



New Jersey School Boards Association

413 West State Street • Trenton, NJ 08618 • Telephone: 609.695.7600 • Toll-Free: 888.88NJSBA • Fax: 609.695.0413

REPORT OF THE STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE August 30, 2018

The New Jersey School Boards Association's Standards and Assessment Committee monitors, studies and makes recommendations on the state's curriculum standards and student assessment programs. One of nine standing committees of the Association, it is comprised of local board of education members. The primary focus of these representatives, like that of all school board members, is providing the best possible education to the students of their districts and the State of New Jersey, enabling children to reach their full potential.

After Gov. Phil Murphy took office in January 2018, he directed the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) to transition away from the PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) tests and toward a new generation of statewide assessments. As part of that effort, the NJDOE requested stakeholder input on the topic.

The NJSBA Standards and Assessment Committee (S&A Committee) has spent several months discussing the impact of standardized testing in New Jersey, especially PARCC, with board members and educators. The committee is pleased to provide input on New Jersey's statewide student assessment program. Please note that the committee's observations and recommendations may go beyond the official policy of the New Jersey School Boards Association.

Areas for Consideration

The committee identified nine general areas for consideration, discussion and recommendations on standardized testing in New Jersey:

1. The length of time for current test administration;
2. The use of current tests as a high school exit exam;
3. The use of test results in the evaluation of teachers;
4. The use of technology in assessments;
5. The use of a single vendor to develop and market the existing tests;
6. The practice of isolated test preparation;
7. The question of rigor in testing and instruction;
8. The use of test question formats that require students to demonstrate a deeper understanding of content; and
9. The issue of student stress.

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Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

Assessment is an important aspect of the teaching and learning process. As the result of its research and deliberations, the S&A Committee arrived at the following conclusions and recommendations:

- Students learning should be assessed holistically over time and not by a single assessment conducted over several days.
- Ninety minutes is too long for a single assessment; there are validated assessments that require less seat time and provide similar information.
- The emphasis on technology-based assessments must be reviewed. Some research indicates that students perform at higher levels on paper-and-pencil tests. While selecting the next state test, consideration must be given to this research.
- Clinical evaluation and classroom observation reports must reflect a district's instructional priorities and include specific suggestions and recommendations for professional growth, while informing administration decisions about tenure and other employment matters.
- Individual student results should be available by July 15 of each year so that the information can be used for student placement and to develop differentiated instructional strategies to meet the needs of all students, including those who require remediation, enrichment or support for understanding of content.
- Unfortunately, a student's socio-economic status remains among the strongest predictors of performance on standardized tests and other assessments. The most significant value of test results is the information they provide to identify individual student strengths and challenges. This information enables educators to target instruction to support each student's learning.
- Focusing testing exclusively on math and English/language arts translates to less of an emphasis and less instructional time for subjects, such as science, social studies, the arts, and other non-tested subjects. The committee strongly believes the next state testing program should ensure that this situation is addressed so that students benefit from instruction in science, social studies, the arts, and the other non-tested areas.
- The emphasis on state assessment performance has led to the neglect of social-emotional learning in a time of growing concern over violence in our schools and across society.
- Instructional time dedicated to test preparation represents a loss of instructional time for content.

