

1. Houston Chronicle

January 26, 1998

High time for feds to get more involved in education

By MICHAEL P. FORBES

SOME of my more partisan colleagues on Capitol Hill would like to think that President Clinton is a lame duck whose term in office will leave no lasting legacy. I say baloney.

The president is embarking on a crusade to reform education. In this era of relative peace and prosperity, no issue is more critical. And no issue is fraught with more political pussyfooting and double-talk. Democrats fear alienating the politically active teachers unions. Republicans sidestep the problem by saying education should be exclusively a state and local responsibility.

Washington has no business dictating what subjects are taught or how they are presented, but it is high time it played a more substantial role in supporting public education. There is no better investment in protecting our economic and security interests in the global marketplace.

Politics must stop, the president has said, at the schoolhouse door. He's dead right on that.

Here are some of the Clinton proposals that members of both parties can and should support:

- Test standards. The president is correct to advocate voluntary national test standards so

that parents, teachers and administrators in our nation's 13,000 school districts can measure the performance of their children against other regions of the country. Republican hard-liners fear such testing puts the long arm of Uncle Sam where it does not belong, but having the bully pulpit of the presidency behind voluntary standards can only help improve education in the long run.

- School choice. Clinton advocates innovative, privately operated charter schools and choice for parents of public school students. These plans deserve our support, and Republicans generally do support them.

Unfortunately, the president remains opposed to school vouchers on the grounds that giving poor parents financial aid will promote parochial or private schools at the expense of public schools.

Another voucher program, the GI Bill, which helped returning veterans attend the college of their choice after World War II, contributed significantly to our nation's postwar prosperity. And Clinton is promoting a voucher that works like the GI Bill to assist the unemployed with job training.

A school-voucher program could also clear the way for low- and moderate-income parents to send their children to whatever public or private school they choose. Giving parents greater flexibility would strengthen public education, not weaken it, by putting failing schools on notice that they must better educate our children, or risk losing them.

- School construction. Congress must drop its opposition to the president's initiative to provide for construction and renovation of school buildings. Children, instinctively hungry to learn, must be able to do so in a safe and secure environment. Assisting the increasing number of districts that are plagued by deteriorating and overcrowded schools should be a federal priority. The Republican opponents who feel this creates an additional federal entitlement best left to the state and local level are being unrealistic about the amount of local resources available for school construction programs.

- Urban schools. There are reports that the president is preparing a package of incentives to bolster performance in the most-troubled urban schools. He must get support for this. The rift in educational opportunity between rich and poor contributes mightily to the continued divisions in our society. Congress has provided some minimal assistance to troubled urban schools in years past, but Republicans no doubt will resist efforts in Washington that they advocate for states.

What they don't realize is that social justice can only come with truly equal access to educational excellence.

How can we pay for all this? I've long advocated a strong military. Reallocating \$20 billion annually from the Department of Defense's \$255 billion budget, however, will do a lot more to protect our national security interests than will a few more bombers or a few more tanks. This amount could safely be removed from the defense budget without compromising national security while still offering a substantial amount to improve education. Just as John F. Kennedy challenged the nation to land a man on the moon a generation ago, so, too, can a popular Bill Clinton use the presidency and his uncanny ability to communicate to rally the public behind his education initiatives.

With the people's support, I'm convinced he can put together a successful coalition of Democrats and Republicans in Congress, and in the state legislatures, to build a better life for every child.

Forbes is a Republican congressman from New York. ■

53. St. Louis Post-Dispatch

December 10, 1997

National testing can offer useful guideposts

By Kerry Crist

When it comes to national testing, some politicians want it both ways. They don't want national testing, but they do want American students to perform at the same high level as students in countries that have national testing.

Missouri Sen. John Ashcroft, for example, both opposes the national tests that President Bill Clinton supports and accuses American schools of promoting

low standards despite the fact that the success of other nations, such as Japan, Korea, and Germany in educating all children to high levels is directly tied to the national tests they employ to measure student progress.

