

Toward a national test

p. 06

President Clinton's call for national testing to measure the reading and math skills of American schoolchildren, even if heeded by Congress, won't cure the well-documented ills of public education in this country. It could, however, enable parents and educators in the disparate states to better measure the progress of their students against those in other parts of the United States, and that could in turn drive the laggards to keep up. In an increasingly mobile society, in which students in California ought to know whether their math skills hold up against their peers in Connecticut and elsewhere, national standards and assessments make all kinds of sense.

That doesn't mean that this modest effort — which would only address reading skills of fourth-graders and the math abilities of eighth-graders, and in which states would only participate if they volunteered — won't be controversial. Some critics charge that a national test, with results for individual students, will unfairly stigmatize poor children in struggling districts by comparing them to their more successful counterparts in privileged neighborhoods. But ignorance of the stark disparities in opportunity and achievement between students of different means is surely no way to bring them closer together.

And past claims that national tests are a federal government attempt to wrest control of children's education from states and local school districts are already being revived, though the fact that any test would be voluntary seriously undercuts the argument. Thus it was no surprise that Clinton called the tests and the standards that will drive them "national" rather than "federal," a term that these days is considered an epithet in some circles.

By whatever name, the test would be formulated by a group of education leaders chosen by the Department of Education. They will base the test on the already established and reliable National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) and the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), which are given to fourth- and eighth-graders every four years. Unlike those tests, which only inform states about the percentage of their students who read or do math above, at, or below grade level, the new national exams would be administered annually and would provide individual scores to all students, enabling school districts and parents to see where each child stands nationally.

Parents may not like what they see. In states such as Louisiana that have developed their own statewide achievement tests, for example, that test shows that 88 percent of Louisiana students are reading at a level deemed appropriate for their grade. Yet on the most recent NAEP reading test, only 15 percent of the students scored as proficient. That ought to be sending Louisiana a clear message about the adequacy of its own reading standards.

California, which has no statewide assessment, cannot yet make such comparisons. But the limited existing national tests have already proved useful here. The state's recent abysmal showing on the NAEP test helped spur significant reforms in the teaching of reading in the primary grades. If the expanded, individually scored national test that the president proposes is prepared well, it could provide an even greater service to all the states.

Toward a national standard math will give the ...

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Toward a national standard math will give the states useful information about their schools.

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1. Richmond Times-Dispatch

01/28/98; Edition: City; Section: EDITORIAL; Page A-15

FAMILIES NEED NO NATIONAL HEADMASTER, LEAST OF ALL CLINTON

By Robert Holland

If Bill Clinton is shown to be a sexual predator and a practiced liar, that won't be easy to explain to children in the country's elementary classrooms, where pictures of Clinton distributed in government propaganda campaigns often hang.

But this President's fall also would present an opportunity to roll back the Clintons' brazen grab for power over American schooling and child care, and in the process to put the power rightfully with the everyday moms and dads and teachers.

Pope John Paul II's historic visit to Cuba was overshadowed by the sordidness overhanging the Clinton White House, but among the pontiff's profound observations bringing hope to the oppressed, was this:

When it comes to schools, "parents ... should be able to choose."

The Pope was zeroing in on Fidel Castro's suppression of Catholic education in the four decades that he has ruled a gentle island with the iron fist of Marxism.

The Clintons' education blueprint for America goes more in the Castroite direction than it does toward expanding the freedoms of the consumers of education. It molds students to state specifications rather than freeing individuals to pursue their own dreams. It is about state-controlled "human resource development" - not liberation.

No, the Clinton blueprint doesn't suppress religious education, or other private or home instruction - not directly. But it is hostile to an unfettered and expanded exercise of choice.

Last fall, Clinton's Secretary of Education, Richard Riley, demonized proposals to award

free-choice vouchers to 2,000 desperately poor Washington, D.C., kids, and to allow American families to set up tax-free savings accounts to help defray expenses of public, private, parochial, or at-home schooling. Riley accused the proponents of ulterior motives, prompting a strong rebuttal from the education chief of the U.S. Catholic Conference.

THE HEART of the Clinton scheme is national School-to-Work. From a very early age, children will be steered into career pathways leading to jobs that workforce development boards decide they're needed for. They will be assessed according to their acquisition of workforce competencies, and they will have to earn a government skills certificate to land or keep a job.

In Oregon, the vanguard state for STW, high school students now spend their days learning such applied arts as "car sales" and "hospitality," according to The Eugene Register Guard. These studies include such lessons as "how to set a table and why it's important to serve from the right or the left." In a few more years, Oregon students will not be able to graduate or work unless they can prove they have mastered such skills as working in a team.

Such utilitarian requirements will affect children who are in private or home schools no less than public-schoolchildren. STW is the functional equivalent of Castro sending conscripts into the fields to cut sugar cane.

PERHAPS it was only coincidental, but barely noticed amid l'affaire Monica last week came a major blow to Clinton's second-term plan to cement his education takeover with the imposition of national assessments. The bipartisan National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) delayed any national tests at least until 2001 - a year after Clinton is scheduled to leave office (and of course he could be out of there much, much earlier).

The President had sought to impose testing by fiat until the Republican Congress at long last mustered the backbone to resist the education putsch. And the Congressman who staunchly led the anti-testing forces, Education Committee chairman Bill Goodling, has news for the NAGB: There won't be any national tests started in 2001 either, not unless Congress signs off. And it shouldn't, because national tests would bring a national curriculum imposed from Washington, an unconstitutional and unwise concentration of power to decree official knowledge.

Dismantling what Bill and Hillary Clinton, and cronies like Ira Magaziner and Robert Reich, put in place during Clinton's first term, through the 103rd Congress, will be much tougher. Four years after the enabling legislation passed, the intricate School-to-Work/Goals 2000 web now extends, to one extent to another, to all 50 states.

In Virginia, the Allen administration applied (unwisely) for STW funds - but it hoped to do it Virginia's way; that is, on a voluntary, academics-first basis. Federal action on the application is pending. However, Democrats Emily Couric and Ted Bennett have bills in the current General Assembly that would bring this state on board with national STW. For instance, they would mandate curriculum integration, a merger of academics with vocationalism, as well as use of assessments and skill-certification on the Clintonite model. Governor Jim Gilmore hails high technology but does he favor STW's low statism?

THE DECISIVE battles, though, may be in Washington. The congressional majority finally has a semblance of a strategy to switch the paradigm from statism to freedom. A key part builds on the amendment Senator Slade Gorton championed last fall: Bundle 120 federal education programs into one block grant, and send the \$10 billion to states to use for locally determined needs. Education savings accounts are back, too, as well as new pilot projects for school choice.

The time is certainly propitious for turning school reform from coercion to liberty. Spending authorization for Goals 2000, which is linked to STW, ends this September 30. (STW itself is supposed to sunset in 2001.) If Clinton is no longer in a position to block termination of those schemes with veto threats, so much the better. If part of the reason for that is a sex scandal, he will have no one credibly to blame except himself. ■

34. Education Week

January 21, 1998

The Tyranny of a National Curriculum

By Marc F. Bernstein

National testing and national curriculum are one and the same. In spite of U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley's assertion that it is possible to support national testing (which he does) and oppose national curriculum (which he also does), most educators agree that "what is tested is what will be taught." Teachers and administrators will spend incredible amounts of their time poring over test questions to analyze the content of each, so that no curriculum gaps exist. And when a significant number of students fail to answer certain questions correctly, teachers will rework the curriculum to guarantee that students are taught that specific material and can answer the questions correctly the next time around.

Tests aren't used merely to grade pupil performance; they also drive curriculum and textbook selection. Already, some textbook publishers have revised their history texts to conform to the contentious voluntary national standards in history. ("Glimmer of History Standards Shows Up in Latest Textbooks," Oct. 8, 1997.) How long will it take for history teachers to adapt their curriculum and teaching to these new textbooks?

If we accept the premise that national testing is synonymous with the development of national curricula, then we have to decide if the best interests of children are served by having a uniform curriculum in the areas of reading and

mathematics (and, later perhaps, in social studies, language arts, and science). Though a good argument could be made to support such a decision, the inherent risks far outweigh the potential benefits.

People who support a national testing program believe that too many students are failing to perform to their potential and that drastic steps need to be taken to improve their education. And, these supporters hold, only the federal government can do it. Through a series of national tests, which will point out failing schools, learning will be improved, chiefly as the result of increased public scrutiny, the testing proponents conclude. They point to many of our large cities or isolated rural areas where student achievement is particularly low. If only parents in these places were aware of how poorly their children's schools were performing, the reasoning goes, increased competition and accountability would force the schools to improve.

How simplistic. What is ignored is ample research evidence that poor student performance correlates strongly with low per-pupil expenditures, parents' own low educational-attainment levels, and family poverty. We all want higher standards and improved achievement, but national testing poses real dangers to public education, and to the role delineation between the federal government and the states.

We have only to recall our experience in developing the voluntary national history standards to shudder at the

prospect of national tests. A panel of "recognized experts" was brought together, after the group's composition was debated ad nauseam to ensure a proper balance of ethnicity, gender, religion, geography, and so on. These well-intentioned people then embarked on the never-ending task of determining what all American schoolchildren should learn about their country's history. Before they had reached the American Revolution, the panel's work was in trouble. Advocates for American Indians, for African-Americans, as well as for Italian-Americans and a host of other cultural interests (not to mention religious groups), charged that their constituents' contributions were being underrepresented. Then scholars disagreed over the priority to be given, say, geography vs. economics, environment vs. nationalism, human rights vs. urbanization. The end product was an incoherent set of standards that continues to be attacked.

Whether any new panel of experts is selected by Secretary Riley or a nonpartisan board is inconsequential. More troubling is the process that would have to be followed to create consensus, reduce criticism, and advance the political correctness of our time.

Such a panel's ineffectiveness is far less dangerous than the possibility that its members might have a preconceived agenda motivated by some desire to change American education or society. Is

it inconceivable that a group of ideologues —political, religious, or other—might achieve a dominant position on the panel? And would it not be possible then that they would use that position to advance their own deeply held beliefs? What better way to effect a change in America than through its children's education?

A further reason to reject efforts that advance a national curriculum is to prevent bipartisan panels of experts from imposing specific educational strategies on all U.S. students. We have had copious examples over recent decades of educational fads, often the products of university think-tanks with little real-life contact or research to support their conclusions. In the 1960s, the "new math" advanced set theory and deemphasized more traditional computation and word problems. In the 1970s, English classrooms ignored spelling errors and sentence structure in the advancement of "creative writing." In the 1980s, the purist version of "whole language" replaced the teaching of phonics, suggesting that all students would benefit from a literature-based reading curriculum devoid of phonics instruction.

The results of all these trends have been diametrically proportional to the blind enthusiasms with which they were once embraced. Yet, for the most part,

exposure to the fads of a university research group, an influential theorist, or a self-interested organization has been confinable to a single state or a region of the country. That may change with national testing.

President Clinton's proposal is for national tests only in reading and mathematics, but the risks are as great in these subjects as in any other, perhaps greater. The choices of an expert panel would dictate the reading tests' focus, whether on vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, or comprehension. Would an expert panel in math permit calculators, and for which parts of the test? Would the math test reflect the de-emphasis of basic mathematical skills that Tom Loveless, the Harvard University professor of public policy, recently criticized in these pages?

Developing a national curriculum is subject to the same pressures that affect other public-policy decisions —pressure to create a consensus among well-intentioned scholars; pressure from unrelenting ideologues and lobby groups; pressure to be part of a larger school of thought (or educational fad). These pressures exist, to a lesser extent, in each of our states' departments of education. My own state of New York, for example, is replacing its 13-year-old Global

Studies curriculum with one entitled Global History. The former course applied a regional perspective to the study of history: By studying distinct regions of the world, students were to learn to make connections between different economic systems, or to gauge the influence of geography on civilization. But many students were simply confounded by this approach.

Now the state will return to a chronological approach to studying the linkages of major historical themes over time. Local educators had been suggesting this for years, but it took well into the curriculum's second decade for the state education department to be convinced.

We can only imagine how long it might take to change a national curriculum —and how many millions of students would suffer in the meantime. States have served well as the laboratories of education, allowing different strategies and practices to be tried, modified, and then expanded or discarded. Yes, of course, we have to strive for higher standards for our children's education. But we can do it without national tests.

Marc F. Bernstein is the superintendent of schools in the Bellmore-Merrick Central High School District, North Merrick, N.Y. ■

The new school standards: A cheer and a caveat

By Peter Schrag

GIVEN THE difficulty of its task, the work of the commission charged with developing new standards for California schools in math, reading and writing deserves, at the very least, respectful attention, and probably a great deal more. Its new proposals, rooted in a firm foundation of basic skills and demanding a far higher standard of proficiency than anything now in place on a statewide basis, represent a major step in upgrading California school curriculums from kindergarten through the end of high school.

Nonetheless, no official commission in a state as complex and large as this can escape the perils and controversies inherent in writing a set of guidelines for

every student in every school, and this one certainly hasn't.

The danger is that too much will be taken on faith. That's particularly the case with the commission's math proposals, which, while they demand a higher degree of math achievement than the weak requirements now in place in many California high schools, also venture into uncharted realms of curricular organization for which there is no systematic evidence of success and, in some respects, no track record at all. The state Board of Education, which has the final say on the standards, will hear plenty about that when it begins its deliberations this week.

The 21-member standards panel,

officially the California Commission for the Establishment of Academic Content and Performance Standards, built on the foundations of the revised California frameworks in reading and math. That means, among other things, language arts teaching rooted in systematic phonics and phonemic awareness, elements now regarded as essential to effective reading instruction. But at the other end of the line, particularly in math, there may be major problems, pedagogical and political.

In essence, the commission's math panel proposes to fuse the teaching of algebra and geometry in the eighth, ninth and 10th grades and in some respects to stretch them over four years instead of

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treating them as distinct areas (algebra I in eighth grade, geometry in ninth, algebra II in 10th grade), which, of course, is how they have traditionally been taught. Since many mathematical ideas and principles stretch across the fields, that proposal is attractive in concept, particularly for good teachers and good students. But can it succeed if it's implemented across the board?

The defenders of the proposal say, among other things, that that's how the Japanese do it. But even if that's the case and there is considerable doubt that it is the claim may owe more to current academic fashion than to any evidence that it would work here. The new program will not provide a set of Japanese parents for every student, much less the rest of the Asian cultures with which our educational wannabes so relentlessly compare our schools these days.

When commission members and staff were asked last week to provide examples of the successful use of their proposals in other states or communities, their answer was pretty much a blank. One staffer said he had heard that the integrated approach was being used in Davis, but commission chair Ellen Wright cautioned that since they had just heard about it, the panel wasn't sure it was the same thing they were proposing.

Either way, the reply was hardly one to generate confidence in the proposal. And since stretching out and combining algebra and geometry would also require middle-school teachers to teach geometry, even though most were never trained for it, makes the prospects even more worrisome.

There are, in addition, questions about the difficulty of the standards not that they are too low, as some dissenting commission members complain, but that they are so high that they will not be taken seriously in the schools where they are most needed. Wright is surely correct when she says that this state has to expect more of its students and schools than it now does. She's also right that those "fixed, knowable, understandable" expectations should extend to all students, not just the college bound.

But are we now on the verge of lurching from the desert to the rain forest? Can all students, in the pursuit of what may be mythic "world-class standards," really be expected to complete three years of math, including a second year of algebra? (Currently just over half do). Can all fourth-graders really be expected to read a half-million words a year outside school, as the commission proposes, and all 10th-graders 2 million words the equivalent of more than two major adult

books a month? Of course these are just goals, but if they're set at absurd heights, how many schools will even try?

The commission relied considerably on experts who said its math standards are comparable to those used on the much cited TIMSS (Third International Math and Science Survey), a survey of achievement on which U.S. schoolchildren ranked no more than average, well below the likes of Japan and Singapore, the current favorites in the "world-class" race. But TIMSS was composed of items on which there was a good deal of international negotiation among school officials trying to make sure their curriculums were well enough represented so that their students would get respectable scores.

President Clinton first wanted to use TIMSS as the basis for his proposed national test in math, then quietly dropped it because it seemed not to be a reliable standard for U.S. students. It might be worth finding out precisely why.

If the commission wants to try promising but unproven ideas, it could well propose tests in a select number of districts or schools. But why risk a set of strong proposals on the uncertain ground of one risky innovation?

PETER SCHRAG's column appears in *The Bee* on Wednesday. ■

National Tests Would Clinch the Triumph of Ideology in Education...

By Robert Holland

To hear President Clinton tell it at a Democratic fund-raiser in Arlington last weekend, opposition to his bid to impose national testing (and thereby a national curriculum) on America's 15,000 school districts stems from "a conflict between ideology and reality." Well, ideological zealotry must be running amok in the land, given that only six states have committed to administering Clinton's "voluntary" reading and math tests if they survive the current challenge in Congress.

Small wonder that Clinton, in speaking to that \$1,000-per-ticket dinner, urged Virginians to elect his Willie-Wonk policy twin, Don Beyer,

their Governor in order to "send a message" of support for the Clintons' scheme to nationalize education. No doubt a Governor Beyer would be a dependable ally in all Clintonite initiatives to expand the authority of the governmental village at the expense of parents.

But consider where ideology stops and reality begins when the federal government shapes education policy, as it increasingly has since the mid-1960s.

A GOOD PLACE to begin is with the Bilingual Education Act of 1968, one of numerous federal incursions that liberal politicians and the education establishment have supported. The act's purpose was to help Hispanic children

learn English. But in a recent paper for The Brookings Institution, education historian Diane Ravitch notes that almost 30 years later, "it is clear that bilingual education has been a dismal failure."

The dropout rate for Hispanic youth is 30 percent, or more than double the rate for blacks or whites. On the other hand, Hispanic children who speak English well are far less likely to drop out.

What is so insidious about bilingual education is that it encourages children to dilly-dally about learning English, so that their mounting frustration is practically guaranteed. The alternative is English-immersion courses in which, with caring help, the children must communicate only in their new language.

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Most learn quickly — in months, not years.

New York State shows how extreme — and, yes, ideological — bilingual education has become. The state's educrats require that when at least 20 students from Caribbean nations speak or understand a Creole language, instruction must be offered in that tongue. But if those students had never come to America, they would have been taught in English — the official language of the Caribbean nations New York educrats have tabbed for this linguistic separatism.

This, then, is one of the bizarre mutants of multiculturalism: Bilingualism is being used not to help children learn English but to maintain their native culture, at least as it may be reinterpreted by the politicizers of education.

Clearly, this is a triumph of ideology over realism. But President Clinton and Congress have agreed to double spending on bilingual education — to \$354 million — and that will stimulate even more state and local spending on a policy that harms children and disunites the nation.

THEN THERE'S Title I, the federal government's largest single K-12 education program, which has rolled along like the muddy Mississippi since passage of LBJ's Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Somewhere across yon Bridge to the 21st

Century, Washington probably will commemorate spending the one-trillionth taxpayer dollar on Title I. The program currently costs taxpayers a cool \$7.2 billion a year.

What benefits have accrued from this massive federal involvement? Recently the U.S. Education Department was obliged to deliver to Congress the results of a five-year evaluation (itself costing \$29 million) of Title I. Its conclusion: The program had failed to close the reading-and-math gap between poor, low-achieving children and their peers. Title I (formerly Chapter I) has been a failure — an extremely expensive one.

Where's the sense of reality in perpetuating a \$7 billion federal program that subsidizes — indeed, rewards — failure?

Finally, please consider the longest-running ideological rip-off of all: the education establishment's insistence on using expensive fads like "whole language" for beginning reading — methods that breed illiteracy instead of success.

PRESIDENT Clinton himself acknowledged the dimensions of the disaster when he pointed to the shocking inability of 40 percent of American third-graders to read on their own. However, as Bob Sweet of the National Right to Read Foundation noted in an

article ("Don't Read, Don't Tell") in the May/June issue of Policy Review, Clinton's "solution" — sending 1 million "volunteer" reading tutors (mostly Americorps-paid college students) into the nation's classrooms — simply "diverts accountability from the colossal failure of the public-education system to achieve perhaps its single most important mission."

Evidence that the Clintons merely would prop up a failing system comes from Hillary Clinton's *It Takes a Village*. In that book, the First Lady endorses Reading Recovery, an ultra-expensive (\$8,000 to \$9,000 per pupil) remedial reading technique linked to whole language (which in its purest form assumes that children will learn to read as they learn to speak if left to their own devices).

In its infatuation with whole language, the education establishment has ignored more than \$200 million in research sponsored by the National Institutes of Health showing that systematic instruction in phonics is the most effective way to teach reading. Again, reality loses, blind ideology wins.

The triumph of ideology over reason will be sealed if Clinton manages to consolidate power in Washington over what is tested (and therefore what is taught) in the nation's schools. ■

The federal takeover of education

To the editor:

People and legislators who mistakenly believe that the national exams advocated by President Clinton are designed to be voluntary should become acquainted with the writings of Marc Tucker and Lauren Resnick, the directors of the New Standards Project. (Hillary Clinton served on the founding board of New Standards, which now serves more than half of all public school children in the United States).

The following quotes are taken from Tucker's writings "The New Standards Project was created in 1990 ... to lay the groundwork for a national examination system in the United States ... We see the New Standards Project as an instrument for a comprehensive and systemic reform of American education. ... Our assessments will be deliberately designed as targets for instruction and learning ... The teacher will teach to the test, and the students will work hard to prepare for it if the stakes are high enough and the objective is clear."

Tucker also talks about the certificate of initial mastery that the National Skill Standards Board is developing (Tucker was appointed to that board by Clinton in 1995), saying that the board's certificates should be based on "assessments that students can study for and around which educational training agencies can organize their curricula," and that this certificate of initial mastery "would be a set of standards for what everyone in the society ought to know and be able to do to be successful at work, as a citizen and as a family member."

