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Students battle to learn HSC raw marks

By Justin Norrie Education Reporter

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MORE than 100 NSW school-leavers have banded together to lift the veil on the Board of Studies' secret HSC scaling process by launching a legal request for their raw exam marks.

The board will fight the move, saying the release of unscaled results could compromise the integrity of its marking program.

In March, the board denied a freedom of information application by an HSC graduate, Bill Kanafani, despite allowing six HSC students over the previous year access to their raw scores. In the earlier cases, there was often a huge gap between the raw marks and the much higher scaled result that at face value made it difficult to fail.

Now Hugh Parsonage, of Port Macquarie, is co-ordinating another application for about 100 recent school-leavers after making his interest known on the boredofstudies.org website.

"It's a matter of principle. I think the board needs to be more transparent about the way it marks and scales students," said Mr Parsonage, 18, who is charging all applicants a fee to defray his costs.

He said he would take his fight to the Administrative Decisions Tribunal if necessary.

James King, an HSC student from 2001 who administers the website, was the first student to receive his raw marks after lodging an application and subsequently fighting the board's rejection in the tribunal.

He was amazed by the difference between his raw and scaled marks. For English extension 1 they leapt from 66 per cent to 92 per cent, and in advanced English they jumped from 64 per cent to 84 per cent.

A spokeswoman for the board said it did "not usually release raw marks as they are of no benefit to students and have no meaning in many cases". She said requests had only been granted where the board could be sure they were not for widespread data gathering.

All HSC students receive a scaled examination mark, an assessment mark, an average of the two, and the performance bands - ranging from 1 to 6 - into which they fall for each subject.

Band 1 covers scaled marks between zero and 49 per cent, where "the student has achieved below the minimum standard expected". The next five bands each cover 10 percentile points in improving degrees of performance.

The board has refused to disclose what level of raw marks will, after scaling, become borderline scores between bands. It told Mr Kanafani that granting him access to his raw score would "assist in the determination and then public disclosure" of that information, which would be "contrary to the public interest".