Although the rhetoric about national testing might lead one to believe that national testing means a national curriculum, with extensive tests at every grade level, national testing proponents

are seeking only two 90-minute tests - one in fourth grade and one in eighth. Similar tests, currently given to 130,000 children by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, are used to make international comparisons.

The tests proposed by Clinton would be a version of those tests and would be given to all children, thus providing information on individual student progress.

Because Americans are so mobile - according to the General Accounting Office about one in every five Americans moves each year - national testing is perhaps even more essential in the United States than in other countries. Each of the 50 states, with a total of 15,000 school districts, has its own standards and tests. Because there is no agreement among states (and often not even among schools within a district) on what should be taught when an American child changes schools probably will be either behind or ahead of his or her peers.

In contrast, most other developed countries require all students, regardless of where they live, to attain the same minimum level of achievement at specific points.

In Japan, for example, all second graders must know their multiplication tables by the end of the year, while in the United States local districts usually determine when students learn multiplication. Thus, an American third grader moving from a school where multiplication is taught in second grade to one where it is taught in third grade is on hold until his classmates catch up.

Conversely, a second grader moving in the other direction is immediately behind classmates.

Ironically, both the left and the right oppose national testing - the left opposes testing and the right opposes anything that's national. But in a strange way, both the left and the right oppose national testing because it's not politically correct: It does not promote unlimited diversity.

For example, although neither the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund nor the Christian Coalition would want to join a club of which the other was a member, they both oppose national testing because they fear that national testing is inherently biased against the particular axes they grind.

And they're right! That's the great merit of national testing: It measures achievement, regardless of socio-economic, ethnic, religious or political background.

National testing means establishing high expectations for American children and making sure those expectations are met. It should not be a partisan issue, and in the past it has not been one.

In 1991, President George Bush and

his secretary of education, Lamar Alexander, proposed more comprehensive tests than Clinton is now. And the National Alliance of Business supports national testing, as does archconservative (but not religious-right conservative) William F. Buckley.

Unfortunately, our system of leaving each decision about education to the local level almost guarantees an uncoordinated, unaccountable educational system. Opponents of national testing argue that it will eliminate local control. But testing is not instruction - local districts will retain the freedom to design lessons, to exceed minimum standards and to determine the extras they want to provide with local money.

Ashcroft and others who are fighting efforts to establish national testing certainly have the right to do so. But they shouldn't complain that American schools aren't measuring up to those of other developed countries whose high standards are in great part the result of national testing. They can't have it both ways!■

DON'T PIGEONHOLE SCHOOLS

As President Bill Clinton prepares to renew his battle for national academic standards, the rest of the country continues to try to make its children's education ever more individualized.

When the president has time, he should include among his reading "New Ways of Education" a recent journal article by conservative education critic Chester Finn and graduate student Rebecca L. Gau. With any luck, the reams of information about increasing diversity in schooling options will convince the president that the path of uniformity is the one least likely to succeed with students, or with voters.

A year ago, the president announced plans to create benchmarks of what American students should know about reading by grade four and math by grade eight. Better still, he suggested, districts could sign up for voluntary national tests so parents would know exactly where their kids ranked, compared with the country at large.

Despite a series of desperately offered compromises, the president's proposal died late in the fall, victim of an inability to overcome conservative charges of federal intrusion and liberal fears that urban areas would be stigmatized. Faced with the loss of a quite flush budget for education and social services, the president finally surrendered on the standards battle, but has vowed to reintroduce the topic soon.

Clinton argues that standards are needed for the nation as a whole to compete in world markets. Yet as Finn and Gau illustrate, state legislators and the people they represent appear to believe increased choice offers a more certain path to improved learning. It is a philosophy the authors embrace:

"Not only do some of these novel schools better suit America's varied educational needs, but the marketplace of parental choice also helps to hold them accountable for student achievement."