In other words, the voluntary national exam is the beginning stage of the final federal takeover of our entire educational system. Tucker is a longtime friend of Hillary Clinton and as president of the National Center on Education and the Economy (Hillary Clinton served on that board too) established many national organizations and initiatives, too numerous to include in this letter, but which include New Standards Project mentioned above, the National Alliance for Restructuring, Rochester School-to-Work Initiative, Workforce Skills Program, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, etc., etc.

President Clinton asked everyone on his campaign staff in 1992 to read Tucker's writings. I think it is time for the public to do the same. Call (202) 783-3668 for a list of his publications or search this web site: <http://www.naschools.org> to become acquainted with some of his work. The main quotes above were taken from two booklets, "On Occupational Clusters," pages 8 and 40, and "States Begin Developing the CIM," page 3.

Debbie Pelley
Jonesboro

Northwest Arkansas Times, Fayetteville, Arkansas

10/6/97

Those who cynically dismiss the president's call for a national conversation about race miss the point. This is not about victims, targets or

"those people." It's about us - all of us - and all of us must make this fight our fight. That's the real message of Little Rock.

Leonard P. Zakin is executive director of the New England region of the Anti-Defamation League. ■

52. Where We Stand (advertisement)

October 5, 1997

Two Wrong Solutions

Last January President Clinton announced a new national education goal: Every child will read well by the end of third grade. Frankly, I was embarrassed. Why does the president of the wealthiest, greatest nation in the world have to make universal third-grade literacy a national goal? And what did he mean, anyway, given that American fourth graders, on average, were in the top tier on the 1992 International Assessment of Reading?

The answer to both questions is that too many of our poor children—and in America more than 20 percent are poor—leave third grade without being able to read well. Indeed, many go on to graduate from high school without solid skills in reading or in writing and math. AFT members have been telling us that one reason for this shameful situation is <i>social promotion—the policy of passing students on to the next grade even though they have not mastered the current year's work. So we decided to research the issue.

Passing on Failure?

Do school districts advocate promoting students regardless of their achievement? Not exactly. We looked at policies from 85 districts, including the 40 largest in the U.S., and none actually calls for social promotion. However, most put all kinds of restrictions on which youngsters you can hold back and when and how often. So while districts may not advocate social promotion, most have policies that make it inevitable.

Most districts do not make use of specific grade-by-grade standards for what kids are supposed to learn. When

"continuous progress" (or something equally vague) is the main criterion for promotion, how do you justify holding a student back? What's more, teachers—the ones who really know the students—seldom make the final decision about promotions. The last word belongs to the principals. And they may hesitate to fail students because they don't want the school to look bad or they fear pressure from parents or because they have no educational options available.

Those opposed to social promotion often think the answer is simple: Hold back unprepared students until they're ready. This policy, called retention, sounds tough and sensible—and if I had no other choice, I'd choose retention over social promotion. But if you consider retention to be a brave new idea that will force students to measure up, you're in for a surprise. We found that retention is as common in our schools as social promotion. More than 15 percent of students are held back every year, and in many large urban districts, half the kids entering kindergarten are likely to be retained at least once before they leave school. The kids who can't read, write or count when they graduate have probably been retained and socially promoted.

The Real Issue

The truth is, both policies are mechanical responses to an educational problem. Districts have all kinds of rules and regulations about promotion and retention. The scandal is how little attention they give to preventing failure in the first place. If getting kids to achieve is our aim, social promotion and retention are both beside the point. But

there are obvious things we should do:

Put an end to guesswork about student achievement. Establish standards for the various grades, with curricula and assessments to go along with the standards, so teachers and parents know how children are progressing. Take an "intensive care" approach to students who are falling behind. Jump on the problems immediately, using proven techniques to get students quickly back on track. Make sure those who teach reading are trained in the latest and best techniques. Teacher preparation is often woefully inadequate in this area, especially when it comes to teaching our most vulnerable youngsters. Prevent failure at the start—by making high quality early childhood education available.

These practices and programs are taken for granted in other advanced civilized nations—and in most of our middle-class schools. The trouble is, too many adults in our society have given up on America's poorest youngsters. When kids face terrible problems, they need extra help; instead, our neediest students get less. Then, either they or their teachers—or both—are blamed for failure. What's the solution? It's neither social promotion nor retention. It's making sure that all our kids get the commonsense and basic things they need to be successful at learning.

Where We Stand appears monthly in the New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, Education Week, Roll Call, the New Republic, and the Washington, D.C. editions of TIME and Newsweek. ■

34. Chicago Tribune

10/02/97; Edition: NORTH SPORTS FINAL; N; Section: COMMENTARY; Page 17

DEBATING NATIONAL TESTING PROGRAM AN EMPTY GESTURE

By Joan Beck.

It's surprising how much energy, rhetoric, time and political chits Congress and President Clinton have spent on the issue of national testing.

Ostensibly, testing 4th graders in reading and 8th graders in math will only tell us what we already know: The United States lags behind most other industrialized nations in educational achievement. And children in poor school districts and those with high minority enrollment are the most behind.

Clinton, however, sees national testing as a key part of his effort to upgrade the nation's schools. He has threatened to veto the \$80 billion bill authorizing funds for the Departments of Education, Labor and Human Services if it doesn't contain money for national testing. The Senate approved an amendment to allow national testing. The House voted it down.

Republicans and Democrats in Congress are sharply divided over the bill, in part because they see different bogeymen and benefits in the tests. Some of the concerns are realistic; others are political bombast.

In theory, Clinton's national testing program would encourage the establishment of national standards in math and reading. It would prod underperforming school systems to jack up requirements. And it would alert parents and state education agencies to schools that have fallen behind. Parents would be able to compare school achievement across school, district and state lines and pressure school authorities where improvement is necessary.

National testing is also necessary, supporters say, to show that school

reforms are working, assuming they are. Besides, they add, the testing, scheduled to start in the spring of 1999, is voluntary. Any school or state can refuse to participate.

The most obvious objection to national testing is that it will waste classroom time and effort to show what is already clear from other standardized testing programs and international comparisons. Children in rich, predominately white, school districts will score best. Those in poor areas, in poor states and in school districts heavily populated with non-English-speaking minorities and single-parent families will have the lowest scores.

The Congressional Black Caucus opposes national testing that "may further stigmatize our children and force them into lower educational tracks and special education classes," in the words of chairperson Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.). Hispanic groups complain that their children will suffer if tests are given only in English. (The reading test would be in English; the math test in English and in Spanish.)

It is difficult, if not impossible, to develop any kind of academic tests that won't be blamed for being biased in favor of middle-class whites—for school achievement, college admission or job qualification—however carefully they are constructed. The University of California system, for example is considering eliminating the use of SAT and ACT scores for admission in hopes of increasing the number of minority students eligible for top-tier colleges.

Many teachers object to the national testing plan, saying it will force them to devote months of classroom time

preparing pupils for the exams, at the expense of what they may consider more appropriate lessons.

Experienced teachers also complain that cheating is inevitable, especially if individuals' scores are to be recorded. The New York Times this week has been reporting on cheating scandals involving exams administered by the Educational Testing Service, which develops and gives 9 million tests a year.

Cheating is common among schools, too, which often exclude children with learning problems from taking standardized tests. Youngsters likely to get low scores on the exams may be told to stay home on test day or sent on a field trip, lest they pull down averages for the school or reflect poorly on the teacher.

Congressional Republicans oppose national testing as a poorly disguised effort to give the federal government more control over the nation's schools, sneaking power away from state education agencies and local school districts. Setting a national education agenda is, of course, one of the basic objectives of Clinton's proposal.

Opponents also fear the influence that education fads and their promoters could have on the tests and through them, on the curriculum of the nation's schools and on textbooks. The major concern now is for the math test and how much it would be influenced by what is called the "new, new math" or "fuzzy math."

Called "interactive" and "inventive" math by supporters, it rejects traditional drill in calculations and lessons in math principles in favor of calculators and open-ended problems that supposedly prompt children to develop their own solutions—if they can. The new math is

spreading widely, especially in California, but has triggered growing revolt among parents who fret that their youngsters are adrift and falling behind.

Critics of the new math charge that panel members set to prepare questions for the proposed national math test for 8th graders are advocates of the new system and that national testing will force even reluctant schools to adopt the

program, however much they dislike it. Richard Riley, U.S. secretary of education, has tried to deflect this opposition by announcing that the use of calculators would be strictly limited on the exam.

We already have a National Assessment of Educational Progress, which shows how states compare to each other and in 1994, documented the

worrisome deficiencies in reading ability that exists among the nation's 4th graders. All but three states also do their own education assessments.

We don't need to waste time, energy, money and goodwill on Clinton's national testing program, especially when it carries downside risks. Let's just get on with solving the problems. ■

By STEPHANIE HOO
MANAHAWKIN BUREAU
STAFFORD TOWNSHIP —

Southern Regional middle and high school students yesterday continued their district's experiments with video conferencing, this time chatting with the politicians who helped get the equipment to their classroom.

Clustered around a flat, boomerang-shaped microphone and facing a tiny camera, a half-dozen Southern Regional students talked to New Jersey's two U.S. senators as well as with peers in Oklahoma City and in Bristol, England.

As a computer image flickered on the screen, 10th-grader Brian Cahill, 15, of Barnegat Township, a veteran of more

than a half-dozen video conferencing sessions, recalled past chats with Miss America and staffers at the Liberty Science Center in Jersey City.

"It's interesting because you actually get to see their body language when they talk," he said.

The Liberty Science Center conference was especially fun, since the eight students who participated got a virtual tour of a few of the center's marine life exhibits, said science teacher Darren Dorris.

"It's an easy way, a time-efficient way, to take kids where they want to go," he said.

But yesterday's main lesson was politics.

"It's more of a showcase," said social studies teacher Barbara Fulkerson, warning her students not to ask questions that would stump or embarrass the senators.

Members of the Senate Democratic Forum on Education Technology were holding video conferences with classrooms all over the country from a Capitol Hill anteroom, according to Sen. Robert G. Toricelli, D.-N.J., who called the technique "an introduction to a brave new world."

The event was designed to showcase public-private partnerships that have brought technology into classrooms, including the setup at Southern Regional Middle School. ■

COMMENTARY

44. The New York Times

10/02/97; Edition: Late Edition - Final; Section: Section A; Editorial Desk; Page 19, Column 2

The Tyranny of Tests

By Marc F. Bernstein

NORTH MERRICK, N.Y. — The debate over President Clinton's proposal for voluntary national testing in reading and math has paid too little attention to whether a national curriculum benefits American children.

I know that the President has not recommended a national curriculum, only national testing, but educators know

all too well that "what is tested will be taught." Teachers and administrators will pore over sample test questions to determine what material must be taught so that students — and therefore teachers and schools — do well.

Without doubt, there are benefits to focusing the public's attention on academic results. It fosters healthy competition among schools and keeps

them accountable for teaching children properly.

There is the risk, however, that even the best-intentioned test makers will create a misguided national standard, even though the Senate has stipulated that a bipartisan board independent of the Federal Department of Education be responsible for designing the tests. Who creates the test is less troubling than the

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process that we in the United States follow to create a consensus, to reduce criticism and to advance the political correctness of our time. One has only to remember the recent debate over history standards to shudder at the prospect of national tests. Plus, national tests would be the battleground for proponents of the latest educational trends.

Past movements, like "new math" (and perhaps the more recent "new-new math") or the purists' version of "whole language," were products of university think tanks that often did little real-life research to support their conclusions.

Until now, exposure to the fads of a particular university or school of thought

could be confined to a state or to one region of the country. Imagine the risks of applying a little-tested theory to the design of a test given to all American students, a national examination that would in turn determine curriculums and standards.

States have served well as the laboratories of education, allowing different strategies and practices to be tried, modified and then expanded or discarded. Almost every state now has a statewide testing program that permits parents to evaluate their schools and to compare them with similar districts nearby.

A national report card, on the other hand, would be of little use. Is there any validity in having parents in New York compare the state's scores on an eighth-grade math test with those of a more homogeneous state like New Hampshire or Vermont? Most parents can already tell whether their children are getting a good education. Yes, we must continue to strive for higher standards for our children's education, but we can do it without national tests.

About the Author: Marc F. Bernstein is the Superintendent of the Bellmore-Merrick Central High School District. ■

45. Houston Chronicle

proposal to develop Beantown, he shrugged, whether it's the Millennium deal, the Turnpike air rights, in Chinatown, or elsewhere.

Menino is confident, he says, that the Patriots will not be fleeing Foxborough for Rhode Island. He ran into Providence Mayor Buddy Cianci at a national mayor's meeting. "And Buddy told me, 'I

up to the selection of the next Democratic presidential nominee. His opinion of congressional politicians is declining. What's the message coming out of Washington, he demands? Too many senators and congressmen are "out of touch with their own people. They 'sound' good but taste 'bad.'" Of the sound and fury over campaign funding,

public officials going to make my life better?"

Menino's mantra: Look out for the little guy and his family. "He's working, worried about sending his two kids to college. She's working, too, to make ends meet, and she's worried about day care. Now, those are the people who need government." ■

64. The New York Times

10/01/97; Edition: Late Edition - Final; Section: Section A; Editorial Desk; Page 27, Column 5

Flunk That Test

By WILLIAM SAFIRE

WASHINGTON — At the moment when Congress is grappling with the education lobby's bid to centralize power with the national testing of students, comes The New York Times with a stunning series that shows how the world's leading testing organization has for years been a patsy for cheaters.

Bill Clinton has just shown himself to be a true believer in snatching from parents the local control of their children's education. He threatens to veto Federal support of state education unless "voluntary" testing — using standardized tests created by the Great Cookie-Cutter in Washington — is used on the states.

But the danger of undue reliance on testing is laid out in the Times series by Douglas Frantz and Jon Nordheimer. In exposing the ease with which hundreds of cheating teachers in Louisiana made a mockery of exams produced by the Educational Testing Service, the reporters dashed a bucketful of reality into the faces of the crusaders doing their leveling best to march from school uniforms to scholastic uniformity.

Perhaps that's why some Cajun test-beaters wrote that "The Louisiana English Language Arts Standards draft document is the work of a team of primarily teachers from throughout the state," a sentence prompting The New Orleans Times-Picayune "to wonder what a 'primarily teacher' does."

The debate today is not about testing, a necessary teaching tool. A

well-constructed test reinforces what you've learned and exposes what you have failed to learn. And a snap quiz is a real waker-upper to somnolent students.

Though not much of a student in class at the Bronx High School of Science, I used to ace the tests. That's because I figured out how to "play" multiple-choice exams, and on essay questions I learned to dance around the subject when I didn't know the answer, and only later found out that the teacher wanted to reward creative writing.

So I'm not knocking tests. (Do not use so to mean "therefore," Miss Ruth Goldstein instructed, unless you are affecting the breeziness of informal speech.) Rather, I'm resisting national standards — regimented ways of thinking and computing, directed downward from the top — in a nation that should celebrate diversity and individuality.

This reflects a classic disagreement between our founders. Alexander Hamilton believed in concentrating power to forge a nation; Thomas Jefferson countered with state and local rights to protect the individual. Today, in education as in health care, William Jefferson Clinton is on Hamilton's side of nationalization and elite establishment control.

Those groupthinkers say: Never mind who writes the laws of a nation, or even its popular songs; let us write its tests. Everybody is for "higher standards" in education. The question is: Who sets the standards and writes the tests?

The American tradition has been to entrust such decisions to local school boards, run (not always well, but usually democratically) by involved parents and teachers in that community, with review by state authorities, and with the Feds intervening only when states fail to protect a student's constitutional rights.

That's a great tradition. It permits experiments in early child development, such as those undertaken now in Texas, to be emulated elsewhere if and when they work. It prevents horrendous mistakes nationwide, such as adoption of a brainwashed history curriculum that some multikulturkampfers wanted to inflict.

Maybe "fuzzy math" is a terrific idea, and a future generation will rely on calculators to balance its checkbooks. But before we abandon arithmetic, let's see how total reliance on an electronic crutch adds up in some locality — and if its users can compete later.

We're only talking about math and English, say the national standardbearers, and shucks, it's only voluntary. Don't believe that; if the nose of that camel gets under the tent, the hump of a national curriculum, slavish teaching to homogenizing tests, and a black market in answers would surely follow.

Despite the last-ditch efforts of the Clinton-Hamiltonians, the moving force in America today is centrifugal. (That means "away from the center." Its meaning was indelibly impressed on my mind because I got it wrong on a physics test.) ■

Would-Be National Testers Disparage English and Computation

By Robert Holland
Washington.

Pundits who argue that federally directed national testing would be a good thing — a way to show parents how their children are stacking up academically — should do a little homework. They ought to look at what the majority members of the Clintons' National Testing Panel actually want to assess.

Here's a clue as to their ideology: The idea of the fourth-grade reading test being in English for all is not something they can bring their bleeding hearts to endorse. Bilingualism, si! Multilingualism might be more like it. Ebonics to be sensitive to inner-city test-takers? By their reasoning, why not?

Another hint: Meeting last week even as Congress was considering cutting off money for the Clintons' national-testing power grab, the panel voted to recommend that students use calculators in taking the eighth-grade mathematics test, and spurned suggestions that the tests stress acquisition of basic, computational skills.

Breaking a tie vote in favor of calculators (a useful tool but sometimes a crutch for those who haven't learned to do the calculations on their own) was the panel chairman, Wilmer Cody, Kentucky's commissioner of education.

THE CLINTONITES' tapping of Cody is in itself a dead giveaway to the agenda behind national testing. Kentucky has been the model state for the Clintonites' attempted trashing of objective testing in favor of "performance-based assessment." That

kind of yardstick supposedly measures students' "thinking skills" as opposed to the core knowledge that is necessary for any so-called "critical thinking" to be more than uninformed opinion.

National testing experts lambasted the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS) two years ago as an invalid gauge of student achievement. Finally, last June, the wheels came off completely when Cody had to terminate the contract with the creator of KIRIS because of gross errors in rating the achievement of the state's pupils.

Millions wasted on specious faddism in Kentucky — yet the Clintonites tapped Cody to head the National Testing Panel?

PERHAPS BLOWING mega-bucks on dumbed-down schooling is a Clintonite qualification for being in charge of testing the nation's pupils. After all, 10 years after the Outcome-Based Education "reforms" Hillary and Bill Clinton effected in Arkansas, pupil achievement on standardized tests of reading and other basic subjects there has skidded as much as 20 percent. Which, of course, entitles Bill Clinton to anoint himself the national school superintendent.

Here's how English came to offend the Clintons' National Testing Panel:

The panel's reading committee wanted to insert "English" into the name of the fourth-grade test to make the statement that "competence in reading in English is crucial. . . without regard to what a

child's first language is." Well, that requested nod to common sense infuriated the Big-Ed panjandrums who dominate the Clintonite panel, according to an Education Week account.

Sharon Lewis of the Council of the Great City Schools complained that the proposal might harm negotiations with the U.S. Department of Education to give the reading test in languages (yes, plural) other than English.

Moreover, Arnold Fege of the National PTA stated that the PTA simply could not accept an English-only national reading test — that this issue was among "the bottom-line deal-breakers for us." Well, that should be a bottom-line deal-breaker for parents who have their dues money extorted by the National PTA only to see it act as a puppet of the National Education Association's left-wing leadership. Parents and teachers who value education ought to abandon both the NEA and the National PTA.

This aversion to English is unfortunately common in education pedagogy today, according to one of the top experts in school standards-setting, Sandra Stotsky, an education researcher at both the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Boston University.

IN A RECENTLY published analysis of 28 states' English standards (she deemed Virginia's and Massachusetts' among the best), Ms. Stotsky said pedagogues are urging classroom teachers to allow non-English-speaking students to speak their home language in

English class on the premise that "research says" such permissiveness is the best practice. To the contrary, counters Ms. Stotsky, "there is no respectable body of research supporting such practices; the research actually shows that students learn English best by attempting to speak, read, and write it as much as possible. . . ."

The Clintons' national tests would feed the educationist trends that contribute to the dumbing down and cultural balkanization of U.S. education. Having attempted to impose tests by an executive memorandum to his own Secretary of Education, President Clinton now arrogantly threatens to veto an entire education/labor/health appropriations bill

if it contains a House-passed ban (the Goodling Amendment) on funding for his testing scheme.

If Clinton wins with a veto, it will be time for American parents to exercise one of their own. They can veto the Clinton tests by simply refusing to allow their children to take them. ■

BY WHOSE STANDARD DO WE TEST TRUE MERIT?

By Clarence Page
WASHINGTON

Tests, tests, tests.

Americans love tests, except when they don't.

They don't love them as much as they used to in California.

The University of California's Latino Eligibility Task Force has found that Hispanic eligibility would go up dramatically if taking the SAT was made voluntary, as it was before 1968. The task force has recommended that the state reduce its emphasis on test scores and concentrate on other factors —like grades, class standing, extracurricular activities and overcoming hardships.

Texans don't love tests as much as they used to, either. Texas Gov. George W. Bush has signed a law that effectively does what California's task force is recommending. The law requires that the top 10 percent of all Texas high school graduates be admitted to the state university of their choice, regardless of SAT scores or other factors.

Nationally, the American Bar Association has launched a pilot project that calls for participating law schools to de-emphasize LSAT scores in admissions. Other schools, like Massachusetts School of Law, already have made LSAT scores optional.

Nationwide, almost 300 of the nation's 1,600 four-year colleges and universities have decided to not require SAT or ACT scores when making admissions decisions for all of their applications, according to the National Center for Fair and Open Testing, a Cambridge, Mass.-based organization that opposes standardized tests.

"We support educational excellence, but, filling test bubbles on Saturday morning is not excellence," Bob Schaeffer, a center official, says. "Doing well in school, being able to write and solve problems, that's excellence. That's a far richer and more meaningful measure of excellence than filling in

bubbles on Saturday morning."

