardless of whether your child has some anxiety around the testing or is as cool as a cucumber about it, there are some ways we as parents can help give them with a little additional support as they start their days.

HELP THEM SLEEP WELL
We all know the value of a good night’s sleep, especially since so many of us parents don’t even remember what that feels like ourselves. It is so important for our kids to get the best quality sleep they can every night, and the nights before testing are a good time to help them have a calm quiet period before they go to sleep, and make sure their bedrooms are conducive to a restful night.

Some kids prefer a nightlight, others need it pitch black – either way, try to make sure their own sleep situation preferences are met and help them get to bed at a reasonable time for their age and needs.

START THE DAY WITH POSITIVITY
If your child is feeling anxious, s/he may act out a little. I know when my kids do this it can be hard to step back from my irritation and think about why they might be behaving in such a way.

Some kids just are not morning people either, just like some adults. If your child needs an extra nudge to get moving in the morning or wakes up grumpy, try not to react to that by matching it in your own mood if you can.

Start the day with a smile. Even if you get a snarl in return, try to keep positive and eventually they will catch it from you.

A GOOD BREAKFAST HELPS BUILD A GOOD DAY.
My daughter is really hard to get food into in the morning. My other kids wake up hungry and happily consume really good, hearty breakfasts but I need to work a little harder with my girl.

By now we all know there are links between what a child has eaten for breakfast and their performance at school during the day, and we all want our kids doing the best they can every day, not just on NAPLAN days.

For my fusspot girl, a smoothie can be the best solution sometimes. She thinks of it like a chocolate milkshake so it feels like a treat, I know there’s a banana and some oats in there and I don’t add any extra sugar, so it’s a win for both of us and I know she’s going to school with some decent nutrition backing her up.

If you have fussspots at your place too, try a few things until you find something that works for both of you. I found that once I stopped thinking that they had to have specific breakfast foods it got a lot easier coming up with options. There’s no reason why anyone shouldn’t have veggie sticks and hommus, left over cold meats or even reheated pasta for breakfast, and it is worth a try to ensure kids are going to school well fueled for learning.

To follow more of Kate’s adventures, experiences and thoughts, go to her blog, www.katesaysstuff.com.