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League tables don't mean anything: achieving your personal best in the HSC is what counts

By **Jenny Allum**

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I am the head of a school which the *Herald* claims has done very well in our HSC results. According to its coverage, we climbed "dramatically" from 20th to 13th spot. SCEGGS is a great school but its excellence is not verified by these dubious calculations.

The drive to analyse school results from meaningless league tables sickens me. I don't think that SCEGGS did any better in 2015 than 2014. Let me explain.

These league tables are constructed around the *Herald's* definition of "success rate" (the SMH's terminology for students gaining of 90 in a course). What does this mean? Is a mark over 90 a good thing?

- What if these students achieved these results over 90 by our encouraging them to take lower level courses – say general mathematics rather than extension 1 mathematics . Would that still be what we want for our students? Is that a measure of success?
- Or perhaps it means that we encouraged students to study fewer subjects, to attempt fewer units, to study the minimum, to narrow their education – is that what we would want for our students and for their future?
- Or perhaps it does mean actually that our girls did really well – balancing challenge with success, keeping a breadth of subjects that will really help them in the world ahead, and that we helped them be good people with integrity and purpose too.

The problem with reducing something as complex as education and schooling to a single measure such as this "success rate" is that we cannot differentiate between any of these situations. When

you read that SCEGGS has a success rate of 43 per cent, placing it 13th in the state – please don't think it means anything.



HSC students sit their exams in 2015. WOLTER PEETERS

I want our girls to strive for excellence and to achieve their own personal best – whatever that may be. I want them to have a broad liberal education, studying a range of subjects to encourage them to grow as people and to broaden their thinking. I want us as a community to be just as proud of an 89 per cent in a higher level course that really challenged a student, rather than encouraging them give up along the way and know they can achieve 90 per cent at a lower level. I want all our girls to keep trying right up until the end, striving for 93, 94, 95 and not just be satisfied with being "over 90". I want our community to value excellence, and the challenge of academic rigour and most of all – striving for and achieving your own personal best.

Now we do take the HSC results seriously. We do, over time, an in-depth analysis and report that to our community. We will look at how individual girls performed against their ability level; we will construct graphs of Year 10 results against HSC results, comparative information of how different subjects did against each other and so forth. We will look at the ATAR each student gained, which subjects counted in the calculation of her ATAR and which didn't. We will look at which options and electives we chose within courses, and how our students performed in each of these. We will use all of this to help us assess how this group of girls performed against their potential. And next year, as with all years, we will identify the areas that we can do even better for the following year. And of course we will continue to work on all aspects of our programs to ensure we are delivering the best education possible in every area.

I am proud of the SCEGGS girls, on achieving their Higher School Certificates and being the fine young women I know they have become. And I know that there are many great schools out there – some of whom have been dubbed "winners" by the *Herald* and others "losers", but great schools

who extend and challenge their students, and help educate them to make a lifelong contribution to our society. I salute you all.

Jenny Allum is the head of SCEGGS Darlinghurst.



SCEGGS Darlinghurst head Jenny Allum. TOMASZ MACHNIK