Yet, over at the White House, they're not quite sure if they like tests or not.

On the one hand, the Department of Education is investigating whether the University of California's standardized test requirements violate federal educational opportunity laws. At the same time, President Clinton is calling for national standardized tests for grade school students, despite opposition from both sides of Congress, for different reasons.

The Congressional Black Caucus and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus have opposed national tests as culturally biased. Congressional conservatives have opposed national tests as an unnecessary federal intrusion into local schools.

Yet, Bill Clinton warmly supports it. Why? Because the polls tell him that an overwhelming majority —more than 70 percent —of Americans support national tests.

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I am certain that all of those folks have their hearts in the right place. But, before they jump on the standardized test bandwagon, they should ask themselves whether this is the best way to do it.

Many people say "yes" to tests because it sounds like the right thing to say. We are a test-obsessed nation. Since standardized tests appeared on the scene during World War II, Americans have gotten into the habit of imbu-ing SATs with more than they really tell us. We have come to think of SATs as accurate measures of "intelligence," even though the test-makers at the Educational Testing Service caution us that they are not.

They are supposed to help predict good of a chance the test-taker has for future academic success. Yet, studies repeatedly show SATs to be more effective at predicting the performance of white males and some Asian groups than

anyone else.

That's appropriate, since white males made up the vast majority of those the tests was designed in its early days to test. The ETS was created in 1947 in the midst of a post-war crush of mostly white and male college applicants, aided by the GI Bill.

Unfortunately, today the SAT and ACT are more likely to underpredict the future performance of blacks and Hispanics, shunting many aside before they've had a chance to prove themselves in the classrooms of select institutions.

The main thing standardized tests tell you is how well the individual has been prepared to take the standardized test. Just ask the many reputable companies who advertise classes to help you boost your college admission scores by 10 percent or more.

Almost all of these classes are offered in nice neighborhoods, convenient to the

families who can afford them the most and need them the least. Few are found in the ghetto or the barrio. Funny how those who protest the loudest about grade inflation "dumbing down" American education seldom seem to complain about the test score inflation caused by such "prep classes."

Ironically, standardized tests were created, in part, to provide objective criteria that could overcome the biases that put "ceilings" or "quotas" on the opportunities of Jews and other minorities.

Today, some new barriers to upward mobility have appeared. Some, like the prep classes, have been created in response to the test itself. That poses a new test for a young nation that still believes in equal opportunity.

It is a test that won't be answered in little bubbles on a sheet of paper. ■

Education: Anybody in Charge?

By David S. Broder

It hurts to say this, but President Clinton and Education Secretary Dick Riley are making a hash of their effort to improve schools. They're not alone in this; a number of Republicans have added to the mess by their policy interventions. But somebody needs to take hold of this. Right now, it looks as if no one is in charge.

Riley is one of the most honorable public officials I have ever covered. It is clear that he and Clinton are motivated by the same passion for public education they displayed as school-reform governors of South Carolina and Arkansas. Still, the strategies they have followed have been so muddled that they may be harming the cause.

In the first term, their main initiative was "Goals 2000," a direct descendant of the program both of them had promoted, along with other governors of both parties, in the 1980s.

The idea was pretty simple: Put a pot of federal money out there to help states devise their own programs for lifting the performance standards of their schools. The goals were noncontroversial, and all that the feds required was some sort of comprehensive state plan for reaching them.

The legislation was passed by a Democratic Congress, but with the arrival of the Republican majorities in 1994, a critical barrage was fired by freshman conservatives who really wanted to abolish the Department of Education but would settle for crippling its programs.

In the last Congress, they rewrote the Goals 2000 legislation in a way that destroyed its policy rationale. No longer were integrated state plans required; no longer was there a nongovernmental peer review of the plans. Instead, states were allowed — indeed encouraged — to use the money for piecemeal projects like buying classroom computers.

Clinton and Riley accepted these changes, and when I wrote, at the time, that the program had been gutted as a serious reform effort, Education Department officials responded that all was well.

They were wrong. While Goals 2000 still exists on paper, it has become a piggy bank that Congress breaks open to pay for programs that have no connection with education reform. The House Appropriations Committee cut it from \$491 million in the current year to \$475 million, far below the \$620 million Clinton and Riley requested for 1998. Then floor amendments snatched another \$90 million for vocational education courses and programs for the developmentally disabled. With no real policy rationale, Goals2000 is easy pickings.

Meanwhile, Clinton came up with a new idea this year: national standards and national tests. This one, too, has been a nonstarter. The rhetoric was always much bigger than the proposal. He talked about the need to measure every child and every school by uniform, world-class standards. But he proposed only that the feds pay for developing a pair of tests — for fourth-grade English and eighth-grade math — and administering them once. Contradicting the logic of his own proposal, he said any child, school, district or state that didn't want to be graded would be excused.

The reception has been chilly. Riley needlessly antagonized Congress by ordering work to begin on the tests without legislative authorization. After some stroking, the Senate said okay. But only seven states and 15 cities have indicated an interest in participating. And the House, heeding governors who said they had enough tests of their own, thank you, buried the proposal on a 295-125 vote.

Meanwhile, Clinton and Riley have tossed other reform balls into the air. They have a pot of money to spur creation of more charter schools — public schools organized and run by folks with innovative ideas. There is a separate and larger pot of money to expand on the work of the New American Schools Development Corp., a big-business-backed effort to develop and test new models of education. The House went along with that after writing in guidelines to calm the nerves of Republicans such as Rep. David McIntosh of Indiana, who complained that one of the academics involved had the temerity to agree with You Know Who that "it takes a village to raise a child."

In the midst of this mishmash of underfunded initiatives, two Republican senators who ought to know better, Slade Gorton of Washington and Pete Domenici of New Mexico, unhelpfully suggested that all federal aid to education programs, old and new, be junked and the money sent out to local communities for whatever they care to do. To everyone's surprise, the Senate approved this by a one-vote margin, after as much consideration as you'd give to choosing dessert from a menu.

That's what happens when the two officials who are supposed to be leading this debate make a muddle of it.■

1. Providence Journal-Bulletin

September 27, 1997

Unnecessary tests

President Clinton was undoubtedly well intentioned when he started pushing the idea of establishing a national testing program for youngsters in elementary school. But the proposal has stirred resistance from many members of Congress, both conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats, and produced no consensus among the nation's governors. The resulting battle may well end up endangering other, far more important education initiatives.

The proposed system of national tests is not worth such a high price. Mr. Clinton should give up the idea, at least for now; perhaps he can come back to it when — or if — he develops more convincing arguments and garners more widespread support.

The President wants to design and administer a new reading test for fourth-graders and a new math test for eighth-graders. But why spend tens of millions of dollars to come up with new tests? After all, there are several tests — e.g., the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the Stanford Achievement Test — that are already "on the shelf" and have been widely used for many years.

The new tests would undoubtedly be different in some ways, but there is little evidence that they would be significantly more useful than those now available. And there is a good likelihood that they will have their own problems — if only because, being new, they will be plagued by substantive and procedural glitches, and will generate arguments about their validity, fairness and similar contentious matters.

In any case, the tests would not be truly national anyway. Individual states, which have the constitutional authority to run their school systems without the help — or the interference, if you will — of the federal government, would be free to use or ignore the new tests. As of now, only a handful of states have signed on to the concept, and it seems clear that some have no intention of ever doing so. In other words, anybody who believes that the tests will provide a nationally comprehensive measure of student performance is engaging in wishful thinking. Indeed, the trends revealed by the extensive sampling of students covered by the longstanding National Assessment of Educational Progress are likely to be at least as meaningful as those provided by Mr. Clinton's proposed testing program.

It's no coincidence that Mr. Clinton is pressing so hard for a new system of national tests just at the time that many states (e.g., Massachusetts) have already devised — and others (e.g., Rhode Island) are in the process of devising — their own new tests. The idea of testing students is in the air, and Mr. Clinton is a master at sensing which way the wind is blowing and steering his course accordingly.

There's nothing necessarily wrong with that. But in this particular case, it's far from clear that we need to add another layer of testing on top of those already there and those now being put in place by the states. Many in the field of education — teachers, administrators and researchers — have long complained about the excessive time, energy and money spent on testing our students. Perhaps if more attention were paid to teaching them, there would be less anxiety about what they are learning (or more ominously, not learning) and thus less compulsiveness about testing them. ■

1. St. Louis Post-Dispatch

September 23, 1997

Who Needs More Education Tests?

President Bill Clinton's proposal for national educational testing is not a Big Brother takeover, as some conservatives claim. Nor is it a plot to stigmatize minority students, as some liberals claim. But just because these critics are wrong doesn't make Mr. Clinton right.

The president hasn't made the case for his proposed 90-minute national tests of 4th graders' reading skills and 8th graders' math skills.

Most children - and any parent who remembers a No. 2 pencil - will tell you that one of the biggest educational challenges is to figure out the alphabet soup of today's standardized tests - PSAT's SAT's, ACT's, AP's, BEST tests, MMAT's.

Who needs more standardized tests? Educational quality isn't proportional to the number of standardized tests. Nor do today's schools lack the testing data they need to design a good curriculum. They've got data coming out of their ears.

The failings of today's schools are complex. We're educating a more diverse group of students. Many live in single-parent homes. And kids watch too much TV.

New national tests have as much potential for hurting education as helping. Schools will teach to the test, shortchanging those topics not tested. Skills required for easy-to-grade multiple-choice tests will get more emphasis than the complex thinking needed for hard-to-grade essay tests. Moreover, fixation with the test undermines a key ingredient of a good education - the spark of creativity between teacher and student.

The federal government does have an important role in education. But a school system is an expression of a community's energy and interests. Local control is important.

The issue of minority test scores is troublesome. Standardized tests may have cultural biases and may reinforce negative stereotypes. This is why some minority members of Congress voted against the Clinton tests and why some Missouri legislators object to reporting test scores by race. Still, the racial breakdowns on current standardized tests provide useful information. Without it, we wouldn't know that minorities have made steady progress on standardized tests over three decades.

Sure, we'd all like our schools to do better and our kids to be smarter. But more standardized tests won't get us there. ■

1. The Washington Post

09/17/97; Edition: FINAL; Section: OP-ED; Page A19

Height Of Hypocrisy; Clinton's school exams would test the wrong students for the wrong reasons.

By Robert J. Samuelson

You should grasp that Washington's latest school debate — over whether to have national exams for fourth-graders in reading and eighth-graders in math — is a sham. If the exams are approved, they won't much change how students or schools do. If they're rejected (Congress is now considering the issue), they will trigger a false debate over who favors "tough" standards. President Clinton supports the exams and condemns "social promotion": moving up students who haven't mastered essential skills. But Clinton is a shrewd hypocrite on education. He actually encourages social promotion where it's most rampant: between high school and college. So do most of his opponents on the testing issue.

Clinton's educational policy consists of two contradictory elements. The most prominent is a boundless enthusiasm to send more Americans to college with more federal money — without (and this is crucial) insisting that the recipients show they can do college-level work. Clinton aims to improve "access," which is a code word for the absence of genuine standards. At the same time, he and Education Secretary Richard Riley loudly advocate more exacting standards in elementary and high school. "If I could sum up everything I've learned about education in three words," Riley recently said, "they would be 'high standards work.' . . . Schools and students rise to the expectations we set for them."

If Clinton and Riley practiced what they preach, they'd set a "high standard" for students to qualify for federal college grants and loans. Longtime readers of this column (all three of you) will recall that I've made this suggestion before. No one of prominence in either party advocates such standards. Republican education secretaries William Bennett and Lamar Alexander didn't. "High standard" goes beyond a high school diploma, whose value varies. Nor does it mean transcripts; these are marred by grade inflation. What I mean is a test of basic college competencies — in reading, writing and math, at least. Students who flunked wouldn't get federal aid.

Let's be clear about the legitimacy of a federal standard. In fiscal 1997 the federal government will provide an estimated \$43 billion in college aid to 7.6 million students through grants and federally subsidized or guaranteed loans. Students receiving aid ought to earn the privilege by showing educational capability. This does not impinge upon state or local power; nor does it impose a national standard for college. It does say that people who receive federal aid also assume obligations. This is the sort of sensible personal accountability embodied in welfare reform.

By contrast, Clinton's tests wouldn't tell us much we don't know — and, therefore, wouldn't spur much change. We know, for example, how most states compare with each other from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which tests a national sample of students. These tests show that in 1994 only 28 percent of fourth-graders read at a "proficient" level. States ranged from 15 percent in Louisiana and 18 percent in Mississippi and California to 38 percent in Connecticut and North Dakota. Similarly, about 41 percent of fourth-graders read below a "basic" level, with Louisiana (60 percent) the worst and North Dakota (27 percent) the best. ("Basic" denotes "partial mastery" of skills; "proficient" signifies "solid academic performance.")

School districts within most states also can compare themselves with each other. Already, about 47 states conduct their own assessments, reports the Council of Chief State School Officers. Everyone knows that schools and students in most central cities aren't doing well. All that Clinton's tests might do is allow individual students and schools to compare themselves across states and against a national standard. (Many state tests can't now be compared with each other.) Even this advantage would be small. To mute opposition, Clinton has made the tests voluntary. So far, only seven states and 15 major school districts have signed up.

For this puny benefit, Clinton has still stirred a firestorm. His tests are criticized, says the New York Times, "by minorities who think they will further stigmatize the poor; by conservatives who think they favor liberal pedagogy, and by ethnic groups who say they should be given in languages other than English." This was predictable. In a diverse country — with a tradition of local school control — national tests and standards were bound to inflame. Before intruding on local schools, the federal government should set standards for its own programs.

It almost certainly won't. The Higher Education Act (which authorizes student loans and grants) is up for congressional renewal, but Clinton won't propose a competency test. "The outcry would be unbelievable," says Marshall Smith, acting deputy secretary of education. Colleges would scream because enrollments might shrink. Middle-class families would complain because their college "entitlement" would be impaired. Black and Hispanic groups would protest that minority students would be hurt most. "These student moneys," says Smith, "have been designed to provide access and not to have a test as a hurdle."

The result is massive social promotion. Six of 10 high school graduates go to college of some type. Roughly half of those eventually drop out. Remedial courses are widespread. In 1995, says the Department of Education, 78 percent of all two- and four-year colleges offered remedial courses. About 29 percent of freshmen took at least one in reading, writing or math.

All the political problems of national tests for fourth-graders would afflict a test for federal college aid. How tough should it be? Which subjects should it cover? But even if the test were "dumbed down" — say, to a 10th-grade level for four-year colleges and a ninth-grade level for two-year schools — it would improve the status quo. It would compel more students to work harder, foster



a climate of learning in classrooms and create popular pressures for school systems to do better. It would assert the principle that federal benefits are a privilege, not a mere handout. The fact that the president and much of Congress disdain this approach — and don't even discuss it — is a measure of our national hypocrisy.■

here's how it came to me: I was talking with futurist Robert Theobald

observed is one aspect of a more general disconnect.

"It's really a disconnect between the

want maximum productivity, and a life that makes sense.

The problem, says Theobald, whose latest book, "Reworking Success," is out

their deaths to express their longing for a world where they reign."

Washington Post
9/15/97 A23

Wm J. Bennett and Chester E. Finn Jr.

National Tests: A Yardstick to Learn By

The debate about voluntary national testing for fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math has until now been dominated by two views.

One view has been voiced by some conservatives and Republicans, notably Rep. Bill Goodling, chairman of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce. They oppose national testing under any condition.

The other view is that of the Clinton administration, which has its own national testing scheme.

We consider both options insufficient and have a third alternative that would make fundamental changes in the Clinton plan to rescue a good idea. These changes, somewhat modified in negotiations with the White House, were introduced in the Senate by Sen. Dan Coats and passed 88 to 12 last week. The House, meanwhile, is expected to turn thumbs down on national testing.

Conservative critics argue that a new national test would provide no new or useful information, would lead to a national curriculum, would reduce local and parental authority and would fail to generate higher academic performance.

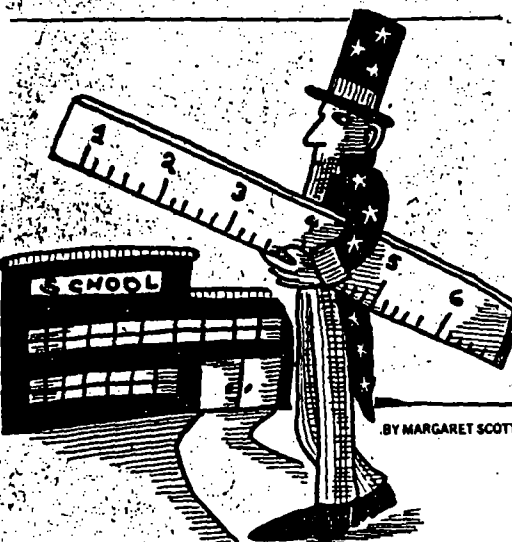
too have deep concerns specific to the proposal. However, we believe many arguments made by conservative anti-testers are substantively misguided and politically unwise. To those who make a philosophical argument against the very idea of national tests, we would point out that almost every serious education expert—Democrat or Republican, liberal or conservative—will testify to the value of today's federally funded National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests. They hold NAEP in high regard because it provides important information, its content is sound and it has rigorous standards built in—in large part because the NAEP is governed by an independent board.

By law, however, the NAEP cannot be used by districts or schools to report the progress of individual students. In other words, it can tell you how one state is doing relative to another state, but not how well one district or school is doing relative to another. We advocate extending voluntary NAEP-based tests to school districts, schools and students. Absent that, we will continue with a system that does not allow for standards-based tests of core academic skills that can be used at any level, by any "consumer" (governor, parent, local school board or charter school principal) to yield clear information about comparable achievement.

For example, today's "standardized" tests do actually contain any standards. They merely

provide a statistical average: where you are within the group. Testing "at or above grade level" merely indicates how a student is performing relative to other students, not how much the student knows. And performing "at or above grade level" is not encouraging if the grade-level bar is set low—which is now the case.

As for the argument that voluntary national tests would reduce local and parental authority: If they are done right, the opposite will occur. The tests will empower parents by providing them with information critical to the success of



reforms such as charter schools and school choice. And keep in mind: these tests would be voluntary. We are a nation at risk—and our flawed testing regime is one reason why. A good voluntary national test would be an important step forward. A bad testing program, on the other hand, would be a giant step backward, which brings us to the Clinton proposal.

In a brazen power grab, the administration has attempted to promote its version of a voluntary national test without seeking authorization from Congress. The Clinton plan would hand the test-development process to the very kinds of organizations and groups that have helped ruin modern American education. It would dumb down the test standards and reflect the "trendiest"—read: "worst"—ideas in education, things such as "whole language" reading and "constructivist" math. The result would be tests that wouldn't indicate whether students could read or do math. The Clinton plan would remove responsibility for national testing from the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB)—a well-

respected, independent, nonpartisan body created to set policy for NAEP—and give de facto control to the Department of Education.

The Clinton plan would politicize and subvert the whole idea of national testing and has flaws so misguided as to be dangerous. This explains why only six states have signed up for it—and the governor of one of those states, Michigan's John Engler, says he will jump off this train unless fundamental changes are made.

If faced with a choice between no test (the Goodling position) and the Clinton test, we would endorse no tests. Fortunately, however, the common-sense Coats proposal makes key changes to the Clinton plan, which include:

- Giving the National Assessment Governing Board control over all policy aspects of the national tests.

- Giving the NAGB authority to review and change the national test specifications, development contracts and advisory committees already launched by the Education Department. Otherwise, bad decisions and contracts already made would stay in place.

- Charging the NAGB with ensuring that the content and standards of national tests be the same as those of the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Otherwise the public would not know whether the test results meant the same thing as NAEP results.

- Making key changes in the composition of the NAGB so that it has greater bipartisanship and independence. At present, just two of its 25 members need to be from the party out of power, and given the huge responsibility of national testing and the need for bipartisan consensus, this imbalance is wrong.

We prefer no test to a bad test. But most of all we prefer a good test—one with integrity, high standards, solid content and procedural safeguards to insulate it from politics and partisanship. That is what the Coats amendment would provide and why we hope that is the legislation that will emerge from the Senate-House conference committee. It is legislation that reform-minded legislators of both political parties should embrace and one which the president should sign.

The writers are, respectively, a former secretary of education in the Reagan administration, and a John M. Olin fellow at the Hudson Institution, a nonprofit research organization.

1. The Washington Post

09/15/97; Edition: FINAL; Section: OP-ED; Page A23

National Tests: A Yardstick to Learn By

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Conservative critics argue that a new national test would provide no new or useful information, would lead to a national curriculum, would reduce local and parental authority and would fail to generate higher academic performance.

We too have deep concerns specific to the Clinton proposal. However, we believe many arguments made by conservative anti-testers are substantively misguided and politically unwise. To those who make a philosophical argument against the very idea of national tests, we would point out that almost every serious education expert — Democrat or Republican, liberal or conservative — will testify to the value of today's federally funded National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests. They hold NAEP in high regard because it provides important information, its content is sound and it has rigorous standards built in — in large part because the NAEP is governed by an independent board.

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Education Advertising
Careers in Education and
Health Care Employment

Scold War

Yelling At the Little Red Menace

By PETER APPLEBOME

Testing fourth graders in reading and eighth graders in math, however important, doesn't sound like that incendiary an idea. But the rancorous debate over President Clinton's proposed national test, which was alternately depicted as part of a Federal takeover of education, a pathway toward a dumbed-down curriculum and a sure way to stigmatize and penalize ethnic minorities and the poor, was a vivid reminder of just how impossibly politicized the national educational debate has become.

More than a decade after the landmark "Nation at Risk" report warned that America's lagging schools represented an "act of unthinking unilateral educational disarmament," it is worth asking how the Little Red Schoolhouse came to replace the Evil Empire as the biggest threat to the nation's security, and whether there is any way to slow the rhetorical arms race.

