

# Teachers brace for another New York initiative

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**Job tenure tied to student performance may be just around the corner, writes Heath Gilmore.**

Julia Gillard is fuelling speculation the federal government will consider report cards for teachers, based on class performance.

The Minister for Education has refused to back away from supporting new measures being introduced by the New York schools chancellor, Joel Klein, tying tenure of teachers to the performance of their students in standardised testing.

The minister has embraced the New York model of publicly comparing the test results of schools with the launch of the My School website, which has resonated with Australian parents.

This month Mr Klein announced that probationary teachers would need to prove themselves in the classroom before being granted tenure.

Asked about the measures, Ms Gillard said: "We obviously take an interest in developments overseas and strongly support transparency in schools. But we have already announced [changes] to My School for next year, including school funding and the next round of national testing."

Under the new Klein measures, each probationary teacher will be given a percentile ranking based on improvement in students' test scores on the state's maths and English tests over the previous year and the previous three years.

That ranking will be compared with all other teachers in the same subject area throughout New York and with peer teachers who have similar classes and teaching experience.

The NSW Greens MP John Kaye said education policy in Australia was increasingly being determined by Mr Klein's market-based ideology.

He said Mr Klein's agenda was to set up competition between schools by reducing all educational outcomes to a simple set of numbers.

"Julia Gillard has already told parents to harass teachers, based on the school's performance, on her website," he said.

"Joel Klein is pushing her to the next step, with teacher report cards based on class performance. It is only a matter of time before My School becomes My Teacher.

"Even if Julia Gillard and [the NSW Education Minister] Verity Firth deny they have any intention of going down this path, it is the logical conclusion of the My School website.

"Joel Klein's teacher report cards are a recipe for educational disaster.

"The pressure to teach to the test will force educators to sacrifice important curriculum time for areas not covered in the tests. Staffroom co-operation will be undermined and it will become much harder to find teachers for difficult-to-educate classes.

Trevor Cobbold, the national convener of Save Our Schools, said there was no credible research showing that evaluating teachers by student test scores would improve teaching.

He said teachers would avoid difficult classes rather than risk their records.

"Evaluating teachers on the basis of student test scores ignores the influence of other factors largely beyond the control of teachers, such as class composition by socio-economic status, ethnic sub-groups, gender and students with disabilities," Mr Cobbold said.

"As a result, it will lead to unfair comparisons between teachers because of differences in the composition of classes."