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- The next generation of New Jersey tests should be criterion-referenced, rather than norm-referenced. Although described as such, the current PARCC assessment is not criterion-referenced. A criterion-referenced test sets a specific benchmark that, theoretically, is possible for everyone to meet, or not meet. Norm-referenced tests rank students in comparison to the performance their peers, rather than determining if they are attaining academic standards. A criterion-referenced assessment would more effectively identify children who need assistance in the tested academic areas.
- There should be a requirement of high school exit or end-of-course exams with an option for alternative measures, including portfolio assessment. The committee also believes in the continuation of prior practice that did not limit the assessment to one test, but permitted the use of the SAT, the ACT, ASVAB, ACCUPLACER, or other state-recognized instruments, thereby providing flexibility of choice for all students.
- The S&A Committee has a concern about the use of standardized test scores as a percentage educators' evaluations. The committee believes that the revised educator evaluation systems, established through the TEACHNJ Act and AchieveNJ, the process to implement the law, provide consistency and ensure that evaluators have a thorough understanding of the expectations for *instruction*, climate, planning and professional practice. The committee further believes that these higher standards for teacher evaluation advance NJSBA's position in support of a fair and consistent evaluation process, based on sound teaching practices and student achievement
- There is the potential for, and the appearance of, a conflict-of-interest in having a company develop tests for the state assessment program, then sell the relevant curricular material and test-preparation materials to school districts, and also sell the required assessment for a permanent teaching license. The S&A Committee believes that further discussion regarding ways to avoid potential and perceived conflicts is warranted.
- The NJDOE should review and revise standardized rubrics to guide the evaluation of student performance on state assessments. This is important in a process that should provide students with opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge on end-of-course exams, as well as multiple means of assessment, including portfolios and options such as ACT, SAT, ASVAB and ACCUPLACER in lieu of the New Jersey state standardized assessment.
- The structure of questions that facilitate deeper understanding and require critical thinking are of greater value than those that require rote memorization.
- Student stress is real and uncalled for. Educators, students, and their families would benefit from the following messages: Students are assessed on multiple types of assessments including, but not limited to, standardized tests; and an assessment is a tool to identify student successes and weaknesses, it determines appropriate instructional levels and remediation that may be needed.

Discussion and Recommendations

1. Length of time for current test administration

Educators, parents and students have voiced their concerns about the extended length of time designated for each PARCC assessment. Based on standardized tests developed by other organizations, the committee asserts that there are reliable assessments that require significantly less time while still meeting the goals of assessment.

The frequency of tests, year after year and for numerous hours over several days, is disruptive not only to classroom instruction in mathematics and language arts, but also to instruction in non-tested subjects such as science, social studies, art and music. Anecdotally, there are reports of students sitting in front of blank screens for hours; some of these students are not putting a serious effort into the test; others have extreme learning challenges and are unable to complete the test; still other students finish the test early and then must sit until the prescribed time has passed.

If we really want to improve the education of the children in our state, we should look to developing criterion-referenced tests rather than norm-referenced tests. Criterion-referenced tests “measure student performance against a fixed set of predetermined criteria or learning standards.”¹ Norm-referenced tests rank students in comparison to the performance their peers. A criterion-referenced assessment would more effectively identify children who need assistance in the tested academic areas.

The PARCC assessments are not criterion-referenced tests, even though they are billed as such. In criterion-referenced tests, it is theoretically possible for everyone to meet all the criteria. But as PARCC developer Pearson Education states:

*When constructing PARCC tests, a wide range of item difficulties is desired (i.e., from easy to hard items) so that students of all ability levels can be assessed with precision. At the operational stage, “item difficulty” statistics are used by test developers to build forms that meet desired test difficulty targets. Some of the items proved to be unexpectedly difficult. This may be due to students’ lack of familiarity with the item type or students’ limited opportunity to learn the content represented in the item.*²

The above citation from Pearson indicates that the PARCC is not a criterion-referenced, but rather a norm-referenced.³

¹ Great Schools Partnership, "Criterion-Referenced Test Definition," The Glossary of Education Reform, April 30, 2014, accessed August 29, 2018, <https://www.edglossary.org/criterion-referenced-test/>.

² Pearson, “Final Technical Report for 2016 Administration,” January 10, 2017, 60, accessed August 29, 2018, <https://www.isbe.net/documents/parcc%202016%20tech%20report.pdf>.