Consider some of the evidence: Enrollment in magnet schools - public-school buildings dedicated to a certain theme or emphasis - has tripled in recent years. Meanwhile, charter schools - public institutions free of many typical government regulations - now claim 170,000 students nationwide. Participation in home-schooling is skyrocketing; once too small even to measure, the home-educated population now includes at least 1 percent - and, according to some estimates, as much as 4 percent - of all school-age children.

Also climbing markedly is enrollment in tech-prep, a program in which high school students can earn credits toward an associate's degree from a local community college. Finn and Gau report that colleges in 33 states offer this model, which, in certain cases results in simultaneous receipt of a diploma and a degree.

Beyond these specific models (Finn and Gau list a dozen), nearly half of all states also allow parents to select schools in districts beyond their home systems, Cleveland and Milwaukee both offer public voucher programs, and a handful of states have begun offering tax credits for parents' educational expenses. In short, the nation faces a growing realization that "incrementalist strategies" will not make the changes needed to reform American education.

To his credit, Clinton has included charter school funding in his federal proposals, although he maintains vehement opposition to vouchers. Even teachers unions, once so suspicious of school alternatives, are embracing charters and even the more controversial path of overhauling entire public school staffs in buildings that are failing.

Still, the president seems certain that federal direction - in the form of these standards and tests - is the way to ensure positive results. He is mistaken, but his quest may have an indirect benefit: While he spends time and political capital making a case that fails the test of common sense, states and districts can pursue innovations much more likely to prove worthwhile. ■

76. USA Today

November 20, 1997

In education, character as important as skills

By William J. Bennett

When President Clinton announced during the last campaign that the education of America's young people was to be the priority of his second administration, he joined a train of political freight cars that has been growing impressively longer over the past 200 years but which has seldom, if ever, left the marshaling yard.

The current debate over the value of national testing for elementary and secondary school students is a telling example of the confrontational character of educational issues today. (My friend and colleague Chester Finn has said that the right opposes anything with the word "national" in it, while the left opposes anything with the word "testing.")

Such concerns are important. But I believe them to be at the margin of the most important issues about education in America.

This is because the highest values of education in a democracy are more than the competitive advantage of an increasingly productive labor force, however welcome such an outcome may be. Those values were understood by America's founders - the larger-than-life figures who pledged one another "our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor" that hot July day in 1776.

For while they had much to say about

what we would now call "the economy" (they had, after all, consciously created a commercial republic), they were also aware of the French philosopher Baron Montesquieu's observation that the laws of education ought to be related to the principles of government.

Without educated citizens, the popular government they founded, in James Madison's unforgettable phrase, is "but a prologue to a farce or tragedy; or perhaps both." Education in America was to be the "best security against crafty and dangerous encroachments on the public liberty."

The founders were heavily influenced by the English philosopher John Locke, who wrote, "Tis virtue . . . which is the hard and valuable part to be aimed at in education."

They knew that teachers in America must educate not only the abilities of children - the sort of thing the much-disputed national tests are intended to measure - but also their character.

Samuel Adams described the mission of educators as nurturing the "moral sense" of children. "Great learning and superior abilities, should you ever possess them," Abigail Adams told her son John Quincy, "will be of little value and small estimation unless virtue, honor, truth, and integrity are added to them."

American education was intended from

its inception to plant virtue, to cultivate what Thomas Jefferson called a "natural aristocracy," and ultimately, to harvest patriots.

When Congress meets to debate the president's education initiatives, or when the Education secretary issues policy directives on national standards, they might do well to remember the civic education the founders contemplated was about more than the acquisition of skills; it has to do with the architecture of the soul.

As Abraham Lincoln said it, "Let reverence for the laws . . . be taught in schools, in seminars, and in colleges; let it be written in primers, spelling books, and in almanacs

And, in short, let it become the political religion of the nation; and let the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the grave and the gay, of all sexes and tongues, and colors and conditions, sacrifice upon its altars."

Much was asked of American education at the time of the nation's founding. We should not settle for less now.