The short answer to the first question, coming at a time when Mr. Clinton appears in schools so often that he seems to be running for P.T.A. president, is that the nationalization of educational politics, the increasingly clear link between education levels and economic well-being and a shortage of competing perils have made schooling ground zero for many of the nation's most charged cultural and political issues. If there's a short answer for the second, no one has come up with it yet.

At the least, however, the escalating school wars

School politics is moving to Washington, so education is now a battlefield strewn with casualties of cultural conflict.

over issues ranging from curriculum to teacher standards to school prayer are evidence of a fundamental tension certain to persist as efforts to improve national educational performance butt up against the fierce localism and sense of independence that have always characterized American education.

"Schooling is much more like religion than it is like economic policy or public policy," said Stephen Arons, a professor of legal studies at the University of Massachusetts and the author of "Short Route to Chaos: Conscience, Community and the Re-Constitution of American Schooling" (University of Massachusetts Press, 1997). "When you treat schooling as if it were a question strictly of public policy you wind up with the same kinds of problems you would have if you tried to create a state or national religion. This has been an issue since the 1840's, but for various reasons it's an issue now like never before."

The Senate last week approved Mr. Clinton's proposal for the first national test of individual student achievement after an amendment took control from the Education Department and gave it to an independent, bipartisan board. But the House, where opposition has been focused thus far, seems likely to approve a proposal next week that would bar Federal funds for the test, which is bitterly opposed by Bill Goodling, Republican of Pennsylvania, chairman of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce.

As Mr. Arons notes, educational politics did not begin with the current culture wars. Horace Mann and the other crusaders for mass public education in the 1840's said the nation's future depended on better schools that would instill both learning and moral values. Numerous education reform eras were to follow, some of which, like the Sputnik scare of the late 1950's, made education an issue of national security.

Still, the current moment is extraordinary, education experts say. While education is always a potentially volatile subject, the public animus toward schools and educators that is now taken almost for granted is relatively new. When the Gallup Poll asked for criticisms of the schools in 1946, 40 percent of respondents could not come up with anything to complain about.

Many things have changed since then.

The increasing education presence in Washington, which has grown enormously through the Clinton Administration's Goals 2000 program to determine national standards, has brought armies of Congressional staffs, public relations experts and advocates of all stripes campaigning for maximum political advantage. On that national grid at least four major forces — businesses clamoring for national standards, the institutionalized web of education organizations that conservatives call "the Blob," religious conservatives and advo-



Paul Hosefros/The New York Times

President Clinton talked Monday about national testing to elementary school students in Gambrills, Md.

Yelling at the Little Red Menace

Continued From Page 1

cates for minorities and the poor — find themselves pitted against each other in shifting alliances.

With peace and prosperity and no looming foreign enemy, education is an inviting area for politicians looking for a legacy and a lightning rod for stray political energies crackling across the landscape. When that 1946 Gallup Poll was taken, for example, a national test, if anyone thought to give one, would have been

Still unresolved is another debate over the gap in spending on the wealthiest and the poorest schools.

given only in English. Many people now say that to do so would penalize students who read well but whose first language is not English. Many others say national tests in any language other than English would be an outrage.

"We don't have the enemy outside, but we do have all this anxiety, all this anger within about who we are, what's our history, what are our values," said Mike Rose, an education professor at the University of California at Los Angeles. "So, bingo, where do they play out but in the schoolroom?" Educational issues have been transformed from diffuse, fractured, largely manageable ones that play out in local districts and individual schools to large, political, often symbolic ones.

Mr. Arons, who sees himself as a libertarian, says the key to bringing down the level of discord is divorcing schooling as much as possible not just from the national government but from local politics as well.

But the schisms may be so broad that that won't help much. Conservatives like Lynne Cheney, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and a critic of curriculum changes toward what some call "whole math" or "fuzzy math," say it's the content more than the theory of schooling that's at issue. "I don't think schools 30 years ago were doing anything so faddish and dismaying as what they're doing now," she said.

Still, as contentious as the debates are, many liberal critics say the most important issue in education — the huge gap in resources available to the wealthiest schools and the poorest ones — is not being discussed at all. That suggests that as contentious as the school wars are, there is plenty of room left for them to get worse.

1. Chicago Sun-Times

September 15, 1997

Skip tests; send cash

President Clinton is right: The federal government has a role to play in public education. But that role should not have anything to do with setting national standards or writing national tests, voluntary or otherwise.

Instead of becoming the umpteenth group to weigh in on just what kids ought to be learning, the feds ought to be using their vast resources to make it easier for kids to learn. Rather than committing federal dollars to develop an unneeded, unwanted and unenforceable national standards test, Clinton ought to be sending that money directly to schools. Cash in hand, the schools should apply the federal grants directly to their capital needs: repairing leaky roofs, replastering crumbling walls, replacing broken windows.

Local school boards, under the auspices of state boards of education, are perfectly capable of setting educational standards for their children. Most are far less able to come up with the millions of dollars needed to rebuild their dilapidated schools. The sad reality is, it does not matter what students are expected to learn if they spend their classroom time dodging falling plaster or they cannot take notes because a broken furnace requires they wear gloves in class.

If we want children to learn, we have to give them all of the tools they need to do that. A solid roof over their heads would be a good place to start.■

1. USA Today

September 15, 1997

OPPOSING VIEW: Teach More, Note Less: Using more federal money for additional new national tests is just waste.

By Bill Goodling

Let's help our children learn ---- not test them again. As parents and educators know, our students are tested and tested. They don't need one more standardized test to tell them what they already know.

I strongly support high academic standards, but I strongly oppose a new federal test. I spent 22 years as teacher, counselor and superintendent. I know we don't need a new federal test developed by Washington bureaucrats.

Last week President Clinton's plan was salvaged only after the U.S. Senate modified it. This week, the House is poised to block funding for it. Here's why:

- Federal dollars can be better spent helping students learn. House Republicans would rather cut red tape and spend dollars directly to the classroom. We also want to bolster basic academics, increase parental involvement and help families save for the high cost of education.
- We already have plenty of federal tests. This year the federal government will spend \$540 million on education tests. These tests give us a clear picture of how students are performing. Why waste \$90 million of taxpayers' money on a new test?
- Forty-six states have recently created new standards and tests. The administration doesn't think that's good enough. Clinton's plan shows the arrogance of Washington at work.
- Educators don't support the administration's plan. Since the president announced his plan in February, only seven states and 15 of the nation's 15,000 school districts have signed up. Educators know we have enough tests. Educators are also concerned about fairness.

What happens when a well-funded school district volunteers for the test, but the poor district next door doesn't? The poor district will, once again, be held up as deficient.

- The public opposes federal testing. A new poll shows that 74% of all Americans oppose federal involvement in testing. The administration says its surveys show that 80% of the public supports high standards and testing ---- but not from Washington.

Leave testing to state and local authorities ---- the people who teach our children.

1. The Atlanta Journal - The Atlanta Constitution

09/13/97Section: EDITORIAL; Page A; 12

Saturday Talk, Journal Voices

National test does nothing positive

By Dick Williams

Since the advent of television, conservatives have been on the defensive —even when they win. After all, "Make haste slowly" isn't exactly a rallying cry. Better the liberal axiom: "Do something."

It figures to be a mismatch. After all, conservatives want less government, less intrusion, more individual responsibility. But when problems are spotlighted, especially with the speed of today's mass media, the thoughtful pales next to the activist.

President Clinton has become the master of exploiting the divide. Insiders call it the micropresidency: Identify a problem and propose a small solution. Force conservatives to object to several dozen such microsolutions, and they look like mossback obstructionists.

In the past year, the president has offered two perfect examples. The first was his desire to spend \$5 billion in federal taxpayer dollars to repair decaying schools, mostly in cities.

The problem is easy to spotlight. The video cameras visit decrepit facilities, capture the rats, the falling plaster and the innocent children dodging the debris. "Do something" is the understandable response.

Clinton lost on that one, chiefly because of common sense. Should the harried taxpayers of Cobb and DeKalb counties, for instance, bail out incompetent or corrupt school boards in other states? Should New York City be rewarded for failing to build new schools in a timely manner? The congressional majority recognized that school finance is the province of the locals and their wrangles over property taxes, sales taxes and bond issues.

Now comes Clinton proposing national testing of students. And why not? After all, we are accustomed to learning that our youngsters are 28th or some such number among industrialized nations in this test or that. How can testing hurt?

It probably wouldn't, unless teachers under pressure taught only the test content demanded of fourth-graders in reading and eighth-graders in math. But it would surely increase the power of the federal government and the teachers unions. It could lead to a de facto national curriculum.

But there are two plain and simple reasons to avoid activism on the issue.

First, the national tests already exist. High school graduates can take the SAT or the ACT. Just about every child in Georgia and elsewhere takes the Iowa Test of Basic Skills through ninth grade, and most students in the upper grades take the Stanford Achievement Test. The press reports the scores thoroughly. Only the most uncaring parent fails to know where a son or daughter stands against the national norms.

And second, those are private tests, with no political or spending agenda. They make sense. The SAT, administered by the private, nonprofit College Board, obviously has the attention of Georgia. The state's poor performance has prompted Johnny Isakson, chairman of the state board of education, and state School Superintendent Linda Schrenko to push for an average score 1000 in 2001. It is a laudable goal. Parents demand answers when a school slips from year to year.

The cry for national testing is a simplistic way of moving toward a national curriculum contemptuous of state and local tradition. It strengthens bureaucrats and diminishes local elected officials.

In short, it looks like doing something. It's just that it's the wrong thing.

Dick Williams is an Atlanta writer. His column appears Saturdays and Tuesdays (in the Journal). You can e-mail him at thecrier@mindspring.com■

EDITORIAL

51. San Antonio Express-News

09/13/97; Edition: Final; Section: Editorial; Page 04B

U.S. standardized tests unnecessary, unwanted

The House is all that stands between American school children and unnecessary national standardized tests in reading and writing.

President Clinton proposed the tests as one of his education priorities, and the Senate approved the plan by a big margin this week.

On a voluntary basis, fourth-graders would be tested on reading and eighth-graders would take a national math test.

States already conduct standardized tests, and critics fear that Clinton's plan would bring more federal interference in education, which is properly a state and local issue.

Gov. George W. Bush, a Republican, and Democratic legislators in Texas voiced opposition to the proposal.

Bush told the Associated Press that Texas has "a very good accountability system," adding that he feared a national standard would promote a "mushy

curriculum."

State Rep. Paul Sadler, D-Henderson, said, "We do a very thorough job of testing our Texas students."

Parents who are paying attention don't need a national test to determine whether their children have mastered the basics of reading and math.

An amendment to block any spending on the national tests is scheduled to reach the House floor on Tuesday. The House should approve the amendment. ■

1. The New York Times

09/15/97; Edition: Late Edition - Final; Section: Section A; Editorial Desk; Page 22, Column 1

Evaluating Pupil Performance

President Clinton's proposal for a national test that would offer detailed comparisons among individual students, schools and states has run into heavy weather. The Senate has approved the idea and even strengthened it. But House Republicans argue that a new test is unnecessary and that a national test in any event would constitute a Government takeover of the schools. On the Democratic side, some black and Latino members warn that a national test would stigmatize minority children, who generally attend worse schools.

The Clinton Administration has done a miserable job at calming fears and building consensus. Even so, the objections raised by those who oppose the plan are minor compared with the benefits of a test that would allow parents to choose wisely among schools — and to know exactly where their children stand with respect to state, national and even world standards.

States now employ a patchwork of different tests, making comparisons among states and regions almost impossible. In addition, test scores are often reported in a manner that seems deliberately obscure, as though to prevent parents from finding out how well or poorly their schools are doing. The national tests administered by the National Assessment of Educational Progress are sound but are given only to representative samplings of students. They can be used to rank states but give no information on individual students, schools or school districts.

Mr. Clinton's plan calls for 90-minute tests of fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade mathematics to be given on a voluntary basis beginning in March 1999. It would cost \$27 million to develop the tests. Administering them would cost about \$10 to \$12 for each of the eight million fourth and eighth graders who would take the tests. Under the Clinton proposal, the Federal Government would pay costs in the first year, and states or local districts would pay after that. The Senate has insured that the test would be constructed in a nonpartisan fashion by giving responsibility to the National Assessment Governing Board, an independent body with a reputation for thorough and tough-minded analysis.

Detailed test scores would help teachers and principals strengthen instructional plans — and find out how well or how poorly the changes work. School-by-school rankings would allow the states to move promptly against failing schools and to replicate those shown to be successful. The goals and standards associated with the test would be widely publicized, so that students, parents and teachers would know what was expected of them.

Critics are right when they argue that the schools require more than just testing to do a better job. The General Accounting Office, for example, estimates that it would take \$112 billion just to put school buildings in reasonable working order. Initiatives to reduce class size and revamp teacher education could cost billions more. A strong comprehensive test would allow the country to judge which improvements made a difference.

A voluntary national test is far from the "Federal takeover" House Republicans suggest. On the contrary, the test would empower parents by allowing them to know how well their children and schools were doing — and to hold politicians and school officials accountable as never before. Perhaps that is why some in Congress want to abort the plan.

04:26 EDT September 15, 1997■

1. USA Today

September 15, 1997

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I strongly support high academic standards, but I strongly oppose a new federal test. I spent 22 years as teacher, counselor and superintendent. I know we don't need a new federal test developed by Washington bureaucrats.

Last week President Clinton's plan was salvaged only after the U.S. Senate modified it. This week, the House is poised to block funding for it. Here's why:

- Federal dollars can be better spent helping students learn. House Republicans would rather cut red tape and spend dollars directly to the classroom. We also want to bolster basic academics, increase parental involvement and help families save for the high cost of education.
- We already have plenty of federal tests. This year the federal government will spend \$540 million on education tests. These tests give us a clear picture of how students are performing. Why waste \$90 million of taxpayers' money on a new test?
- Forty-six states have recently created new standards and tests. The administration doesn't think that's good enough. Clinton's plan shows the arrogance of Washington at work.
- Educators don't support the administration's plan. Since the president announced his plan in February, only seven states and 15 of the nation's 15,000 school districts have signed up. Educators know we have enough tests. Educators are also concerned about fairness.

What happens when a well-funded school district volunteers for the test, but the poor district next door doesn't? The poor district will, once again, be held up as deficient.

- The public opposes federal testing. A new poll shows that 74% of all Americans oppose federal involvement in testing. The administration says its surveys show that 80% of the public supports high standards and testing ---- but not from Washington.

Leave testing to state and local authorities ---- the people who teach our children.

1. The New York Times

09/15/97; Edition: Late Edition - Final; Section: Section A; Editorial Desk; Page 22, Column 4

Letters to the Editor

Washington Should Give Schools More Money, Not More Exams

To the Editor:

Re "National Test Plan Runs Into Minefield" (Education page, Sept. 10): Like the development of National Standards, the creation of a nonbinding national testing program provides an easy way for the Federal Government to suggest educational goals without committing the resources necessary to realize those goals.

Rather than employing educational researchers in the inconsequential tasks of report and guideline preparation, President Clinton and Congress need to recognize that the most productive role for the Government is not in assessment but in the development of exemplary curriculums and in the creation of affordable teaching and learning materials of quality.

ROGER B. BLUMBERG

Providence, R.I., Sept. 10, 1997

The writer is a researcher in the Scholarly Technology Group at Brown University.

04:26 EDT September 15, 1997■

1. The New York Times

09/15/97; Edition: Late Edition - Final; Section: Section A; Editorial Desk; Page 22, Column 4

Letters to the Editor: Washington Should Give Schools More Money, Not More Exam

Nothing to Accomplish

To the Editor:

The debate over the creation of national tests in fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math (Education page, Sept. 10) misses the point. The real question is, What will additional testing accomplish?

Why is it necessary to verify what we already know: that 40 percent of American children test at below reading level at fourth grade, and 36 percent test below grade in math at eighth grade. Instead of spending \$27 million to develop the tests, and an additional \$10 million to \$12 million to administer them, our Government could use that money to purchase textbooks or to set up reading and math tutorial services. More testing will not address the real problems in our schools.

BONNIE LE VAR

White Plains, Sept. 10, 1997

The writer is a research associate, Institute for Socioeconomic Studies.

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1. The New York Times

09/15/97; Edition: Late Edition - Final; Section: Section A; Editorial Desk; Page 22, Column 5

Letters to the Editor: Washington Should Give Schools More Money, Not More Exam

Backfiring on Vouchers

To the Editor:

Conservatives who oppose national achievement tests fail to recognize that such testing is needed to make their own proposals work (Education page, Sept. 10).

In a drive to limit Federal power, education vouchers have been proposed as a market solution for raising educational standards that would leave control over schools at the local level. Parents could use vouchers at the school of their choice, so schools would have to compete to attract enrollment and budget dollars by improving performance. However, without information about the relative performance of schools, it is impossible for parents to know which schools do a better job of teaching, and the school voucher model breaks down. IRVIN CERNAUSKAS Oak Park, Ill., Sept. 10, 1997

04:26 EDT September 15, 1997■

language approach to reading rejects traditional phonics. The result of the latter is that 40 percent of today's third graders can't read and 70 percent of them are not proficient.

Most Americans, of course, favor student testing. They see it as a way to make schools accountable. In that respect, testing can be helpful. But the president's concentration on national testing, by design or not, serves to distract attention from the growing demand for parental choice, vouchers and relaxing the iron grip of teacher unions on public education.■

1. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

September 12, 1997

Liberals and conservatives against national school test

Liberal Atlanta Congressman John Lewis and conservative House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who despise each other's politics, are joined in opposing President Clinton's call for national education testing.

Lewis' response was dramatic and newsworthy. While I did not hear him personally, he was quoted as saying this about a non-defense issue: "We don't need to be spending millions of dollars coming up with a federal program." Lewis often expresses such views on defense spending. But it is quite the newsworthy item when he rejects any other expansion of the federal reach.

The convergence of the political polarities to oppose Clinton's national testing program arises from their fear that it is the federal camel's nose in the tent. Liberals fear it will lead to tiered education, or tracking, while conservatives are concerned that it will lead to federal usurpation of local education authority and to a national curriculum.

The U.S. Department of Education has already spent \$13 million on the tests, which would be administered starting in March 1999, and cost \$100 million to develop. To gain approval from those who suspect his motives, Clinton agreed to hand oversight to the National Assessment Governing Board, an independent agency created by Congress, to give it more political balance. The board oversees the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a sampling test used in 43 states to measure improvement in several subject areas.

Still, there is doubt. Either the administration has an agenda, as with health care, that it would implement incrementally — or the proposed testing program has no particular usefulness beyond providing numbers for stern-faced editorial writers and politician to assert: "We can do better. We must do better."

The problem is not an absence of evidence that schools are failing. It's how to fix the problem. That's not a federal responsibility.

Educating children is, first off, a parental responsibility. Parents decide what values and curricula they want taught. Customarily, they express that desire through elected local school boards — their agents. When those values or that curriculum are not acceptable to them, they have two options: Agitate to change the instruction or choose an alternative, such as private or home schooling.

Children should be prepared to function in the world. That's a definition, however, that varies from system to system. In one community, it may mean self-esteem classes and early sex education. In another, it may be music appreciation. In any case, when the values and curriculum conflict with parents' personal code and religious beliefs, they should change the system or find another option for their child.

Parents, then, are the "customers" and owners of public education. They assign up the ladder those functions they cannot, or do not choose, to handle. Hiring teachers. Organizing the school day. Buying buildings. Choosing textbooks.

Local school boards do the same thing. They rely on the states to evaluate education material, including textbooks, because it's more economical and efficient to do in bulk. Assembling comparative performance information is another state task. Funding equity. Teacher preparation.

The federal role is to address exceptions: The financial impact of military bases on a local school system, for example. Or special needs, such as non-English-speaking populations.

Frankly, there's no real reason for the federal government to have any significant role in education. Testing or otherwise.■

1. The New York Times

09/15/97; Edition: Late Edition - Final; Section: Section A; Editorial Desk; Page 22, Column 1

Evaluating Pupil Performance

President Clinton's proposal for a national test that would offer detailed comparisons among individual students, schools and states has run into heavy weather. The Senate has approved the idea and even strengthened it. But House Republicans argue that a new test is unnecessary and that a national test in any event would constitute a Government takeover of the schools. On the Democratic side, some black and Latino members warn that a national test would stigmatize minority children, who generally attend

1. The Indianapolis Star

09/13/97; Edition: CITY FINAL; Section: EDITORIAL; Page A12

The testing dispute

President Clinton is again pushing for national student testing. He took time out during his vacation to complain about the reluctance of states to participate beginning in 1999. And back in Washington, he lit into congressional opponents who threaten to eliminate funding for testing from the Department of Education budget.

A number of conservatives in Congress would like to see the Department of Education eliminated, but they don't have the votes to do it. More's the pity.

For now, the battleground for conservatives is national testing. Fourth graders nationwide would be tested on reading skills and eighth graders on math skills. Testing would be voluntary and funded - at least in 1999 - by the federal government. Who could object to that? Lots of people, as it turns out.

For one, numerous governors have expressed reservations, among them Wisconsin's Tommy Thompson, head of an educational task force for the nation's 32 GOP governors: "Because state governments pay 93 percent of the costs of education, we're fearful of the federal government coming in now and dictating to us about standards and assessments."

As others point out, what starts as voluntary with the federal government often turns out to be mandatory. Plus, states already have access to numerous testing programs.

Many are convinced national testing will lead to curriculum standards. The country got a sample of that in 1994 with the publication of proposed history standards that outraged 99 out of 100 members of the Senate.

Clinton insists there is nothing controversial about math and reading. They are straightforward subjects with no political agenda. Some would question that.

Newsweek magazine recently reported that many parents are revolting against the "new-new math" being taught in about half of elementary schools. New-new, begun in 1989, is successor to the discredited New Math and is the inspiration of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.