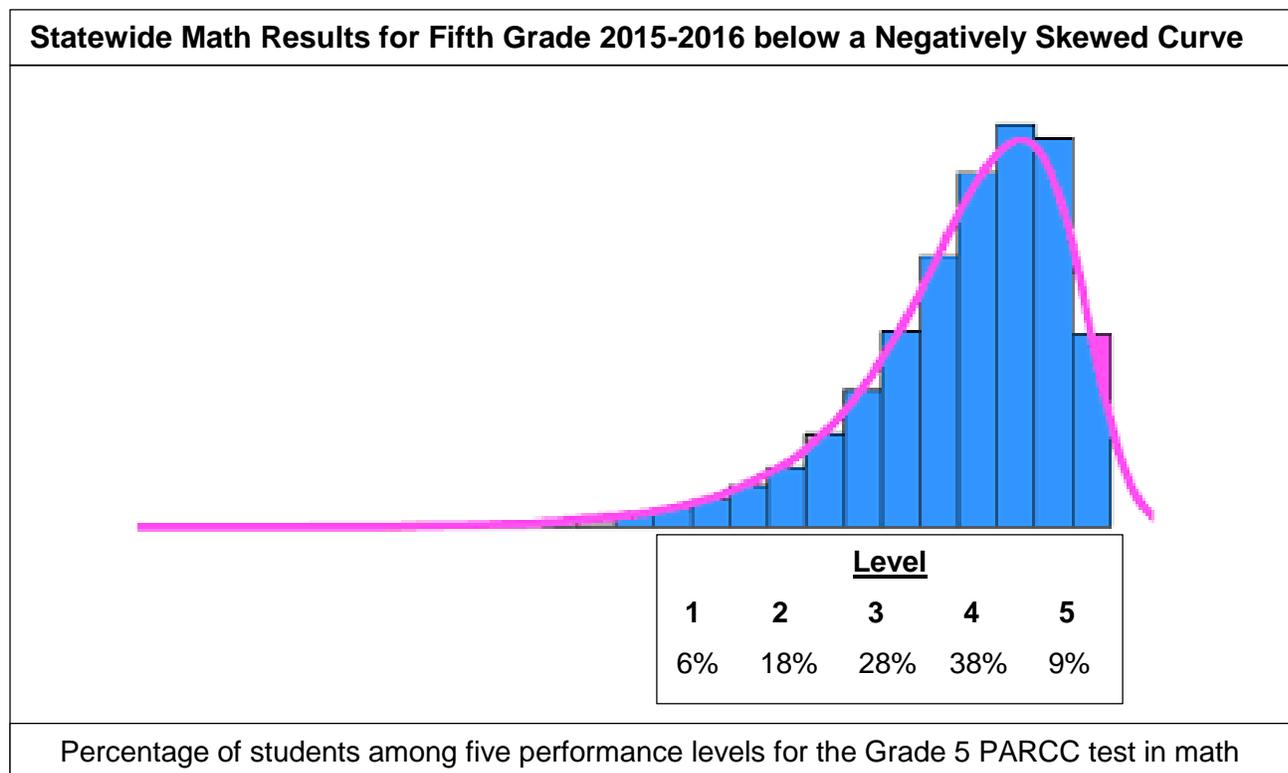
³ A description of criterion-referenced and norm-reference tests can be found in a reference guide by a publisher of educational materials and assessments at <http://files.hbe.com.au/flyerlibrary/Brigance/Criterion-referenced%20vs.%20Norm-referenced%20Assessment.pdf>.)

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On a criterion-referenced test, every student taking the exam could theoretically fail if he or she doesn't meet the expected standard; alternatively, every student could earn the highest possible score. On criterion-referenced tests, it is not only possible, but desirable, for every student to pass the test or earn a perfect score. Criterion-referenced tests have been compared to driver's license exams, which require would-be drivers to achieve a minimum passing score to earn a license.

In contrast, norm-referenced tests are designed to rank test takers on a "bell curve," or a distribution of scores that resembles, when graphed, the outline of a bell—i.e., a small percentage of students performing poorly, most performing average, and a small percentage performing well. To produce a bell-curve each time, test questions are carefully designed to accentuate performance differences among test takers—not to determine if students have achieved specified learning standards, learned required material, or acquired specific skills. Unlike norm-referenced tests, criterion-referenced tests measure performance against a fixed set of criteria.

As can be seen from the chart below, the PARCC test results can be visualized as a negatively skewed curve. (This is one example, but the negatively skewed curve holds for all the tests.)



The NJSBA Standards and Assessment Committee urges the New Jersey Department of Education to develop assessments which require less time than do the current PARCC assessments, and to seriously consider moving to a criterion-referenced test, rather than a norm-referenced test.