*William J. Bennett is editor of the new book **Our Sacred Honor: Words of Advice from the Founders in Stories, Letters, Poems, and Speeches**. He served as secretary of Education under President Reagan. ■*

74. The Washington Post

11/16/97; Edition: FINAL; Section: Magazine; Page W36

WIT'S END

Cutting the Mustard

By Dave Barry

SHOULD AMERICAN SCHOOLCHILDREN be given standardized national education tests? I believe they should, and I will tell you exactly why: because I am not a schoolchild. I am strongly in favor of things that I, personally, do not have to do. Childbirth is another example.

The national testing program was proposed by President Clinton because he

desperately wants to be remembered by posterity for some achievement other than being investigated and jogging around in shorts the size of a wedding tent. Another program that he proposed recently was an urgent federal campaign against — I am not making this up — the threat of foreign vegetables. I think this issue could be a big winner, posterity-wise. I can picture a scene in Washington, decades from now, wherein hundreds of thousands of grateful Americans gather to dedicate a majestic

monument, comparable in size to the ones for Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln, consisting of a statue of President Clinton heroically confronting a menacing statue of an imported rutabaga.

But getting back to the issue of requiring students to take standardized national tests: I truly believe that it would provide great benefits to the nation. For example, if I drove past some students who were walking to school, looking young and carefree and thin and healthy, I could roll

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down my window, pound my horn and shout: "Perhaps I am old and flabby, and perhaps I could weave a medium-size area rug from just one month's growth of my nose hairs, but at least I DON'T HAVE TO TAKE A STANDARDIZED NATIONAL TEST HA HA HA!" Then I could drive off, whimpering, because I have arthritis and my hands hurt when I pound things.

So national testing is a fine idea. The question is: What should the questions be? My considered opinion is that the questions should test the students' grasp of the five basic academic disciplines: English, mathematics, science, history and condiments.

I include this last discipline because recently I attended a college football game, and I purchased a hot dog, and while I was waiting in line at the condiments station, shuffling my feet to keep them from becoming permanently bonded to the thick layer of high-adhesive condiment goo that had been building on the stadium floor since the Truman administration, I noticed that the young man in front of me was covering his hot dog with mayonnaise. And I thought: "Our educational system has failed this young man! Standardized national testing could have prevented this!" So here is my proposed Standardized

National Education Test.

CONDIMENTS SECTION

1. What goes on a hot dog?
 - a. Mustard.
2. What is it okay to put mayonnaise on?
 - a. A turkey sandwich.
 - b. The seat of the fan in front of you at the football game whose automatic response to everything that happens on the field, including spitting, is to stand up, so that you're basically paying to see a panoramic view of his butt.

SCIENCE SECTION

1. Why do some people take astrology seriously?
 - a. Because they have unusually small brains.
 - b. Because thousands of years of human experience have proved to us, beyond a reasonable doubt, that no matter what so-called "scientists" say, the positions of the stars in the heavens at exactly the moment of your birth can, in fact, dramatically influence the course of your life, if you have an unusually small brain.
2. What is the smallest unit of matter?
 - a. The molecule.
 - b. The atom.

- c. The amount of mustard they put in those damned condiment packets that you have to open with your teeth.

HISTORY AND MATHEMATICS SECTION

1. If Abraham Lincoln is writing the Declaration of Independence at 20 words per minute on a train traveling west from San Francisco, and at exactly the same time Franklin Delano "Teddy" Roosevelt is forming the National League of Nations on a train traveling east from Boston, what should they put on their hot dogs?

- a. Mustard.

- b. And they had better do it quickly, before their trains hit the ocean.

ENGLISH SECTION

Write an 800-word essay in English about an important political or social issue such as national education testing without saying a single intelligible thing about it.

Extra credit: Make repeated references to mustard.