Like many parents, respected educational scholars are concluding that new-new doesn't work. Yet every member appointed by the administration's math test panel supports it.

New and new-new math reject the traditional techniques of rote memorization and blackboard instruction just as the whole language approach to reading rejects traditional phonics. The result of the latter is that 40 percent of today's third graders can't read and 70 percent of them are not proficient.

Most Americans, of course, favor student testing. They see it as a way to make schools accountable. In that respect, testing can be helpful. But the president's concentration on national testing, by design or not, serves to distract attention from the growing demand for parental choice, vouchers and relaxing the iron grip of teacher unions on public education.■

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HIGHWAY FUNDS LAGGING

Gov. Roy Romer had history and economics on his side Monday when he suggested in Grand Junction that Colorado's gasoline taxes should be indexed to inflation to preserve their purchasing power. The fact that political adversaries rushed to take cheap shots at the idea only served again to underscore the fact that Romer, and the business-led coalition known as the Colorado Transportation Network, have at least succeeded in forcing the Colorado Legislature to begin addressing the transportation needs it neglected for decades.

Colorado's most important revenue sources - sales taxes and income taxes - are already "indexed" to inflation by the simple fact that they are percentage taxes. If the price of an automobile jumps from \$2,500 in 1960 to \$25,000 today, the 3 percent sales tax collected on that automobile likewise jumps from \$75 to \$750. In contrast, Colorado collects 22 cents on every gallon of gasoline sold in the state, an amount that is fixed regardless of the retail price of fuel. The 5 percent state income tax also brings in more money as incomes increase.

Besides losing purchasing power in the face of inflation, that unit tax also lost purchasing power for decades as fuel economy improved in the wake of the 1973 oil embargo. This year, that trend reversed, at least temporarily, as gasoline-hungry sport utility vehicles flooded the market.

These trends have had a heavy impact on highway construction and maintenance in Colorado because the state relies on fuel taxes for 75 percent of its highway funding, with most the balance coming
* from registration fees. As a national average, states draw only 45 percent of highway revenues from fuel taxes, relying on registration fees, bonds, tolls and other taxes to fund the

(See p. 3)

difference. As a result, Colorado's gasoline tax is the 17th highest in the nation, but our total transportation revenue on a per capita basis is only 37th.

Indexing the gasoline tax is one way, though not the only way, to ease this problem.

If Romer's critics have better ideas, we're waiting to hear them. **FIX THE INS**

When the overwhelmed INS decided six years ago to turn its citizenship-testing program over to private contractors, its intentions were good. But the move has backfired.

As more and more cases surface of corrupt subcontractors taking advantage of immigrants desperate for citizenship, it has become painfully clear that the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service needs to better police these private entities.

The move to private testing was touted as a way to reach legal residents who wouldn't apply for citizenship because they feared the INS.

That fear is gone. Amid tighter requirements for citizenship, applications hit 1.3 million last year - more than double the count from two years earlier.

But that explosion also underscores the agency's need for help - and that's where private contractors still can prove handy.

Denver immigrants already face a one-year backlog in getting applications processed, and that's speedy compared with the three-year waits elsewhere.

While contractors can conduct the first of two tests required
* for citizenship, the INS still has to issue the second test.

Imagine how torturous the process would become if the contractors were eliminated. Preserving some privatization - while pouncing on the scofflaws who have infiltrated the system - would be preferable.

However, either route requires better performance from the beleaguered agency. And improvement won't come without radical changes.

The U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform wants the INS abolished and its duties divided among the departments of Justice, Labor and State.

We prefer INS Commissioner Doris Meissner's idea.

To help contend with a stampede of aspiring citizens, Meissner is seeking \$50.8 million to implement - by June 1 - a standardized computer system that achieves what INS spokesman Andrew Lluberes calls "absolute integrity - meaning every person naturalized as a citizen meets all the requirements, and that INS has, as it processes that application, all the information it requires."

"It ain't cheap," he says, "but it needs to be fixed."

Indeed, controlling immigration decently and fairly should be

Source: Denver Post, September 10, 1997

one of our nation's top priorities. Abolishing INS seems counterproductive. Fixing it, on the other hand, is an excellent idea. TESTING, TESTING, TESTING President Clinton, fresh from vacation, has dislodged a major political beehive by announcing his * renewed support for voluntary national reading and math tests. The annual tests would be administered to fourth- and eighth-grade students by the nation's local school districts.

To some, this may seem a "no-brainer" in the sense that more testing can't hurt and, in many cases, would actually help parents and students determine how well their local schools are doing. We believe the issue is not quite so simple.

To begin with, there is some confusion over whether the tests * will be truly voluntary. The U.S. Department of Education plans to spend \$16 million or so developing the tests and then would be prepared to spend up to \$100 million implementing the program. In practice, that might mean that pressure, in the form of federal financing, would be applied to get states to sign up.

* In addition, there are concerns that a national testing program at this point would detract from the efforts of some 45 states, including Colorado, who have spent time and energy developing their own state testing standards, in response to the federal Goals 2000 program. Local districts have finite resources, and they can't effectively try to improve their own standards and assessments if * they are busy administering a new national program.

There is already what might be called a third option. The * National Assessment of Educational Progress test and the Third International Mathematics and Science Study have existed for years and are voluntarily given by some local districts. It would seem inevitable that the tests now proposed by the Department of Education would to some degree overlap these prior efforts.

Finally, we think there is value in having a full-scale debate over what the federal government's role in education should be. That debate should occur before Congress approves the initial * appropriation for a new national testing program.

In our view, the federal role in education should largely be limited to designing tax benefits that encourage education and generally helping states and localities raise educational achievement.

Colorado has a long history of protecting the notion of local educational control. The state's local districts have just finished administering the first battery of state-sponsored tests.

Therefore, at the minimum, it would seem these efforts would be diluted by a rush to develop yet another round of tests.

I0607 * End of document.

New York Newsday
September 10, 1997

Failing the Exam / A coalition of liberals and conservatives lets down our kids by opposing national tests.

After all the complaints about the mediocre performance of American students and with a pile of evidence showing that scholastic rigor varies wildly from one school district to another, the Clinton administration is trying to accomplish something worthwhile. It wants national tests in reading and math to give parents, schools and even employers the basic information they need to determine if the kids measure up.

This should not be a politically arduous endeavor but a rallying point for everyone concerned about the nation's need to upgrade the schooling of all children to prepare them for the new work force.

Yet conservative Republicans including House Speaker Newt Gingrich

(R-Ga.), in an alliance of convenience with some liberal Democrats, are trying to beat back the plan by denying funding. That would be a triumph of ideology and politics over common sense.

No modern nation but the United States has such a fragmented education system, in which there are effectively no checks to ensure that schools perform as they should. Yet President Bill Clinton, mindful of the enduring attachment Americans have to local control of public schools, specifically has proposed to make the national tests voluntary. No district or state can be forced to administer them - but the more that do, the sharper the picture will be about where the failings are. Clinton also has wisely bowed to demands that the test be

developed by a bipartisan testing board.

Despite the conservatives' rhetoric that decries Clinton's plan as a federal power grab, no one proposes to have Washington bulldoze through the little red schoolhouse. Liberals worried that disadvantaged students will perform poorly are probably right in their assumption but wrong in their remedy. Not testing won't make things better, and testing could, once and for all, pinpoint the worst failings for remediation.

No matter how much the two extremes argue, there's no running from the consensus that exists among hundreds of businesses and most educators: It's time to get serious about demanding high-quality educational outcomes. Clinton is right to push toward it. ■

1. The Wall Street Journal

09/09/97

Throw These Tests Out of School

By Chester E. Finn Jr.

This week Congress weighs President Clinton's plan for national standards and tests, beginning with fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math. But although national testing is in principle a good idea, the president's proposal will do more harm than good. If Congress is going to enact such a measure, it should do it right.

The House is likely to vote to block future funding for the program. A multimillion-dollar contract, however, has already been signed by the Education Department and work is now under way. Timid GOP Senate leaders, lacking the nerve to kill the program, will decide whether to accept the Clinton version or make last-minute repairs. House and Senate negotiators from the appropriations committees, who have scant expertise in education policy, will then work out the final version of the bill.

The administration has pulled out all the stops to keep its plan alive, including threats to veto the huge Health and Human Services appropriation in which it is embedded. Only in the past few weeks has its fate been in doubt. For six months, a passive GOP Congress simply allowed the executive branch to proceed unilaterally with the first-ever nationwide standards and tests in a country that heretofore left such things to states and local communities. The White House brashly asserted that it didn't even need authorization from Congress. The president has already signed up six states and 15 cities to participate. Congress merely yawned. My fellow alumni of the Reagan and Bush administrations agree that if a Republican White House had attempted a maneuver like this, it would have taken the Democratic Congress about 30 seconds to cut us off at the knees.

The reason the testing plan is now one of the hotter issues in Washington is not, alas, because Republicans in Congress took the lead but because outside opposition finally surfaced. On the left, groups such as FairTest (which has never seen a test it deems fair) and the Congressional Black Caucus are opposed on grounds that test scores may harm minorities and more dollars should instead be pumped into school programs. Conservative groups, such as the Christian Coalition and Concerned Women for America, protest this new federal intrusion into education. One influential congressman, Rep. Bill Goodling (R., Pa.), himself a former school superintendent, opposes national testing in principle. In his view, more tests wouldn't tell us anything we don't already know about what's wrong with U.S. schools, and comparisons among schools are invidious.

Many fellow Republicans think Mr. Goodling is wrong. Properly done, standards-based national tests would provide useful information to students and their parents and put pressure on schools to improve. The public-school establishment is opposed because it wants to continue obfuscating the truth about its dismal performance.

But the Clinton administration has mangled this promising idea to the point that the GOP Congress should either make major repairs or scrap it altogether. The past few weeks have brought bountiful evidence that the tests now in the works are sorely flawed, just the sort of exams teachers' unions would love. They won't tell us whether children can actually read or compute. Major problems include dumbed-down standards, "fuzzy" math (as Lynne Cheney calls it), universal use of electronic calculators, and assumptions about reading that partake of "whole language" and "deconstructionist" notions rather than systematic phonics, grammar and basic understanding. The Clinton tests will examine the things trendy experts wish the schools were teaching, rather than the skills and knowledge that parents, employers and state officials prize.

This subversion of national testing results from letting the Education Department run the project on behalf of its school-establishment and ivory-tower pals. No issue is more fundamental than who is in charge of the tests; Mr. Clinton opted to vest that control in his own appointees and contractors and experts of their choosing. That arrangement invites future manipulation of sensitive matters such as test content, standards and "accommodations" for influential groups. A dozen assistant secretaries can fiddle and meddle, and their machinations will shift with passing political winds and changing administrations.

Once the plan encountered opposition, the White House made a sop to its critics. It hastily cobbled together a proposal to transfer jurisdiction partly from the Education Department to a body called the National Assessment Governing Board. That's the "deal" currently before Congress.

I served on the NAGB for eight years, and chaired it for two. It's a good group. If it were made truly independent and bipartisan, given unambiguous control over the tests and invited to fix the mistakes of the Clinton plan, it might be able to do this delicate job.

But that isn't what the administration proposed. Rather, the White House would hand very limited authority to the NAGB, a board that also remains vulnerable to second-guessing and foot-dragging by the Education Department. Its membership is anybody the secretary of Education wants to appoint. It could have as few as two Republicans out of 25 members. It includes plenty of educators and "testing experts" but just a few governors, parents and employers. As currently constituted, and with the meager authority proffered by the White House, the NAGB cannot be counted on to fix the errors in the Clinton scheme, much less safeguard the future integrity of national testing.

Congress, which created the NAGB in 1988 and weakened it in 1994, could easily set this right. It would take minutes to write good legislation to reconstitute the board and give it full control, and the Clinton White House is so hot for national testing that it would likely go along. But today it appears Congress is not up to that assignment. These are complex, technical issues that the president cares mightily about but few on Capitol Hill even understand. Indeed, the GOP leadership seems to have virtually abandoned education, apparently concluding that it cannot outgun or outmaneuver the White House and its powerful allies in the school establishment. On issues far larger than testing, the GOP has already yielded to the administration. The pending appropriations

bill, for example, would more than double funding for the genuinely destructive bilingual education program.

Pundits and business spokesmen, meanwhile, are giving bad advice, urging Congress simply to get on with the president's well-intended initiative. They evidently haven't read the test "specs" and they dismiss the governance issues as "details." Yet if we are to have national testing, it's precisely these details that matter most. The crucial questions about any test are who decides what's on it, and who sets the standards by which student performance is judged.

If the House and Senate cannot make sure that sound answers to such questions are enshrined in law, the country would be better off without the tests. But that's not apt to happen either. Keeping this project alive is hugely important to Mr. Clinton, and the GOP leadership would rather create a bad program than risk defeat on a showdown vote. So the president will likely have his way, or close to it. Bad national tests will proceed. A weak NAGB will provide political cover. And true education reform will again be dealt a setback by Uncle Sam.

Mr. Finn is a fellow at the Hudson Institute and a former assistant secretary of education.■

1. Detroit News

September 9, 1997

Testing Choice

Bill Clinton's proposal for new national tests in primary and secondary education has run up against congressional opposition - as it should. Education policy should be kept local, diverse and competitive. If the federal government must do something, it should consider a proposal by Sen. Paul Coverdell, R-Ga.: Creation of tax-free education accounts.

The tests President Clinton wants to develop for fourth and eighth graders are based on "national" education standards written during the past few years by various academic panels. Mr. Clinton argues that challenging tests and standards are needed to improve schools.

This is probably true - which is why nearly everybody has already had the idea. In Michigan alone, there is a "model core curriculum" - voluntary, like Mr. Clinton's proposed program - as well as the Michigan Educational Assessment Program, Michigan's High School Proficiency Test and privately administered college entrance exams, such as the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), ACT and Advanced Placement exams, which are taken nationwide. These exams are in addition to two other voluntary, federally financed tests, the National Assessment of Educational Progress and the Third International Mathematics and Science Study.

Perhaps Mr. Clinton's new tests will be no worse than superfluous. But the federal government is renowned for initiatives that push local efforts aside, and this one seems particularly likely to do so. Recently issued national standards have been widely attacked as failing to emphasize basic skills, and despite Mr. Clinton's assurances that the program would be "national," not "federal," the U.S. Department of Education is trying to fund the program, arguably without congressional approval.

Moreover, testing is inherently fraught with difficulties, especially in a political environment. Challenging tests bring poor test results and disappointed constituencies - a real political no-no. For instance, students' school grades appear to have been inflated during the past two decades, according to administrators of the SAT and ACT exams. In Michigan, the High School Proficiency Test may be revised on grounds that students' scores are lower than they ought to be.

The problems of testing and agreement over standards suggest that various independent tests like the ACT and SAT will ensure better quality than a single national regime. The federal government's role in education should be to step out of the way.

Congress should therefore approve a proposal by Rep. Bill Goodling, R-Pa., to prevent the U.S. Department of Education from spending money on a new federal test. And it should consider a proposal by Sen. Coverdell to create an "education savings account" where people can accumulate money, free from taxes, to finance a variety of educational activities: special education tutoring, home computers, transportation to school and even private school tuition.

Such an account would allow taxpayers to keep more of their own money, freeing private resources to compete with and supplement public education. Though creating these accounts is really a temporary solution until a lower, flat tax is politically feasible, Sen. Coverdell's bill is the best way for Washington to empower parents and communities. ■

1. Bangor Daily News (Bangor, ME)

09/03/97; Edition: ALL;

Enough testing

President Clinton's attempt to resurrect his moribund national education testing plan by taking federal bureaucrats out of the picture is an improvement. Dropping the idea altogether would be even better.

In his "back to school" radio address Saturday, the president promised to rewrite his long-cherished plan in a way to ease fears of a federal takeover of the nation's schools — the test for reading and math proficiency now will be developed by an independent bipartisan board, rather than the much-criticized U.S. Department of Education.

Considering that the entire Education Department is at the top of many a list for bureaucratic extinction, that's a wise and necessary move. Considering that the independent bipartisan board is likely to be indistinguishable from the Department of Education, it seems like a minor bit of fiddling that doesn't address the bigger questions.

Are not the nation's schoolchildren tested enough already? Do we not already know that our math and science performance, while improving slightly, still trails other developed nations and that our reading and writing skills are abominable? Will one more test, demographically and sociologically watered down to boost the national self esteem, do any good? Could not the money to be spent on this — \$16 million to develop the test and \$100 million each year thereafter to administer it — be put to a better use, such as actually helping kids learn?

And, if the test does reveal some identifiable, specific problems to fix, where's the money with which to do the fixing? Does the phrase "unfunded mandate" ring a bell?

The irony in the president's call for national performance testing is that it is based upon what looks like some pretty thorough testing already done, the Education Department's National Assessment of Educational Progress, which tested about 30,000 pupils, nine to 17 years of age, since 1978. Nearly 20 years of random sampling shows a modest improvement in math and science, but a decline in reading and writing skills.

The report not only identifies the problem in an entirely adequate way, but also pinpoints the cause: 39 percent of the 17-year-olds tested say they watch as much as five hours of television a day, up from 26 percent in 1978. The number who read for fun daily has dropped in proportion. Nearly one-fifth say they never, ever, read for fun.

Spending \$100 million a year for more testing won't change a national bad habit. As Monty Neill, head of the National Center for Fair and Open Testing, puts it, "You don't fatten cattle by weighing them more often."

The national testing was a cornerstone of the president's very first state of the union address back in 1993. It's gone nowhere: only six states and 15 major school districts have shown any interest. Dressing it up in new school clothes doesn't make it any less unnecessary or redundant.

The nation's pupils have been tested quite enough, the deficiencies are obvious and \$100 million could go a long way toward fixing them. Just paying kids not to watch so much TV would do more good than another test. ■

1. USA Today

September 2, 1997

Opposing View: Don't force standards

By D.L. Cuddy

When I hear that all students should be required to take algebra by grade eight, I wonder, why the lack of choice?

Some would argue that if students are to succeed academically, they must have algebra by grade eight or be closed out of necessary higher math classes later.

I didn't take "Algebra I" until the ninth grade, but before my junior year in college, I had successfully completed two junior-level math classes.

Why push to require algebra by grade eight, as opposed to nine? Could it be because President Clinton called for national education standards and said the federal government would help develop a national math test to be taken in grade eight?

Remember, he declared that "every state and school must shape the curriculum to reflect these standards."

Former U.S. commissioner of education Ernest Boyer said in 1994: "If I had ever whispered national standards, I think I would have lost my job."

National standards are an attempt by politicians to centralize power. As Kenneth Goodman, past president of the International Reading Association, has said, controlling education outcomes allows power brokers to control schools while claiming to support local control.

Each state should decide if and when algebra, or other subjects, should be required.

Another national effort under way seems to be the elimination of tracking students based upon their abilities.

One may be able to make a case that doing away with ability grouping in certain academic areas such as social studies would allow a wide variety of students to get to know one another better.

But in technical areas, that argument is lacking. For advanced math and science students to reach fullest potential, they shouldn't have to take classes slowed to the learning speed of less advanced students.

Unfortunately, this too often happens in today's outcome-based education.

D.L. Cuddy has been a senior associate with the U.S. Department of Education and is the author of a 200-year education chronology. ■

1. Houston Chronicle

08/30/97; Edition: 3 STAR; Section: A; Page 46

NATIONAL EXAMS

Leave the public schools in state and local hands

President Clinton's proposal to institute standardized national tests for America's schoolchildren - tests on reading for fourth-graders and mathematics for eight-graders - will appeal to many Americans.

After all, don't we want our children to be more knowledgeable and better educated? Don't we want to know how our particular school district compares to others in Texas and the nation?

But closer examination should raise some serious concerns about the president's plan, which he says would be voluntary but which he wants used by everyone. For example:

This is a nation whose citizens believe strongly in local control of the public schools. Standardized tests given to every fourth- and eight-grader in the nation's public schools inevitably would lead to a national effort to teach what is being tested, and from there to a national curriculum. In the United States, the public schools are state and local matters, and national tests would decrease state and local control of schools already burdened with federal strings and regulations.

National standards, prescribed by the **Department of Education** in Washington, D.C., undoubtedly would be dumbed down to avoid accusation that the tests were unfair to disadvantaged poor and/or minority students.

With the Department of Education designing the exams and defining the material to be covered, politics and social engineering goals would enter the picture. Liberals generally see the world one way; conservatives another. Partisan intrusions supplied by ever-changing administrations would not serve public education.

Finally, what vital purpose would new national tests serve? **The National Assessment of Education Progress** tests are already taken by a sampling of students nationwide. Our state has the standardized Texas Assessment of Academic Skills text. College-bound students take the SAT and PSAT. Some districts also give their students nongovernmental national norm tests such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. The Houston Independent School District will begin using the Stanford Achievement Test this year.

What do these tests tell us? They tell parents and taxpayers that overall achievement in the public schools remains unsatisfactory and that significant progress, such as HISD is making, is uneven and slow. National tests would merely confirm what Americans already know.

Students spend too much of the school day taking tests as it is, but HISD Superintendent Rod Paige has expressed interest in having the district participate in the president's proposed national tests. However, he and other educators already have more than sufficient tools with which to gauge students' progress. ■

1. The Washington Post

08/27/97; Edition: FINAL; Section: Financial; Page C20

JUDY MANN

Testing's Bottom Line

By Judy Mann

Let's head into the new school year with a few disturbing facts:

Only 40 percent of our nation's students meet basic reading standards in the fourth grade, and only 20 percent have studied algebra by the eighth grade, compared with 100 percent of the students in many other developed countries.

The Czech Republic, which spends a third of what we spend per pupil, ranks sixth in math and second in science, while we rank 28th in math and 17th in science on internationally administered exams.

These grim findings are cited in a discussion, prepared by the Educational Testing Service, of the Clinton administration's proposal for voluntary national testing of fourth- and eighth-graders in reading and math.