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2. The use of current tests as a high school exit exam

One concern with the current test is the requirement that students achieve a specific score on the PARCC test to earn a New Jersey high school diploma. State law requires that New Jersey's student pass an "exit exam." For many years, that exam was the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA). Prior practice permitted the use of other standardized tests, such as the SAT, the ACT, the ASVAB (the military entrance exam) and ACCUPLACER, as high school exit exams. Should this practice be continued when a new standardized assessment is instituted in the state?

The Standards and Assessment Committee agrees with the requirement of high school exit or end-of-course exams. We believe there should be some type of final, or exit, exam and that alternative assessments, including portfolio assessments, should be available for students. The committee recommends the continuation of prior practice that does not limit the assessment to one test, but rather permits the use of SATs, ACTs, ASVAB, ACCUPLACER or other state-recognized assessments, thereby providing flexibility of choice for all students.

3. The use of test results in the evaluation of teachers

There is a wide range of opinion regarding the use of student scores in teacher evaluations, and there are both supporters and detractors of the practice. The S&A Committee discussed whether student scores should be a factor in evaluations and, if so, to what degree (i.e., what percentage of the evaluation should student scores comprise), as well as the evolving role of classroom evaluations. As a result of these discussions, the committee has strong concerns about the use of standardized test scores as a percentage of educator evaluations and its impact on the process.

The New Jersey School Boards Association supports a fair and consistent evaluation process, based on student achievement and sound teaching practices. In the past, NJSBA advocated for continuation of the TEACHNJ requirement to factor standardized test results into teacher evaluations at least until there was an opportunity to determine its impact of the evaluation process.

TEACHNJ, enacted in 2012, and AchieveNJ, the process to implement the law, provided for comprehensive teacher evaluations using validated instruments on which evaluators must be thoroughly trained. Unlike evaluations prior to AchieveNJ, which were neither reliable nor consistent, the revised systems have raised the standards of evaluations by ensuring that evaluators have a thorough understanding of the process including expectations of instruction, climate, planning, and professional practice.

The S&A Committee believes that these higher standards for teacher evaluation advance NJSBA's position in support of a fair and consistent evaluation process, based on sound teaching practices and student achievement.

4. The use of technology in the assessments

The S&A Committee believes there is some cause for concern about the exclusive use of technology in assessments. Some research indicates that students may perform at higher levels when using traditional paper-and-pencil tests. For example, students who took the 2014-2015 PARCC exams via computer tended to score lower than those who took the exams with paper and pencil.

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The committee believes there must be additional thought and deliberation given to this factor to ensure that taking a test on an electronic platform does not have a negative impact on students. Districts (or students) choosing to take assessments using the traditional paper-and-pencil format should not be penalized financially, and data should be returned to the district no later than July 15 following the spring testing period.

Finally, districts across the state made a significant investment in technology, for equipment, infrastructure, staffing and professional development to support the required assessment technology. While that technology should primarily be used for daily instruction, the NJDOE should be cognizant of these extraordinary expenditures as it selects the next generation of standardized tests in the state.

5. The use of a single vendor to develop and market the existing tests

With the PARCC assessments, there was essentially a single vendor developing and marketing the tests. This proved to be a point of controversy. In addition, the same vendor also sells curriculum materials for instruction, test-review materials, and the required undergraduate assessments for teacher licensure. As a result, there has been significant public discussion about the appearance of conflicts of interest.

For-profit corporations can sell testing materials at costs lower than non-profit organizations such as the Educational Testing Service because the corporation can take a loss on the testing portion of its business and then make a profit on the rest of its products. For example, the Pearson company, which publishes PARCC, encompasses some 39 companies, including several prominent education publishers. The company has extensive holdings in both K-12 education and at the university level. In New Jersey, all teachers need to pass the edTPA test, a subsidiary of Pearson.

The S&A Committee believes there is a potential conflict of interest in having the same for-profit publisher involved in every aspect of the development of the test, relevant curricular material and test preparation materials. The committee believes that further discussion regarding these potential conflicts, including the perceived monopoly of textbook and educational materials suppliers, is warranted.

