

# MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release Wednesday 14 January 2009

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## *Accountability and transparency key to education quality*

An approach that measures educational 'outputs' through student, school and teacher assessment is needed to ensure accountability in the education system, says a new paper from the Australian Council for Educational Research.

The paper, *Output Measurement in Education*, by ACER Principal Research Fellow Dr Andrew Dowling, is the latest in a series of policy papers released by ACER.

"Governments can no longer justify their performance in education in terms of inputs; that is, in terms of the amount of new money they have provided, or the number of new teachers they have employed, or the range of new computers they have installed," says Dr Dowling.

"Output measures, particularly those related to student achievement, are the new bottom line in education."

The policy paper shows that despite massive spending on education by the world's governments, totalling \$2 trillion in 2006, performance has barely improved in decades. Funding does not often correlate with performance, and therefore educational quality must be measured by other means.

The paper considers the effectiveness of accountability processes, particularly standardised tests of student performance, and corresponding rewards and sanctions based on performance indicators.

The paper shows that many high performing OECD countries do not have extensive national student testing. But Dr Dowling does not suggest from this that accountability systems do not work. In fact, recent research from the OECD, that attempt to isolate the effect of accountability systems, shows these systems do improve student results.

Dr Dowling considers the arguments for and against national testing for accountability purposes and concludes that improved measurement of student performance is both inevitable and justified, and is the best way forward for Australia's education system.

Dr Dowling also suggests that Australia's accountability system should be extended to regularly and formally evaluate individual programs designed to improve student performance.

"Performance measures are a positive shift in education but they haven't gone far enough. Educators need to know, in more detail than they do, what works and doesn't work in schools," he says.

While the paper urges increased measurement of performance and transparency of information, it does not advocate rewards and sanctions based on performance.

"The question of whether educational measurement systems should have penalties attached to them is another matter. There is not yet enough conclusive evidence to show whether the type of accountability apparent in the United States works or not," says Dr Dowling.

*Output Measurement in Education*, by Dr Andrew Dowling, Principal Research Fellow with ACER's Policy Analysis and Program Evaluation Unit, is available for download from <http://www.acer.edu.au/publications/policy-briefs.html>

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