Anthony P. Carnevale, an economist who is vice president in ETS's Office for Public Leadership and who co-authored the discussion paper, says the push for testing is part of the reinventing and reengineering that we are seeing in almost every American institution that is affected by the global economy.

The need to adapt to global competition begins in the classroom, both for individuals and for the nation, at the same time that educational resources are growing scarce, he says. "It would cost \$150 billion to drop class size to 20 people and add 15 to 20 school days," Carnevale says. Education and health care, he says, both have serious productivity and service problems and both are highly fragmented. And the public has made it clear with both that it doesn't want the federal government micromanaging.

The way around this is to set up "outcome standards," he says. "The issue is how much efficiency can we drive into these systems. We spend three grand in Utah and nine in New York [per pupil], and Utah does much better. There is an efficiency problem here."

Outcome standards are part of modern management systems that entered the manufacturing sector in the '70s, he says, then spread to the federal government and are now spreading to education. "Money gets tight, and that forces higher performance. It's the people inside the industry that figure out how to do it."

Clinton is proposing testing in areas that are relatively easy to measure and where we can all agree that basic skills are necessary. He has stopped short of backing a high school exit exam, for example, and he has stopped far short of anything that resembles nationally mandated standards.

Instead, the model the administration seems to favor is the one used to develop the National Assessment of Educational Progress exams — known as the "nation's report card" — which test a statistical sample of fourth- and eighth-graders in reading and math every two years. The frameworks for these tests are developed by the National Assessment Governing Board in consultation with a wide range of professionals.

(ETS, a private testing organization, could receive a small fee for consulting work in developing the new tests.)

Carnevale would like to see a strong business presence on any board developing the tests. "This is a role they could be playing in American life that would be very progressive," he says.

What's crucial, he says, is to "build a fire wall between politicians and any test," and to insulate the tests from the latest educational fads. Putting the testing in the hands of a neutral body and outside the U.S. Department of Education, he says, "takes it away from the Big Brother stuff."

National tests have all manner of pitfalls, including how to protect against cheating. But perhaps the most difficult reality we will confront is that, as Carnevale puts it, the schools with "the poorest kids will perform woefully on this test."

"It will be a very precise measure of our collective social failure to give everyone an opportunity to learn.

"If we find out poor Americans don't do as well on these exams, it becomes their enemy. This is a real test of people's willingness to face up to this. If all we are going to do is test them and not teach them, it will explode."

What testing can do is show parents how their children are doing compared with children in other parts of the country. It gives parents the information to push for improvements in schools that aren't educating their children. It is, says Carnevale, a "way to engage parents and build standards from the bottom up."

We spend \$720 billion on education and private-sector training, he points out, and the education system has almost no efficiency standards. "If you could just get 10 percent more efficiency, it could yield \$72 billion."

"Educators ought to remember that you don't go anywhere without going to school," he says. "They are more important than they've ever been, but they haven't kept up with the economics of learning. Their function is becoming more important, and they are about to become modernized."

It's about time. ■

1. The Washington Post

08/26/97; Edition:FINAL; Section: OP-ED; Page A15

National Tests: A Good Idea Going Wrong

By Dianne Ravitch

Six months ago I was an enthusiastic supporter of the president's proposal for national testing. I wrote articles in this paper and elsewhere endorsing the idea of testing fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade mathematics. In March I had the privilege of meeting with the president, the first lady, and the secretary of education to discuss the president's education agenda. At that time, I urged the president to place the national testing program under the supervision of an independent, bipartisan agency, not the federal Department of Education.

Unfortunately, this did not happen, and now the Clinton administration is well on its way to destroying the credibility of its good idea. Instead of turning the testing program over to the National Assessment Governing Board, which is independent and bipartisan, the administration has kept the test development process under its own tight control. It chose a contractor and selected committees to design the tests who may or may not be bipartisan and who may or may not represent the diverse spectrum of views in the fields of reading and mathematics. A few days ago it awarded a \$13 million contract to a consortium of testing companies.

Now the Internet is humming with charges that the national tests will be stacked to favor "whole language" theories of reading and against phonics and to promote "fuzzy math" (where the process of problem-solving, not the right answer, matters most) and against computation. I do not know whether any of these fears are valid, but the administration's partisan control of the test development process has inflamed such feverish concerns.

The National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) should be in charge of the national tests. Appointed by the secretary of education, NAGB is required by statute to be bipartisan and broadly representative; its members include governors, legislators, business leaders, teachers, school board members, public members and testing experts. NAGB was created by Congress 10 years ago to set policy for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). This is the federal program that regularly tests national samples of American students in such subjects as reading, mathematics and science. NAEP has earned great credibility because it is supervised by an independent governing board. However, the Clinton administration plans to use the NAEP tests while bypassing NAEP's governing board.

The issue of who should control the national tests is not just a technical quarrel. The decision to have a national test is of historic proportions; the federal government has never done anything like this before. This is certainly not the kind of initiative that should be undertaken without full public discussion and bipartisan support.

The launch of national testing is precisely the kind of issue that ought to have congressional authorization, yet the administration is pushing ahead without public hearings or explicit authorization by Congress. I believe that a public debate would be healthy and that Congress would ultimately agree to endorse national tests. Every opinion poll shows broad public support for the idea.

To date the administration has refused to seek authorization, apparently fearing that Congress would prohibit the tests. It was my experience, when I worked at the Department of Education, that any new program must be authorized by Congress. No matter how terrific an idea the White House might have, the nation's Founders did not believe that the executive branch should be able to impose new programs unilaterally.

Spokesmen for the administration claim that they cannot ask NAGB to oversee the national tests because it is not authorized to oversee individual testing of this kind. This is sophistry, however, because the Department of Education certainly has never been authorized to launch a national testing program for individual students. If NAGB is prohibited from managing the new tests because it lacks specific authorization, then surely the department is also prohibited.

Worse, the administration is establishing a dangerous precedent. If the party in power gets to control the national test, to pick the contractor without an open competition, to select the committees that will write the tests and to control the reporting of the results, imagine what will happen when the other party comes to power. The next Republican secretary of education (Lynne Cheney? Phyllis Schlafly?) will revise the national tests, choose congenial experts to write the reading and math tests, and make the changes that seem right to the party in power. And all of this can happen without congressional authorization, because the Clinton administration demonstrated that it was not necessary!

It isn't surprising that only six states have signed up to participate in the first national tests in 1999, even though the administration has offered to pay the cost for the first time only. So long as the testing program is directly controlled by political appointees, it will not gain the broad bipartisan support that it needs to be credible.

Yes, national testing is still a good idea, because our current patchwork of tests does not provide a common yardstick by which parents and educators can compare results. Some critics say that testing won't help children learn more, but testing based on high standards will give us valuable information about how we are doing.

If we are to have national tests managed by the federal government, it is important to do it right rather than hurriedly. The administration's insistence on partisan control will destroy the future of national testing.

The writer, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, was assistant secretary of education in the Bush administration. ■

Failing or passing grades

Testing, testing, testing. No, this message isn't coming to you from your local public address announcer; it's coming from the Clinton administration, which is trying to sell the nation something it doesn't want and doesn't need.

Since early this year, President Clinton and Secretary of Education Richard Riley have actively campaigned for two new national tests: one in reading for our nation's fourth graders and another in mathematics for eighth graders.

Though the president and the secretary are convinced that more testing is the way to boost the academic achievement of American students, I disagree — and so do many of the nation's governors, educators, legislators and members of Congress (both Republicans and Democrats).

We don't need new federally funded tests. We would rather send dollars to the classroom, bolster basic academics and increase parental involvement.

As a former teacher, principal and school superintendent, I know the value and purpose of testing. Tests help educators determine whether students are learning their lessons, and they are used to evaluate curriculum and teaching.

One of the many problems with the president's national test proposal is that it comes at a time when we already have plenty of testing. American students are tested, tested and tested. Nearly all the states and many local school districts have their own testing programs. There are already two federally funded tests. The first and oldest is NAEP (the National Assessment of Educational Progress), which is a national sampling of students in various subjects.

The second test is provided under TIMSS (the Third International Mathematics and Science Study). All of this testing occurs above and beyond the classroom tests that teachers create.

As a result of all this testing, we already know that nearly half our students are not performing as well as they should be. We don't need another test to tell us how our students are doing. We should help these students — not test them again.

There are other concerns I have with the administration's proposal:

The development of national tests is too controversial for the administration to act without con-

gressional review or authorization. The administration has no bill, nor has it indicated any intention of seeking legislation for this initiative. There is federal legislation allowing for NAEP.

The U.S. Department of Education has quickly planned these new tests without wide public input. In addition, valid tests take years to construct. The fast-track nature of this initiative has alarmed many educators and policy makers.

New national tests could lead to inappropriate and unfair comparisons of schools and students. For instance, we already know that suburban students in Upper St. Claire, Pa., will, in all likelihood, outperform students from center city Pittsburgh. Why? Students from Upper St. Claire have more educational advantages. There is no reason to develop another test to show us the deficiencies of disadvantaged students.

Tests don't generate higher academic performance. The administration and the U.S. Department of Education have talked as if a new national test will create better students. It won't. Standardized tests assess performance; they don't generate it. And, with any testing proposal we should be wary of the tendency of teachers to teach to the test.

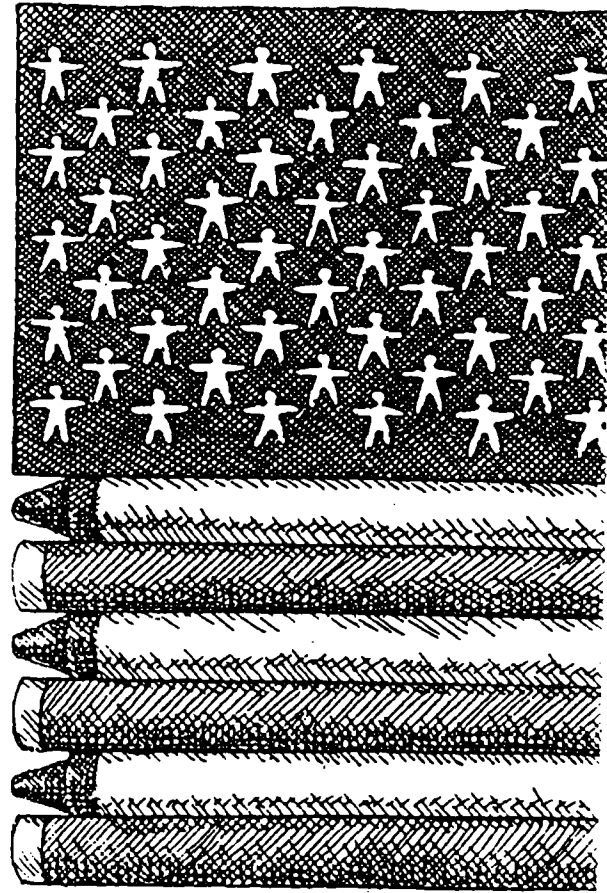
New national tests could lead to a national curriculum. In developing new assessments, there is a tendency to create new curriculum to match those assessments. But, like new national tests, a national curriculum is something Americans don't want and don't need. Local control is a hallmark of American education.

Given what happened with the federally funded U.S. history standards project (a dismal initiative

that generated political correctness rather than history) we don't need to engage in any effort that could lead to a national curriculum.

Unlike the NAEP tests, which are governed by an independent board, these new tests will come from the U.S. Department of Education. That puts the department in an extremely powerful position in our local schools.

There is no significant support for new national tests. Since Mr.



Clinton announced his test proposal, only six governors have indicated interest in it.

Instead of developing new national tests, I want to direct federal resources to family literacy and preschool readiness. I also want to take steps to improve teacher preparation and improve the teaching and learning conditions in our schools. Those should be our priorities — not more testing.

Rep. Bill Goodling, Pennsylvania Republican, is chairman of House Committee on Education and the Workforce. Distributed by Scripps Howard News Service

Wash
Times
8/17

for national school tests?

A properly constructed and voluntary national test would give a needed boost to American education reform. Its results would enable us to see how our children and schools are doing; to compare schools and states; and to see whether our reform efforts are paying off.

Today, such information is elusive. We have decent countrywide data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, and some states have developed sound

sure, but none of them is quite right. The "standardized" kind that most school systems use doesn't actually contain any standards — and is prey to the notorious "Lake Wobegone" effect: Everyone is told they're above average. State testing programs don't allow scores to be compared across jurisdictions. The NAEP is barred from reporting on units smaller than whole states. College entrance tests aren't taken by everyone — and are no help in the

early grades. International tests operate on no regular schedule, are limited to math and science, and never give results for schools or children.

What's missing is a standards-based test of core academic skills and fundamental knowledge that can be used at any level by any "client" (a governor, parent, local school board, charter school principal, etc.), and that yields clear information about current achievement compared with rigorous standards and with other units and jurisdictions.

Nothing like that now exists.

That's the void President Clinton sought to fill with his national testing plan. Unfortunately, his approach is fatally compromised by its association with the federal government and the education establishment.

The White House plan fails to recognize that credible national tests must be insulated from politicians, bureaucrats and lobbyists. The integrity of their content, standards and management must be ironclad. They must not be colored by the whims of appointed or elected officials — or of the very school establishment for which they will serve as an audit.

That means the policies and

operation of the national tests must be independent of Uncle Sam — and that parents, business leaders and other education "consumers" must be heavily represented in their governing board. The surest way to do that is to turn full responsibility over to the independent National Assessment Governing Board, which already runs NAEP. (Another approach is

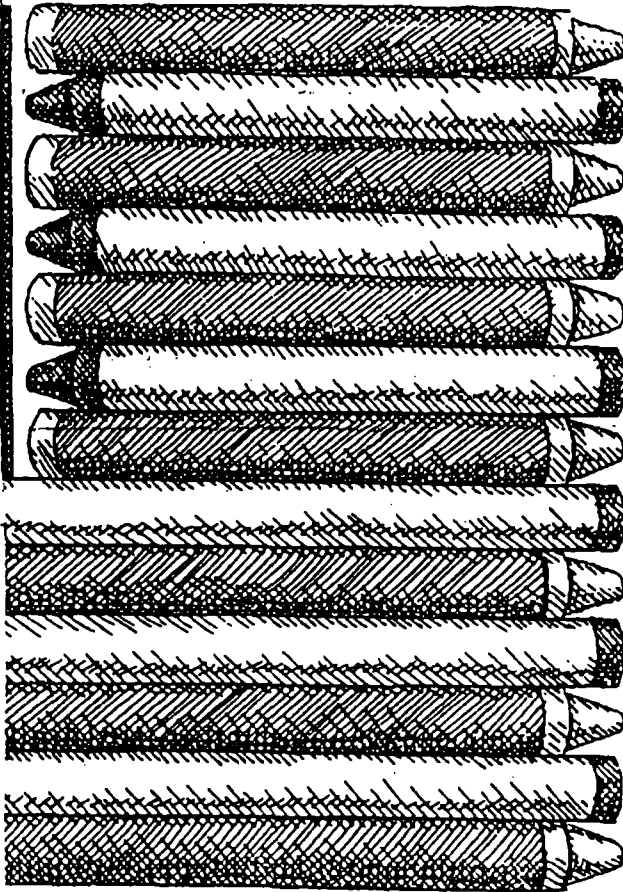
The integrity of their content, standards and management must be ironclad. They must not be colored by the whims of appointed or elected officials.

to privatize the national testing idea so it has nothing to do with Washington.)

Instead, the Clinton tests belong to the U.S. Department of Education, where a platoon of assistant secretaries and an army of bureaucrats can fuss with them. The job of setting "specifications" for them has been turned over to one of the major inside-the-Beltway voices of the education establishment. The main advisory committee consists largely of interest group and "producer" representatives. And the panels charged with determining what will actually be on the 4th-grade reading and 8th-grade math tests are packed with the sort of education "experts" that foisted "whole language" reading and "fuzzy" math on American schools.

No wonder few states have signed up; Clinton-style national testing is worse than no national testing. Which is a great pity, because a soundly conceived — and totally independent — national testing program would be good for America.

Chester E. Finn Jr. is John M. Olin Fellow at the Hudson Institute. He served as assistant U.S. secretary of Education from 1985 to 1988 and as chairman of the National Assessment Governing Board from 1988 to 1990. Distributed by Scripps Howard News Service.



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tests. But it's still impossible for most taxpayers and parents to find out just how their town or their child's school is really doing in relation to how it ought to be doing. Often they cannot even get satisfactory information about their own child's progress.

That's because we have nothing like an "independent audit." The same folks who run the schools are responsible for measuring and reporting on their success. No investor would allow a corporation to get away with that. There's got to be an outside audit to verify the accuracy of the books and report to the shareholders.

We have no such thing in U.S. education. We have plenty of tests,

1. Richmond Times-Dispatch

August 13, 1997

Uncle Sam Wants YOU to March Back to School to the Tune That He Composes

By Robert Holland

Americans used to be a fiercely independent people. Surely, therefore, there was a time when children and their parents managed to make the annual back-to-school trek without the United States Education Department (USED) and its collaborationists taking them by the hand, wiping runny noses, and telling them what they should think about assorted issues in education.

Anyone remember such a time? Well, it's bygone. USED is beating the drums for an America Goes Back to School Initiative that, according to USED's monthly propaganda sheet, Community Update, will be "annual" and will run "especially" (hence not exclusively) August through October. The fanfare invites the painful conclusion that official Back to School will be with us always, as inescapable as a government sermon on Lifelong Learning, and just as edifying.

The sheet reports that Education Secretary Richard Riley "will be joined in this effort by parents, educators, and members of the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education." Who are these Partners? Update doesn't identify them, except that it does mention in a cutline of an Al Gore photo that the National PTA — that reliable shill for Big Education — is one Partner.

CALL 1-800-USA-LEARN and get a "free copy" of the "America Goes Back to School" kit, which supposedly tells about the Partners. Or you can visit USED's website for family involvement: www.ed.gov/Family/agbts/.

Okay, that website does list every single Partner, but if you want to check them all out, be prepared for online eye strain. Thousands of schools appear (did you ever think how many elementaries are named Lakewood?), along with many associations, businesses, and churches. One wonders if their patrons realize they have been conscripted as foot soldiers in the federal Back to School march.

Your humble scrivener, an avid collector of government documents that (miraculously) cost not a penny, called the 800 number and was informed that there actually are six Back-to-School kits, divided as to Family, School, Business, Community, Religion, and Universities. So which one will it be?

"Well, I belong to a family, visit schools, work for a business, am a member of a community, pray for our country constantly (especially since 1992), and have an alma mater."

"Okay," Miss USA-LEARN chuckled, "we'll send you all of them."

"Thanks, and give my regards to Dick Riley."

SECRETARY Riley says he wants the America Goes Back to School Initiative to challenge all Americans to do such things as read with a child so the child can "read well by the end of the third grade." Evidently, the first and second grades, not to mention kindergarten, are to be reserved for baby-sitting purposes.

The 1-million homeschoolers, as well as other conscientious parents, who teach children to read by age 5 or 6 — often using systematic phonics — just need to kick back and get with the government's leisurely third-grade emphasis.

Speaking of which, Riley also wants Back to School to be about "learning more about how your school, school district, and state can sign up to take the 1999 national tests in fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math to make sure students are mastering the basics." (The preceding was a paid political advertisement.)

Yep, those are the tests the Clintons have put on a fast track without asking for congressional authorization. So the President is making law. Civics apparently is not one of the basics.

THE OFFICIAL Back-to-School Initiative attracted "thousands" of participants last year, according to Update:

In Macomb, Michigan, fifth-grade teacher Frank Miracola and his principal, Kathy Markel, had a "back-to-school barbecue" for teachers, parents, and others. (America's official backyard cookout?) And Hemmings Motor News in Bennington, Vermont, gave its employees two paid Education Participation Days to do something with local schools. (Did they have to bring back a note from teacher?)

Evidently, Satellite Town Meetings (also "free"?) will help USED direct all Americans in the correct back-to-school track. Update listed nine of them for the coming school year, under a partnership (yes, another one) of USED, the National Alliance of Business, and the Center for Workforce Preparation.

The September 16 meeting will be "Back to School: Families and Communities Together for Learning." And by calling the above 800 number you can receive a "Just Add Water" kit enabling you to "use the national broadcast of the Satellite Town Meeting to create a local event in your community."

Disidents need not apply. These are for correct-thinking people who will not snicker when Riley utters such profundities as this one at the June satellite session: "We know now — more than ever — that the first few years of life are absolutely critical to a child's development." So we knew that, but now we really, really know it, especially since Hillary Clinton had her Brain Summit at the White House last spring.

The thrust of the June satellite powwow was to sign up parents for government training in how to be parents. And we really, really know that government is good at stuff like that, right? Says so right here in the government-issue tool kit.

WANT MORE Partners? Well, there's also the Education Excellence Partnership, which brings together USED, The Business Roundtable, the teachers' unions, the National Governors' Association, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce — the usual suspects.

This outfit is enlisting millionaire baseball players to cut public service ads urging everyday moms and dads to "be a big-league parent" and offering yet another free (!) booklet entitled "Strengthening Your Child's Academic Future." Just call 1-800-38-BE SMART for that gem.

"This advertising effort," Secretary Riley assures us, "will result in champions in the classroom."

Sure: Better ed through ads. Duh. Government propaganda no doubt will make us even smarter than monopolistic government schooling already has made us. ■

More Testing Is No Solution

Washington Post
August 13, 1997
Page A21

If testing is the answer to our education problems, it would have solved them a long time ago. American students are tested, tested, tested, and the Clinton administration is proposing to test our children again.

Contrary to The Post's Aug. 7 editorial, "Get On With Student Testing," regarding President Clinton's national test initiative, the proposal is not "bogged down in politics and process." The proposal is bogged down because Americans don't want and don't need a new national reading test for fourth-graders and a new national mathematics test for eighth graders.