6. The practice of isolated test preparation

The most effective test preparation is high quality instruction that supports New Jersey Student Learning Standards. Too often, the “drill and kill” approach is used, taking time away from instruction and placing stress on students and teachers. In addition, “drill and kill” is not a practice that provides the thorough understanding required by current assessments.

Regardless of what state standardized assessment is finally chosen, the educational community must remind all stakeholders that teachers should be teaching to standards, that the best test preparation is high-quality instruction, and that “cramming for a test” does not equal understanding content and being able to apply it appropriately.

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A clear message needs to be sent by the state, through county NJDOE representatives, to local boards of education, chief school administrators and building administrators, and on to teachers: Quality instructional practices that are chosen because they complement a student's learning style, and are delivered in a welcoming, healthy, safe climate, are the foundation for effective learning.

7. The question of rigor in testing and instruction

Research shows that the rigor of instruction, classwork and homework is a predictor of student achievement. The increased rigor of the current assessments is directly related to the increased rigor associated with the New Jersey Student Learning Standards. Those standards require test questions to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate knowledge. That knowledge is best demonstrated through the types of questions teachers are developing daily and which students encounter on the SAT, ACT and PARCC tests. Rigor should not be debilitating; however, an easy test does not inform the student, teacher or family of student progress in mastering standards.

The S&A Committee endorses the increased rigor in academic expectations for all students. The committee also believes that, just as instruction should be differentiated, so should the degree of rigor. The committee also believes that the NJDOE should develop standardized rubrics to guide the evaluation of student performance on assessments. This is important in a process that should provide students with opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge on end-of-course assessments as well as multiple means of assessment including portfolios and, in lieu of the state standardized test, options such as ACT, SAT, ASVAB, and ACCUPLACER.

While students develop and learn at varying rates, it is important that educators continue to address the challenges that cause many students to fall further behind. Students who are in remedial/academic support programs and whose instructional levels are chronically two or more years below grade level are at a disadvantage compared to their on-grade-level peers when they graduate from high school. Addressing this challenge must be a priority.

The committee also believes that there should be further discussion on assessing subjects that are currently not tested. The current assessment program puts unreasonable weight and investment on "tested subjects" and does not encourage and reward investment in building deep, meaningful knowledge across all disciplines. Whether it is the sciences, social sciences, or the arts, each subject area contributes to the overall, well-rounded education of an individual. Unfortunately, the reality is that, too often, it is the untested areas like science and history that are neglected, as the system forces all to focus on the tested subjects.

The committee also believes that there should be a comprehensive discussion to determine the goals of assessment. Are we using assessment to inform instruction? Or, are we using assessment to inform students and their families of a child's strengths that, in turn, will guide them as they plan and make choices regarding their futures?

8. The use of test question formats that require students to demonstrate a deep understanding of content

Should the test questions require students to show a deep understanding of the content and an ability to think critically, including providing support for their responses via references to the text? The current generation of tests is characterized by questions that require explaining steps to

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arrive at a mathematical answer and questions that require students to include supporting evidence from text in their responses. Unlike multiple choice or matching questions, these questions give students deeper opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge. New Jersey students have been explaining steps in state math assessments since 1996 on tests like GEPA (Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment).

In today's information age, where content is rapidly evolving, it is imperative that students have a strong foundation on which to build knowledge of new subject matter. The practice of requiring students to refer to text during an exam in order to provide supporting information encourages them to be true lifelong learners. There is agreement among educators that it does not matter if the questions are developed by a classroom teacher, a commercial test developer or a non-profit organization, these tests must assess critical thinking and a deep understanding of the content.

The Standards and Assessment Committee endorses the structure of questions that facilitate deeper understanding and require critical thinking over one that requires rote memorization.

When the recent generation of tests (the PARCC tests) was initiated, many students did poorly on the writing prompts. Educators could not understand why their students did poorly, since the students' writing for school assignments was done well. Once information was published on how to score well on tested writing samples, results improved dramatically. For students to score well on writing samples scored externally, they had to follow this formula: (a) Restate the question; (b) Answer the question; (c) Cite the source, usually with three facts from the passage, and (d) Explain the answer.