Though the president and Secretary of Education Richard Riley are convinced that more testing is the way to boost the academic achievement of American students, I disagree—and so do many of the nation's governors, educators, legislators, and members of Congress (both Republican and Democratic). To date, only six governors

have indicated interest in the president's proposal.

The Post is correct in saying that I intend to block funding for the initiative, but my effort is not political. It's common sensical. As a former teacher,

Taking Exception

principal and school superintendent, I know the value and purpose of testing. I also know that we don't need new national tests. The president's proposal comes at a time when we already have plenty of testing. Nearly all the states and many local school districts have their own testing programs. We already have two federally funded tests. The first and oldest is NAEP (the National Assessment of Educational Progress), which is a sampling of students in various subjects. The second test is provided under TIMSS (the Third International Mathematics and

Science Study). All of this testing occurs above and beyond the classroom tests that teachers create.

As a result of all this testing, we know that nearly half our students are not performing as well as they should be. We should help these students—not test them again. The Post editorial maintains that new national tests are needed in order to "identify a child's academic weaknesses and plan improvements." This is already accomplished through the panoply of tests already in use. Moreover, test developers and publishers maintain they are creating uniform tests that are comparable state to state and school to school. I have other concerns with the administration's proposal:

- The administration is sending mixed signals. Since 1993 President Clinton and Secretary Riley have actively pushed their Goals 2000 program, which encourages, and provides funds for, states to create their own standards and tests. In essence, the administra-

tion has backed decentralized reform. Now, with this new test proposal, it appears to be backing centralized reform. Why the switch?

- The development of national tests is too controversial for the administration to act without congressional review or authorization. The administration has no bill, nor has it indicated any intention of seeking legislation for this initiative. For instance, federal legislation allows for NAEP. But the U.S. Department of Education has quickly planned these new tests without wide public input. In addition, valid tests take years to construct. The fast track nature of this initiative alarms many educators and policymakers.

- New national tests could lead to inappropriate and unfair comparisons of schools and students. For instance, we already know that suburban students in Upper St. Clair, Pa., will, in all likelihood, outperform students from center city Pittsburgh. Why? Students from Upper St. Clair have more edu-

cational advantages. No reason exists to develop another test to show us the deficiencies of disadvantaged students.

- Tests don't generate higher academic performance. The administration and the U.S. Department of Education have talked as if a new national test will create better students. It won't. Standardized tests assess performance; they don't generate it. And with any testing proposal we should be wary of the tendency of teachers to teach to the test.

- New national tests could lead to a national curriculum. In developing new assessments, the tendency is to create a new curriculum to match those assessments. But like new national tests, a national curriculum is something Americans don't want and don't need. Local control is a hallmark of American education. Given what happened with the federally funded U.S. history standards project (a dismal initiative that generated political

don't need to engage in any effort that could lead to a national curriculum. Unlike the NAEP tests, which are governed by an independent board, these new tests will come from the U.S. Department of Education. That puts the department in an extremely powerful position in our local schools.

Instead of developing new national tests, I would rather send dollars to the classroom, bolster basic academics and increase parental involvement. I want to direct federal resources to family literacy and preschool readiness. I also want to take steps to improve teacher preparation and the teaching and learning conditions in our schools. Those should be our priorities—not more testing.

The writer, a Republican representative from Pennsylvania, is chairman of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce.

1. The Sunday Patriot-News-Harrisburg

08/10/97; Section: OP-ED

As We See It: More testing won't improve learning

By Rep. Bill Goodling

Testing, testing, testing . . . No, this message isn't coming to you from your local public address announcer; it's coming from the Clinton administration, which is trying to sell the nation something it doesn't want and doesn't need.

Since early this year, President Clinton and Secretary of Education **Richard Riley** have actively campaigned for two new national tests: one in reading for our nation's fourth graders and another in mathematics for eighth graders.

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One of the many problems with the president's national test proposal is that it comes at a time when we already have plenty of testing. American students are tested, tested and tested. Nearly all the states and many local school districts have their own testing programs. There are already two federally funded tests. The first and oldest is NAEP (the National Assessment of Educational Progress), which is a national sampling of students in various subjects.

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The development of national tests is too controversial for the administration to act without congressional review or authorization. The administration has no bill, nor has it indicated any intention of seeking legislation for this initiative. There is federal legislation allowing for NAEP.

The U.S. Department of Education has quickly planned these new tests without wide public input. In addition, valid tests take years to construct. The fast-track nature of this initiative has alarmed many educators and policy makers.

New national tests could lead to inappropriate and unfair comparisons of schools and students. For instance, we already know that suburban students in Upper St. Clair will, in all likelihood, out perform students from center city Pittsburgh. Why? Students from Upper St. Clair have more educational advantages. There is no reason to develop another test to show us the deficiencies of disadvantaged students.

Tests don't generate higher academic performance. The administration and the **U.S. Department of Education** have talked as if a new national test will create better students. It won't. Standardized tests assess performance; they don't generate it. And, with any testing proposal we should be wary of the tendency of teachers to teach to the test.

New national tests could lead to a national curriculum. In developing new assessments, there is a tendency to create new curriculum to match those assessments. But, like new national tests, a national curriculum is something Americans don't want and don't need. Local control is a hallmark of American education.

Given what happened with the federally funded U.S. history standards project (a dismal initiative that generated political correctness rather than history) we don't need to engage in any effort that could lead to a national curriculum.

Unlike the NAEP tests, which are governed by an independent board, these new tests will come from the **U.S. Department of Education**. That puts the department in an extremely powerful position in our local schools.

There is no significant support for new national tests. Since President Clinton announced his test proposal, only six governors have indicated interest in it.

Instead of developing new national tests, I want to direct federal resources to family literacy and preschool readiness. I also want to take steps to improve teacher preparation and improve the teaching and learning conditions in our schools. Those should be our priorities — not more testing.

Rep. Bill Goodling, R-Seven Valleys, is chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Education and the Workforce. ■

D. G. Moore
Jan
8.8.97

Consensus needed for national testing

By MICHAEL H. KEAN

AS ANY policy-maker will tell you, consensus is the key factor in change. You must have consensus to move legislation and policy proposals.

Several years ago, the Clinton administration's national health care program died because of a lack of a consensus. So did Ronald Reagan's "Star Wars" arms proposal in the 1980s and the Equal Rights Amendment in the late 1970s. George Bush, on the other hand, made sure he had consensus on Capitol Hill before going forward with the gulf war.

In education — an area rife with new ideas and reforms — consensus is the linchpin of success.

This summer, the Clinton administration will need to build consensus for its voluntary national test proposal for U.S. fourth- and eighth-grade students. But Republicans are trying to halt the proposal out of concern that it is moving too fast.

National tests stand as being the largest challenge for Mr. Clinton's education agenda. Despite the importance the administration has placed on developing and implementing national tests, few governors are committed to it.

Only six states — Maryland, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michi-

gan, North Carolina and West Virginia — are on board. Despite this lack of consensus, the White House is moving forward in developing the test.

Rep. Bill Goodling, R-Pa., may try to apply the brakes prior to the August recess. Chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, Mr. Goodling has previously attempted to stop the proposal with amendments that were later quashed.

This summer, however, he may succeed. He is preparing a resolution barring the U.S. Department of Education from further planning or development of the tests until Congress gives the go-ahead.

President Clinton and Education Secretary Richard Riley maintain they don't need congressional approval or an appropriation. They are funding the proposal with \$22 million already available in the Fund for the Improvement of Education.

Building consensus

Mr. Goodling insists that the president build a consensus. Since President Clinton proposed the plan four months ago, the Department of Education has moved rapidly to develop the tests — without doing the field work to create a clear consensus among educators and policy-makers that national testing is needed. Without consensus, the proposal is a target.

Much testing already occurs in our schools. Forty-six states have taken steps to develop their own standards and assessments. Many individual school districts have testing programs, too.

It is unknown to what extent the proposed national tests would complement or replace existing

testing programs. The administration's proposal is mute on how the national tests will be better.

The White House is also sending mixed messages about education reform. For the past four years, it has supported and funded decentralized reform through Goals 2000, its education agenda. This initiative encourages the states to create world-class standards and new assessments to measure pupil progress.

But, under Mr. Clinton's new test proposal, the U.S. Department of Education will develop assessments for use by the states. The proposal seeks a centralized result without first gaining support in a decentralized education environment made up of 50 states and 16,010 school districts.

The U.S. Department of Education must ensure that the national tests are integrated with existing state and local testing programs.

In the United States there are 50,453 public elementary schools and 9,075 public middle schools. The possibility of testing more than 4 million students at the fourth and eighth grades poses enormous challenges.

National schoolchild testing may very well be the right idea. But, given the number of questions that need to be answered, and given the significance of the proposal and its impact on our children and schools, Mr. Clinton must take the time to clearly justify the need and enlist the support of a strong group of informed supporters from across the nation.

Michael H. Kean, of CTB/McGraw-Hill, is former chair of the Test Committee of the Association of American Publishers.

To our readers

Peter A. Jay is on vacation. His column will return in September.

In a quaint summer cottage, Lincoln fo u

By DAVID M. SHRIBMAN

WASHINGTON — Here Abraham Lincoln and his wife retreated in grief after the death of their son. Here the wartime president and his family found a few moments of peace and solace amid war and struggle. Here the Great Emancipator learned of the Union victory at Antietam.

restoration project waiting to happen. The capital is a festival of wide boulevards — and tiny corridors of power.

It is a city of monumental buildings — and hidden power centers. It provides a giant stage for performers — and a few real levers of power. And so one of the lessons of Washington — not only in our time but in all time — is to seek power in the nooks and crannies, in the out-of-the-way places beyond the reach of the

glory, but for grief.

Here, in a place that once was remote, a setting that Washingtonians used for horse carriage rides and ice skating, America's wartime president went into retreat. Sometimes he would slip away to visit hospitals where the ambulance trains dumped the wounded soldiers from across the Virginia line.

Pain endured

1. The Des Moines Register

08/01/97; Edition: 4 Star; Section: Main News; Page 12

Leave schools to the states

Forget national education testing.

For three reasons.

First, each state knows best what it needs to do to improve. States already are working hard to raise the academic achievement. Most states wrote or revised standards for public schools in the past year, according to the American Federation of Teachers, a teachers' union.

Second, states will take more ownership of standards they set for themselves. Federal standards, even if voluntary, don't have the same appeal: Only six states so far have endorsed President Clinton's call for national testing, with about a dozen others saying they would probably give the tests. Suspicion of the hand of politics in shaping national standards hurts their credibility.

Third, if each state's goal is excellence, states can learn from each other, and from the many education groups issuing stronger guidelines. Washington's role is better left to providing money for school innovation -such as the Goals 2000 program that is bringing Iowa about \$3 million this year. States will be more creative and flexible than a distant bureaucracy.

Behind the push for national education standards is the fear that the United States won't be globally competitive if its youngsters aren't better prepared in math, science, social studies and English. That's why states are rethinking things, too. The "Nation at Risk" report in 1983 set the education-reform wheels in motion; now they seem to be picking up even greater speed.

Iowa is reported to be the only state not working on common academic standards, according to the American Federation of Teachers. Whether Iowa should is controversial, given a tradition of strong schools with local control. But here, too, there is nervousness about the future.

The state Board of Education's strategic plan calls for renewed emphasis on local districts looking at their academic standards and reporting on how they are doing, said Klark Jessen, an Iowa Department of Education spokesman. And a state commission headed by Des Moines businessman Marvin Pomerantz is expected to make recommendations in September on how to have better public schools.

Iowa's approach, in any case, should be left to Iowa. ■

1. The New York Times

07/20/97; Edition: Late Edition - Final; Section: Section 4; Editorial Desk; Page 15, Column 1

Wake Up, America: Apathy Can Be Dangerous

Unless the heat has warped our memory, it was only a couple of years ago that Americans were so mad at Washington there could have been a new Congressional election every month. Today, the cry of "throw the bums out" is seldom heard, and the people storming the ramparts of the Capitol are mostly the usual suspects looking to cut the usual deals.

John Huang had ties to a company with ties to the Chinese Government while raising millions of dollars for the Democrats? The loyalists whom Newt Gingrich had taken to his bosom tried to ace him out? What does any of this have to do with the price of a double-decaf iced mocha latte?

The reason for this complacency, according to the polls, is that most Americans believe the country as a whole and they themselves are better off than at any time since who knows when. But boredom with government is a threat to the people's long-term interests, including people who make a living saying things like "boredom with government is a threat to the people's long-term interests" — the experts, pundits, gurus and others known collectively as the Beltway insiders.

A few leading commentators and others were asked to explain once again just why all good citizens must get serious. Here are their responses: Ralph Nader is the author of "No Contest: Corporate Lawyers and the Perversion of Justice in America."

Strange, isn't it, that thousands of corporate lobbyists are actually excited about what is going on in Washington. For they are pushing legislation to limit or eliminate their liability for their corporate crime, fraud and abuse against citizens and investors whom

they injure. These corporate interests use Orwellian language to call their bills "tort reform," "securities reform," "regulatory reform" and "banking reform."

Should these measures pass, you will pay more and have less recourse to justice, and health and safety standards will be weaker and less vigorously enforced.

On another front, more of your tax dollars will go to huge corporate welfare programs and giveaways (\$70 billion worth of public airwaves to existing TV broadcasters, for instance) if people do not back the politicians — both liberals and conservatives — who are fighting in Congress to end these boondoggles.

Stay bored and government becomes more of an instrument of the rich and powerful against the rest of America. Get active with your fellow citizens and you might just see more government of, by and for the people.

Norman J. Ornstein is resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.

Peace and prosperity: great developments for the country, but tough going for politicians and pundits. Good times mean complacency among voters; combine that feeling with the underlying cynicism about politics, and it is no wonder that, outside the Beltway, events in Washington are even less compelling than they were in the halcyon days of cold war tension and economic turmoil.

The benign neglect of Washington has been fed by a sense that President Clinton, Speaker Newt Gingrich and the Senate majority leader, Trent Lott, have found ways to cut deals to make modest changes that steer the nation in the right direction.

Their ability to keep the process on track has been admirable, but it is plenty tenuous. The very lack of outside threat or internal crisis leaves a vacuum that has been filled by often vicious partisan bickering and ideological warfare that could, if unchecked, poison the atmosphere enough to make further compromise and action impossible.

"So what?" you ask. Times will not always be good. If we continue to make small but tangible progress in areas from Medicare reform to expanding free trade to campaign finance reform, we can prevent pain and dislocation down the road when we can least afford it. David Gergen is editor at large of U.S. News & World Report.

People are so bored with Washington, says my friend Mark Shields, that they are turning off C-SPAN in favor of the Weather Channel. True enough, but there's much about our long-term future that needs attention.

Beyond the obvious lack of nerve in reforming Social Security and cleaning up campaign finance, we seem unable to figure out what can be done to rebuild American families. The past 40 years have witnessed the largest collapse of family life in recorded history — and it won't be repaired with V-chips and \$500 tax credits.

Meanwhile, much of Washington is also strangely silent on the disasters unfolding in public universities in California and Texas — and soon to appear elsewhere — as affirmative action is thrown out. Racial preferences are no longer sustainable politically, but a return to segregation would be even worse. Clearly, we need to pursue much stronger efforts at remediation in secondary school.

On a wholly different front, we are shortchanging one of our most vital long-term investments: basic scientific research. Federal spending has dropped four years in a row and is still heading down. To allow a continued deterioration would compromise prospects for our security, economy and quality of life. Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund.

Congress and President Clinton have a historic opportunity to address a shameful and solvable problem shared by 10 million uninsured children, most of whom live with working parents. The House-Senate conference committee will soon decide whether to adopt a Senate plan to insure at least six million children with good benefits.

The Senate plan is partly financed by a 20-cent tobacco tax that would curb teen-age smoking and save hundreds of thousands of lives. The inferior House plan leaves the door open for special interests to raid the child health fund and gives no assurance that a single child will actually receive coverage.

Every American must speak out for our children's health so that special interests like Big Tobacco are not the only voices our lawmakers hear. Lynne Cheney is former chairwoman of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

One reason that people outside the Beltway should care about what's going on there is that Washington can render state efforts moot. Consider "whole math" instruction, which has been making its way into schools for several years. The idea is that mathematics is a natural activity that students will invent procedures for if only they are given mathematically rich problems to solve.

Parents concerned that this idea will prove destructive are working to be sure that states require instruction in basic skills. They've made headway, but the Administration could reverse it. The national math test for eighth graders being planned for 1999 could easily overwhelm state efforts, and it is being shaped entirely by advocates of the "whole math" approach. Arianna Huffington is chairwoman of the Center for Effective Compassion.

A very important piece of legislation — the charitable tax credit — is getting scant attention in Washington. The proposal would allow families to give up to \$1,000 of what they owe in taxes to a poverty-fighting charity of their choice. Not only would it provide billions of dollars for effective grass-roots groups but it would also strengthen the frail bonds of community.

In the course of deciding what group to support, citizens would have the opportunity to become more involved in the lives of those in need. And the charitable tax credit would establish a hierarchy of charitable priorities at a time when both political parties have tragically neglected the crisis of poverty and violence in our inner cities. Kevin Phillips is editor and publisher of American Political Report and author, most recently, of "Arrogant Capital."

For voters to ignore Washington's corruption hearings because Congress won't pass meaningful reform anyway is sagacity, not apathy.

Besides, Washington is never the nation's prime focus near the peak of a financial boom and stock market bubble — not in the early 1890's, not in the late 1920's and not now. That's true even though money's corruption of politics often tops out close to other peaks of the money culture — the record-setting Dow and the economists' announcement of the end of the business cycle. When (and if) the bubble pops, voters will get involved with a vengeance. Michael Mandelbaum is the author of "NATO Expansion: A Bridge to the Nineteenth Century."

As Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic received invitations to enter NATO, and American officials assured Estonia, Latvia

and Lithuania that they, too, could join, one feature of NATO expansion received less attention than it deserves: the price tag for Americans.

Upgrading the military establishments of the new members and sending Western troops to the territories of the three Baltic countries to protect them from their huge neighbor, Russia, could cost hundreds of billions of dollars. The new members cannot pay; the Western Europeans will not pay.

So Americans would foot the bill, requiring higher taxes, less social spending, abandoning a balanced budget, or all three. All Americans should care about that. Zbigniew Brzezinski was national security adviser to President Jimmy Carter.

Three issues deserve public attention; each, if mismanaged, could affect every American's pocketbook and even cost American lives.

The first involves Europe. By widening NATO, we can reduce the chances of new intra-European conflicts. Otherwise, Americans could soon find themselves again engaged in European bloodshed.

The Middle East cries for more engagement by the United States in the stalemated Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Renewed conflict could quickly ignite a major energy crisis.

Last but not least, a more powerful China is emerging, while America's relationship with that awakening giant is in a state of drift. By portraying China already as our enemy, some commentators are engaging in a self-fulfilling prophesy.

In brief, ignorance is not bliss. Vinnie Rosario is a bartender at The Capital Grille.

As the economy has heated up, Washington has seen a revival of 80's indulgence with a 50's retro twist, demonstrated by the unusual number of martinis, cigars and steaks being ordered at The Capital Grille when Congress is in session.

And over the hustle and bustle of bar interaction, the old jokes can be heard, like, "How many politicians does it take to screw in a light bulb?" The most timely response these days, though, is, "They'd immediately form a committee to determine the most effective way to meet the challenges of this great task."

What does all this mean for the rest of America? Hey, a bartender never reveals his secrets. ■

...a one-time practicing psychiatrist from Sarajevo, has strengthened the guard protecting his quarters near Pale to

years, with Mr. Karadzic and Gen. Ratko Mladic suitably demonized also by the Hague tribunal and a cheering press clique.

As if the million or so Bosnian Serbs would suddenly be transformed into "acceptable" (read: docile) human beings after the physical removal of their wartime

...Serbs be any happier or safer than in a Bosnia of three separate entities? No. Because then the Muslims would go at the Croats again as they did in bloody in 1993, hoping to seize the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina — just as President Alija Izetbegovic has repeatedly vowed

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David Binder covered the Balkans for The New York Times over a period of 34 years.

National testing, national curriculum

By Michael Farris

Today the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education is scheduled to vote on a measure intended to block President Clinton's unilateral decision to create a national achievement test based on "real, meaningful national standards." Although the test is supposed to be voluntary — at least initially — Mr. Clinton has



declared, "I believe every state must participate and that every parent has a right to honest, accurate information about how his or her child's doing." That doesn't sound particularly voluntary.

Congressional critics of national testing argue that it would lead to an unwarranted national curriculum, stifling local control of education at the level of textbooks and teachers. The administration counters that local control would not be lost because the simple taking of a test does not mandate the use of a particular curriculum or teaching style.

The critics are right, but for reasons that have largely been missing from the public debate.

Michael Farris is the president of the Home School Legal Defense Association and is a member of the Education Commission of the States.

The American Psychological Association and two related professional groups have created an official rulebook for the ethical and professional use of standardized tests. The book, "Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing" (known in professional circles as the "APA Standards") is not only accepted by the education establishment as the bible of testing, it has been frequently used by federal and state courts to invalidate various testing requirements that do not measure up.

One of the basic precepts of the APA Standards is that students may not be given tests unless they have had an opportunity to learn the material on the test. In a leading federal case from Florida, *Debra P. vs. Turlington*, a high school graduation test was invalidated because there had been no validity study done to match the curriculum in use by all students with the test required for graduation.

Mr. Clinton claims that he wants a national test in place so that accountability can be measured against real national standards. The only way this can happen, according to the APA Standards and the case law, is if every student who takes the test for accountability purposes has his or her curriculum checked to see if it includes all of the skills being tested. It is absolutely impossible to do a single, proper content validity study when 16,000 school districts in this country are free to choose 16,000 different courses of study. There would have to be 16,000 content validity studies done at an astronomical cost to the taxpayers. A very simple content validity study can cost \$250,000.