The committee agrees that students need strong content background. However, they also need content background in other subjects, including the arts, science and social studies that are often omitted from the daily elementary school program with the time spent on "learning how to take the test."

It is also important to note that while all educators agree that critical thinking is an important skill, not all agree on what should be taught and when. New Jersey Student Learning Standards went into place in 2016 following a review of the state's previous standards, which incorporated the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for mathematics and Language Arts. The current standards are substantially similar to the CCSS.

However, the English Language Arts Common Core State Standards are not endorsed by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). The organization, which represents elementary, middle, high school and college teachers of reading and writing, did not endorse the Common Core due to both the content and the way it requires reading and writing to be taught.⁴

9. The issue of student stress

The Standards & Assessment Committee recognizes that student stress is real. It is often a byproduct of the climate in which students are learning. Educators, students, and their families would benefit from messages that students are measured on multiple types of assessments, including but not limited to, standardized tests. The goal of the assessments is to identify areas

⁴ "P.S. How The Common Core Hurts Kids As Readers And Writers," Real Learning CT, July 29, 2016, accessed August 29, 2018, <https://reallarningct.com/2016/07/29/p-s-how-the-common-core-hurts-kids-as-readers-and-writers/>.

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where students need support as well as those in which they would benefit from enrichment. Until the state eliminates the burden on districts to "perform" and redefines the current narrow definition of performance, it is hard to sincerely deliver that message.

There is some misunderstanding regarding the belief system of educating the “whole child.” While there is much discussion about the whole child, others ask how that strategy prepares students for college and careers. Social-emotional learning, or SEL, provides the structure to support students as they navigate the difficult landscape of life by developing students’ social skills. SEL is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

Final Thoughts

Although the NJSBA Standards and Assessment Committee has specific concerns and recommendations regarding state standardized testing, the committee embraces the application of assessments as one factor in the teaching and learning process.

Districts should consider adopting a robust formative assessment process that includes quarterly assessments in all subjects, which are developed by the teachers who teach in those areas, using questions modeled after those found on the SATs and PARCC that require critical thinking, citing evidence and the explanation of math responses. The assessment should be based on what subject-area teachers agree are the essential takeaways for each subject during a quarter.

While it is not the subject of this position paper, the committee believes that effective evaluations are those using a clinical supervision model, three-minute walkthroughs that help teachers and administrators to develop a “common eye” of district instructional expectations. “Instructional rounds,” which involve visiting and observing teachers at work in their classrooms, can identify successes and challenges in the instructional program, and they can inform the district’s program of professional development for educators. Observing high-quality teaching practices can also help newer teachers model excellence in instructional techniques and strategies.



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STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE 2017-2018

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NJSBA Bylaws, Article X, Section 11

The Standards and Assessment Committee shall monitor the code on New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards and the state's assessment program and their impact on all types of districts in the state of New Jersey.

The Standards and Assessment Committee shall study issues relating to the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards and the state assessment program, report periodically to the Delegate Assembly and shall recommend additions, modifications or deletions to policy as needed.

The Standards and Assessment Committee shall prepare and present appropriate testimony on issues involving standards and assessment affecting the delivery of education and assessment to the children in New Jersey and in support of Association policies. The committee may also, when necessary and appropriate, recommend positions on standards and assessment issues for consideration by the Board of Directors.

The article below is provided as an additional source of information.

[Sunday Review](#) | Opinion
The New York Times

The Common Core Costs Billions and Hurts Students⁵

By Diane Ravitch
July 23, 2016

For 15 years, since the passage of George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind act, education reformers have promoted standardized testing, school choice, competition and accountability (meaning punishment of teachers and schools) as the primary means of improving education. For many years, I agreed with them. I was an assistant secretary of education in George H. W. Bush's administration and a member of three conservative think tanks.

But as I watched the harmful effects of No Child Left Behind, I began to have doubts. The law required that all schools reach 100 percent proficiency as measured by state tests or face harsh punishments. This was an impossible goal. Standardized tests became the be-all and end-all of education, and states spent billions on them. Social scientists have long known that the best predictor of test scores is family income. Yet policy makers encouraged the firing of thousands of teachers and the closing of thousands of low-scoring public schools, [mostly in poor black and Hispanic neighborhoods](#).

As the damage escalated, I renounced my support for high-stakes testing and charter schools. Nonetheless, I clung to the hope that we might agree on national standards and a national curriculum. Surely, I thought, they would promote equity since all children would study the same things and take the same tests. But now I realize that I was wrong about that, too. Six years after the release of our first national standards, the Common Core, and the new federal tests that accompanied them, it seems clear that the pursuit of a national curriculum is yet another excuse to avoid making serious efforts to reduce the main causes of low student achievement: poverty and racial segregation.

The people who wrote the Common Core standards sold them as a way to improve achievement and reduce the gaps between rich and poor, and black and white. But the promises haven't come true. Even in states with strong common standards and tests, racial achievement gaps persist. Last year, average [math scores](#) on the National Assessment of Educational Progress [declined for the first time since 1990](#); reading scores were flat or decreased compared with a decade earlier. The development of the Common Core was funded almost entirely by [the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation](#). It was a rush job, and the final product ignored the needs of children with disabilities, English-language learners and those in the early grades. It is no surprise that there has been widespread pushback.

⁵ Diane Ravitch, "The Common Core Costs Billions and Hurts Students," The New York Times, July 23, 2016, accessed August 29, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/24/opinion/sunday/the-common-core-costs-billions-and-hurts-students.html>.

APPENDIX

In 2009 President Obama announced Race to the Top, a competition for \$4.35 billion in federal grant money. To qualify, states had to adopt “college and career ready standards,” a requirement that was used to pressure them into adopting national standards. Almost every state applied, even before the specifics of the Common Core were released in June 2010.

The federal government, states and school districts have spent billions of dollars to phase in the standards, to prepare students to take the tests and to buy the technology needed to administer them online. There is nothing to show for it. The Race to the Top demoralized teachers, caused teacher shortages and led to the defunding of the arts and other subjects that were not tested. Those billions would have been better spent to reduce class sizes, especially in struggling schools, to restore arts and physical education classes, to rebuild physically crumbling schools, and to provide universal early childhood education.

Children starting in the third grade may spend more than 10 hours a year taking state tests — and weeks preparing for them. Studies show that students perform better on written tests than on online tests, yet most schools across the nation are assessing their students online, at enormous costs, because that is how the Common Core tests are usually delivered. Computer glitches are common. Sometimes the server gets overloaded and breaks down. Entire states, [like Alaska](#), have canceled tests because of technical problems. More than 30 states have reported computer testing problems since 2013, [according to FairTest](#), a testing watchdog.

Standardized tests are best at measuring family income. Well-off students usually score in the top half of results; students from poor homes usually score in the bottom. The quest to “close achievement gaps” is vain indeed when the measure of achievement is a test based on a statistical norm. If we awarded driver’s licenses based on standardized tests, half the adults in this country might never receive one. The failure rates on the Common Core tests are staggeringly high for black and Hispanic children, students with disabilities and English-language learners. Making the tests harder predictably depresses test scores, creating a sense of failure and hopelessness among young children.

If we really cared about improving the education of all students, we would give teachers the autonomy to tailor instruction to meet the needs of the children in front of them and to write their own tests. We would insist that students in every school had an equal opportunity to learn in well-maintained schools, in classes of reasonable size taught by expert teachers. Anyone who wants to know how students in one state compare with students in other states can get that information from the N.A.E.P., the existing federal test.

What is called “the achievement gap” is actually an “opportunity gap.” What we need are schools where all children have the same chance to learn. That doesn’t require national standards or national tests, which improve neither teaching nor learning, and do nothing to help poor children at racially segregated schools. We need to focus on that, not on promoting failed ideas.

[Diane Ravitch](#), a historian of education at New York University, is the author of “The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education.”