The only feasible alternative to validating 16,000 courses of study is to impose a uniform national curriculum. Then you know for sure that every child has been taught the material that is in the test. To do otherwise is unfair to the child, professionally

unethical and illegal. The only way to have a test that improves "real, meaningful national standards" is to have a national curriculum.

Currently used nationally normed standardized achievement tests produced by a variety of private testing companies do not have to be validated for each school district's curriculum because there is no official accountability step which follows failure on such a test. In other words, a student doesn't sink the third grade because of a low score on the Stanford Achievement test.

The Stanford test, which is a very good test, gives a parent a general idea of his or her student's achievement compared to other students across the country. It would be improper to say that the Stanford test judges whether or not the student has mastered the material that has been taught.

If all we want is for parents to know how their child is doing in a general sense, there is no reason in the world that the very fine tests that are privately developed and widely used don't suffice.

American public education does not need better testing. It needs better teaching. And the problem with poor teaching is not the fault of the teachers but their centralized managers.

We have hamstringed teachers with maddeningly centralized regulations and an army of supervising bureaucrats. Can you think of any other profession where the supervisors outnumber the assistants? Teachers should outnumber administrators just as nurses outnumber hospital administrators.

Education, like the economy, does not work when it is managed by a centralized government. American public education has been on a crash-and-burn diet since the increase of centralized control.

National testing will be the last nail in the coffin of local control of education. Anyone who wants to hasten the demise of public schools should vigorously support President Clinton's testing program. People who care about individual children need to fight for their right to receive a real education that is not the one-size-fits-all pabulum that is the necessary result of a national test.

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By Tim

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FairTest

The National Center for Fair & Open Testing

Winter 1996-97

Volume 11, No. 1 ISSN #0898-2511

Examiner

Race Discrimination Suit Filed Against NCAA Test-Score Rules

The long struggle to end the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) controversial use of cut scores on the SAT and ACT to determine initial athletic eligibility moved to Federal court in early January, when two student-athletes filed a lawsuit in Philadelphia charging that Proposition 16 discriminates against African American student-athletes.

The class action suit, which grows out of research and advocacy carried out by FairTest and the McIntosh Commission, was brought by a team led by the Washington, D.C.-based Trial Lawyers for Public Justice (TLPJ).

According to the complaint, *Cureton v. NCAA*, the NCAA's use of a fixed minimum score on standardized tests to decide

who is allowed to play first-year college sports and receive athletic scholarships violates Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its implementing regulations, which prohibit race discrimination by institutions receiving federal funds.

The plaintiffs are seeking an
CONTINUED ON PAGE FOUR



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New FairTest Executive Director

Following a three-month national search, Laura Barrett has been hired as FairTest's new Executive Director. She replaces Pamela Zappardino, who left FairTest to lead several programs in her home state of Rhode Island.

Laura has 11 years of experience in advocacy, public policy and non-profit management. Most recently, she was the Executive Director of the Tax Equity Alliance for Massachusetts Education Fund, a Boston-based organization that researches fiscal issues and promotes tax fairness.

Laura worked at the TEAM Ed Fund, and its sister organization TEAM, beginning in the fall of 1990 when she joined the campaign to oppose an initiative on the Massachusetts ballot that would have cut taxes and revenues by nearly \$2 billion.

CONTINUED ON PAGE TWO

Clinton Proposes National Exam, Again

In his State of the Union address, President Bill Clinton revived a proposal soundly defeated during the Bush administration to create national exams, this time to test reading in grade 4 and math in grade 8. Earlier this decade, FairTest organized the successful campaign to halt far more extensive proposals for a national exam (see *Examiner*, Fall 1992, Summer 1991).

Responding to President Clinton's proposal, FairTest called it "a step backward in school reform" and a "return to the fraudulent notion that you can improve educational quality by imposing more tests."

The statement noted, "Since test-driven reform did not work when he was governor of Arkansas, how can Bill Clinton logically expect the same approach to enhance academic performance nationally? His proposal fails the test of serious education reform."

According to Clinton's proposal, the

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Clinton Proposes National Test Again

reading test would be based on the current National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which now samples both test items and students to obtain data at the national and state levels (see *Examiner*, Summer 1996). The math test would be based on the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), which was the basis for a recent international comparison of student achievement.

Reasons for opposition

There are a number of important reasons for rejecting Pres. Clinton's proposal:

- U.S. students are already the most tested in the industrialized world, and Clinton's proposal will make it worse. All but a few states test students in both reading and math on a regular basis. The President's plan is simply overkill.
- Believing we can improve schooling by adding one more test is like believing we can fatten cattle by weighing them more often. Not only is the claim wrong, it also deflects attention from more important issues and wastes limited resources.
- Enhancing teachers' ability to assess all children accurately and fairly in order to improve instruction is what schools most need in the area of assessment. This requires a serious commitment of time and money for teacher professional development. Another "accountability" test does nothing to meet this need.
- A national test will push teachers to teach to what is on that test. Most major tests are rather narrow and limited.

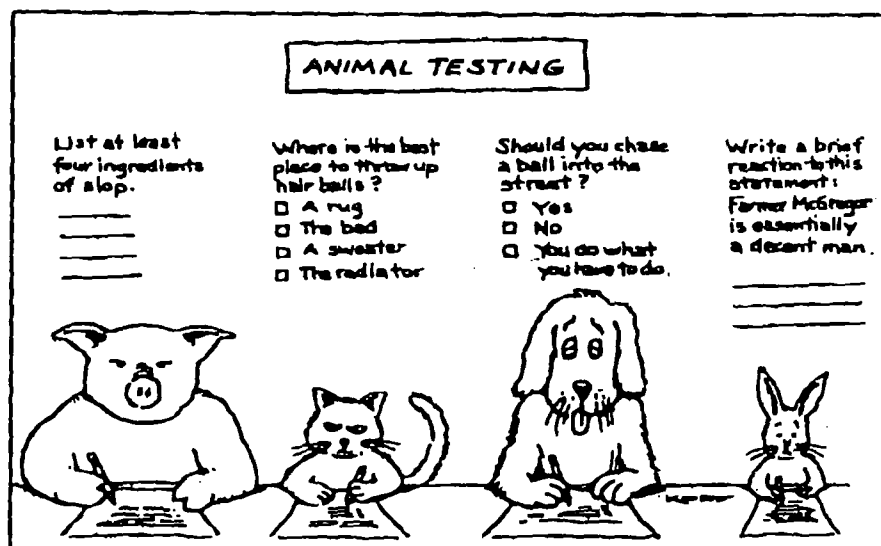
Teaching to them means that curriculum often gets watered down, and instruction is often dumbed-down to test coaching by drill-and-kill methods. While coaching can improve test scores in the short run, it does not improve learning in the long run and therefore also runs counter to the desire for high standards for student learning.

- Proponents of more tests like to claim that having these tests will increase student motivation. However, research shows that testing reduces motivation for many students. Teaching to the test usually produces a boring curriculum that turns many children off from learning. Instead of learning to like education, kids learn to dislike school. The end result is that instead of improving achievement, for many students more testing will actually reduce real achievement.
- Whoever controls the test will strongly influence the curricu-

lum of all the kids in the country, even if it is a "voluntary" test. While President Clinton claims it will be voluntary, his proposal creates a slippery slope downhill to a full-fledged national exam that will establish a de facto national curriculum through the back door. For example, when the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) was created, the public was told there would never be state scores. Now there are. When Congress authorized state scores, the public was told there would never be individual scores. Now that is exactly what Bill Clinton wants, as apparently does the National Assessment Governing Board which oversees NAEP (see *Examiner*, Summer 1996).

- Once NAEP produces individual scores, not only will it control curriculum, but neither the public nor educa-

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE TWELVE

Clinton Calls for More Testing

will be able to distinguish what kids really know from what they just memorized for the test. A useful monitoring device -- NAEP -- will have been altered to produce more redundant comparative data about kids.

- One form of assessment cannot adequately or fairly assess all students equally well, due to diversity in learning styles, cultural backgrounds, and social experiences. For reasons of cost and convenience, one form or a limited range of assessment most likely will be used.
- Finally, once the exams are in place, higher-stakes consequences are likely to follow for both individual students and for schools. Damaging effects, such as retention in grade for not passing the test (called for by President Clinton at Education Summit II last summer), will most heavily impact students who attend schools which receive the least financial support, disproportionately students of color and those from low-income families.

While holding schools accountable for properly educating their students is desirable, doing so on the basis of a test score is not reasonable. Richer, stronger and more useful forms of accountability can be and are being developed (see *Examiner*, Summer 1996).

For a packet of articles on the previous proposal for a national exam send a SASE with \$.55 postage to "National Test" at FairTest.

Two Books Refute Bell Curve Findings

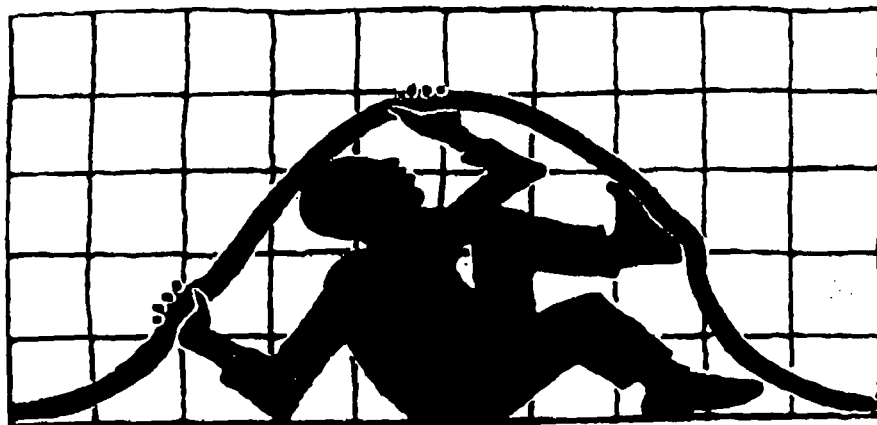
Inequality by Design: Cracking

the Bell Curve Myth by six members of the University of California, Berkeley, Department of Sociology does precisely what its title promises. Through a reanalysis of the data set used in the infamous Herrnstein and Murray book (see *Examiner*, Winter 1994-95), the authors refute the claim that inherited differences in intelligence cause inequality. Instead, they show that racial variations in achievement are the result of a society's inequality, not an unavoidable consequence of genes. With statistics from a host of sources, they make a persuasive case that the social status of an individual's birth in a highly stratified culture is the primary link to his or her future economic success. Based on this analysis, they call for a focus on policies designed to reform the "rules of the game" to close the widening gap between rich and poor.

Inequality by Design is available from the Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, NJ 08540; \$35.00 cloth; \$14.95 paper.

Another reanalysis of Herrnstein and Murray's work, concluding that its fundamental conclusion is erroneous, appears in the peer-reviewed electronic journal *Education Policy Analysis Archives*. Haggai Kupermintz of Stanford University takes up a challenge from the *Bell Curve* coauthor Charles Murray to "[c]reate some other scales and use some other method of combining them" to determine if "cognitive ability" has an effect independent from family social economic status (SES). Adjusting for an individual's own years of education, Kupermintz finds IQ is no longer dominant and that SES has a crucial role. He concludes, "Attempts to disentangle the independent effects of cognitive ability and harsh environment are doomed, not because of technical complications, but because American social reality is less than generous toward its weakest citizens."

A copy may be found on the internet at <http://olam.ed.asu.edu/epad/v4n20.html>.



Dow Jones News/Retrieval®**Whose National Standards?**

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LP Today a group of business leaders will gather at the White House to endorse President Clinton's effort to establish national education

- * standards. Shouldn't we have learned by now the danger of embracing
- * national standards when we have no notion of what form they'll take?

Not long ago, President Bush and the ambitious head of the National Governor's Association, Bill Clinton, emerged from an education summit in Charlottesville, Va., with what seemed to many a terrific plan:

- * "world-class standards" for U.S. schools. But several years and millions of taxpayer dollars later, when the experts came forth with the details,
- * standards no longer seemed like such a good idea. Ninety-nine members of
- * the U.S. Senate voted to reject history standards that would have students learning more about Joseph McCarthy than George Washington, more about the Indian chief Speckled Snake than Thomas Edison.

TD So how is it that today President Clinton's plans for national

- * standards for fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade mathematics are proceeding so smoothly? Otherwise-sensible politicians are backing the proposal even though the details are unknown and the few things one can speculate about are not reassuring.

The president has given his proposal an aura of specificity by

- * promising to model the new standards on the respected the National Assessment of Educational Progress. But because the NAEP tests are not intended to measure every child in the nation, they will have to be overhauled. The Department of Education intends to award contracts worth some \$9 million a year over the next few years to groups outside the government to rework the tests. Therein lies the danger: If those groups are so inclined, they can turn out a product that differs significantly from the model, just as outside groups did in the last round of standard-setting

Mr. Clinton tries to allay such concerns by suggesting that in reading and math -- as opposed to controversial subjects like history -- universal agreement prevails about what students should know and be

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tested for. "From Maryland to Michigan to Montana," he said recently, "reading is reading and math is math." Apparently the president has not heard of "whole language" instruction, an approach to reading and writing that has created firestorms in several states, most notably California. Whole-language teachers focus on student "empowerment." They prefer not to talk about student errors, but about "approximate spelling." They also don't talk much about phonics, one of those dreaded instructional techniques requiring drill and memorization.

Although common sense and recent research argue against whole-language instruction, it has powerful advocates, including the National Council of Teachers of English, a group sure to have influence in the development of a reading test. Since it is impossible to imagine the process going forward without the NCTE, it is quite possible to imagine a national reading test in which it matters not a whit to students' scores if their answers are full of spelling and grammatical errors.

Even mathematics is vulnerable to such fashionable nonsense. In 1989, * the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics set forth standards embodying what one might call "whole math" instruction. As powerful in its field as the NCTE is in English, the NCTM lambasted "a long-standing preoccupation with computation and other traditional skills," which makes students into "passive receivers of rules and procedures rather * than active participants in creating knowledge." The council's standards urged that drill, practice and memorization be downplayed in favor of "number sense," "operation sense" and "cooperative work." Parents in at * least four states have blamed the NCTM standards for inadequately fostering math literacy. Given the NCTM's likely role in developing a national test in eighth-grade mathematics, parents across the country could soon be irate. Worse, in the absence of other tests, a national examination that downplayed skills like computation might well disguise student inadequacies, which would be very bad news indeed.

A third group that could play a role in developing tests is the National Center for Education and the Economy. With \$20 million from the Pew Charitable Trusts and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the NCEE has been at work for the past few years on * standards and assessments for fourth-, eighth-, and 10th-graders. Thus * it is very well positioned to influence any new standards -- and well connected, too. Hillary Clinton and Ira Magaziner are among those who have served on its board. Mike Cohen, formerly NCEE executive director, is now chief education adviser at the White House.

Undersecretary of Education Mike Smith has worked closely with the NCEE. Like Robert Schwartz, then head of educational giving for the Pew Foundation, Mr. Smith was among those whom NCEE president Marc Tucker brought together right after the 1992 election to advise Mrs. Clinton. After the meeting Mr. Tucker wrote an 18-page letter to "Dear Hillary"

Source: Wall Street Journal, April 2, 1997

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advising that the Clintons aim to "remold the entire American system" of education and training. Crucial to spinning a "seamless web" of education and labor policy that would envelop all Americans "from cradle * to grave," Mr. Tucker wrote, are "clear national standards of performance."

Mr. Tucker's letter offers vivid support to those who worry that the Clinton reading and math tests are merely the first step on a path toward central control of all aspects of education. Many of those who have come out in support of the Clinton proposal would no more approve of this idea than they would of approximate spelling; but, as the last round of standard-setting showed, what is proposed in the beginning may bear little relationship to what results in the end.

Mrs. Cheney is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

If You Have Brains, You Might Decide To Skip This Test

Continued From First Page
 son officers because, after all, only public school students from Michigan are taking it. But there is no telling what mischief a "novice" stamp on your diploma or transcript might do. In Birmingham, where 95% of the kids go on to college, and 75% to 80% earn a degree, the proficiency test took on the character of a high-risk, low-yield bond.

So when this year's test approached, the guidance counselor at Jonathan's school, Anita Farrar, sent home a note pointing out a clause in the proficiency test legislation that allows parents to exempt their kids from the test (she says the law requires her to let them know). That option was written for parents of children with learning disabilities, and parents who oppose testing on religious grounds.

The local paper, the *Eccentric*, picked up the buzz and made it a lead story. Parents were spooked. The test was too long, they said. It covered subjects the kids hadn't finished studying, they said. There were essay questions and subjective grading. And the graders weren't even Michiganians, they added.

When test day came last month, two-thirds of the 500 juniors at Birmingham's two high schools didn't take the exams—and by and large, they were the highest-achieving two-thirds. At Seaborn High, 148 juniors didn't take the test; 118 of them had it averages of better.

'Never Happened'

Greg Townsend, who has a 3.9 grade-point average and a fascination with robotics, didn't take it. "It might hinder your chance of going to an out-of-state school," he reasoned. Ryan Kusprzak, who studies Japanese before school hours, didn't either. "If you take it and fail, it goes on your transcript. If you don't take it, it's as if it never happened."

Parent Bonnie Brooks urged her son, Ryan, not to take the test. "What if you don't pass?" I said. "Jeff Salz had his son Jonathan retake the writing test (he passed), but he doubts he will let his daughter, a sophomore now, take the test next year."

Only in one other school district did kids refuse the test; in nearby Troy, 30% of the juniors didn't take it. But nowhere were there absences like in Birmingham. Meanwhile, Lansing, the state capital, is up in arms. The state can't lower the passing grade on the test: it is just above 50% now, and it is supposed to be raised, not lowered, every year.

It can't link the test to graduation. That idea had been around for years, but was canned when educators warned that the drop-out rate would rise. It can't require the University of Michigan to ask for the exam for admission; what would out of state students do?

If You Have Brains, You Might Decide To Skip This Test

Michigan High-School Exam
 Has Bright Kids Smarting
 And Parents in Revolt

By JUNE KRONHOLZ

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
 BIRMINGHAM, Mich. — What if they gave a test and no one took it?

Or worse, what if they gave a test and the really bright students — the kids who study Japanese in their spare time, the kids whose small talk runs to developments in robotics, kids with 3.9 grade-point averages and aspirations to careers in engineering — refused to take it?

Which is what happened when the state of Michigan announced it would test all its high school juniors for academic proficiency, and the juniors in Birmingham said no.

The American public, hungry for accountability in its schools, tests pollsters it wants standardized tests: tough ones, long ones, lots of them. States that don't have tests are writing them; states that do have tests are rewriting them to make them harder: President Clinton, sensing the mood, is proposing national tests for fourth and eighth graders.

Michigan was a beat ahead of much of the country. Last year, it drafted the High School Proficiency Test, an 11 1/2 hour high-achievement marathon whose results were to be stamped on a graduate's diploma as a sort of seal of state approval.

In February 1996, 100,000 Michigan juniors took the first proficiency test — and the results were less than commendable. Statewide, about a third were declared "proficient" in writing and science, 40% in reading and half in math.

Those who weren't proficient were labeled either "novice" or "not-yet novice," designations that almost everyone now agrees were ill-chosen. Birmingham's juniors scored well above the state average — but still not as well as this schoolproud, follow-the-rules Republican suburb of Detroit is used to scoring on tests.



Bankrupt Schools?

Gov. John Engler has proposed legislation that would let him declare a school district "educationally bankrupt" and appoint a receiver if too few students pass the high-school proficiency test. But he hasn't said what the receiver would do to restore solvency to Birmingham, where SAT scores already are 140 points above the national average.

Indeed, Gov. Engler recently announced that Michigan youngsters, who already take standardized tests in third, fourth, fifth, seventh and eighth grades, will take the president's national exams as well. It's not a popular decision: "Public pressure is growing against testing," says Diane Smollen, the Michigan school board's director of assessments.

Test makers say grades on new tests always start low, until kids learn how to take them and teachers learn how to coach them. And Michigan's test was particularly tricky because of its heavy demand for writing, a skill most schools don't teach any more.

Lesson for the President

There's a cautionary tale there for the president. His national tests would be voluntary, and after the first year, 1999, the states would have to pay the administrative costs of giving them. There would be nothing to gain from doing well, no new federal grants or aid, and everything to lose by doing poorly — your school's name and results would be splashed across the Internet. And the Education Department is predicting plenty of kids will do poorly — up to a 40% failure rate the first year.

Jonathan Salz, meanwhile, figures he didn't gain anything by taking the Michigan test last year. And Ronnie Victor, who worried that his penmanship might cost him points on the writing test, thinks he didn't lose anything by sitting it out this year.

"When they wrote the legislation," Mr. Ballard says, "they forgot how smart our kids really are."

A third or more of Birmingham's juniors were declared "novice" at reading, writing, math or science when the test results came back last summer. One of them was Jonathan Salz.

Jonathan Salz:

Jonathan, 17 years old, was declared a novice at writing. But by that time, he had already been accepted at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, California Institute of Technology, Carnegie Mellon University, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and the University of Illinois. He had earned a perfect score on the American College Testing, or ACT, exam, which Midwestern states favor over the Scholastic Aptitude Test; he had scored a near-perfect 770 out of 800 on the verbal portion of the SAT; he had accumulated a 3.993 grade point average; he was a National Merit Scholar, had a perfect grade in advanced-placement English, and was on his way to graduating at the head of his class.

Low-Yield Risk

"It scared me," Jonathan says. "I had never failed a test before in my life." And because the Michigan tests are never returned and the grades never explained, he had no way of knowing why he hadn't passed this one.

The buzz went around Birmingham: The test can't help you with college-admission. Please Turn to Page A11, Column 1