BONUS EARL SECTION

1. Whatever happened to Earl, the suspected snake egg that you received for your 50th birthday?

- a. Earl is fine and continues to be a wonderful pet in the sense of not hatching.
- b. But he is starting to smell funny. ■

75. The Washington Post

11/09/97; Edition: FINAL; Section: Outlook; Page C01

National School Testing Will . . .; a) Help b) Hurt c) Cause Anxiety d) All of the Above

By Jay Gillen

Last May, I had one of those unnerving conversations with an anxious parent that I often seem to have at the end of the school year. The man's daughter, a diligent student, was graduating from eighth grade but wasn't headed to the high school of her choice. Her grades and test scores had turned out worse than she had hoped, particularly in math, and so she was destined instead for a school of no one's choice. Her father was engaging in a losing battle of second-guessing: If only he had understood a few years ago how she measured up against the competition, he said, maybe he could have done more to help her.

If every American child were guaranteed an annual income of \$50,000 from age 21 to retirement, few parents would demand test results as a way of knowing how well their children were doing in school. And fewer still would be wringing their hands during conferences in my classroom; they would be enjoying their child's growing knowledge instead. The desire for more testing is directly related to the concern that many parents feel about their children's future. This is not the only reason why many parents support testing, but it is a prominent one — and one that skillful politicians are quick to understand.

I thought of this father and his

anxieties last week as President Clinton and Congress continued to fight over whether to have national education testing and standards. The president has proposed voluntary proficiency tests for fourth-graders in reading and for eighth-graders in math. But some Republicans oppose this idea as, among other things, an unnecessary intrusion by the federal government into a state and local matter. The two sides say they have a tentative agreement, but the details haven't been worked out yet.

The issues under discussion in Washington — the proper role of the federal government in local education, the quality of tests already administered

at the state level, the effect of testing on students' self-esteem — are all important ones. But they also are beside the point for many parents, who support national testing for more emotional reasons: They are worried that their children may lose out, and so they seek any sort of information and clarity that will help them decide how best to position their children for advantage.

The school where I teach — and which my children attend — is a quasi-charter public school in Baltimore ("chartered" by the city school system directly, rather than through legislation). Seventy percent of our students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches; 90 percent are African American. On weekends, gunfire can be heard in our neighborhood. Unemployment and underemployment are high. Drugs form a significant part of the neighborhood economy. But, on the other hand, most families are raising children successfully, keeping them safe and out of trouble, keeping them well-fed and suitably clothed, participating in report card nights, supporting churches, coaching baseball and football, supervising homework.

All of us with children at the school, the more affluent as well as the less affluent, share common worries: What will our children's lives be like when they leave school or college? Will they qualify for decent jobs? Will they be able to afford a car so they can travel to decent jobs? Will they be able to buy a home so as not to be at the mercy of a callous landlord when their own children need shelter, security and a place to play?

I don't believe we are very different from parents elsewhere in America. For the most part, parents put their children in the best schools they can afford. If they can afford to move to a suburban school district with good public schools, they are likely to do so. If they can afford a private school, they are likely to pay. Parents, by and large, want their children well educated. But even more than that, they want their children to be safe, happy and equipped to compete.

In many countries, parents' anxieties about their children's competitive advantage is institutionalized through national tests at about age 12. In Japan, for example, performance on these tests determines whether children will go to university or not. Successful students are tracked into the most demanding courses, further batteries of challenging examinations and university careers.

Unsuccessful students are tracked into less-demanding courses, vocational training, vocationally oriented examinations and certification and early entry to the work force.

But none of these tests or examinations have the purpose of letting parents know how their children are doing. Instead, the tests let parents know how their children are going to be sorted: this one to university, that one to vocational training. Many people abroad are not happy with the finality and competitive nature of the testing system. But such a system would be a positive embarrassment if we were to institute it here. We are bound up in the American dream, pretending that anyone at any time can begin working hard and achieve wealth, significance and honor. For this reason, American educational tests are designed only to "let parents know how their children are doing in school."

There are some standardized tests used to determine entry to selective public high schools; but these are downplayed and never all-or-nothing. A student's grades, attendance, extracurricular activities and personal recommendations all figure more or less equally with test scores in most selective high school admissions. The SAT, which is acknowledged to be a sorting test for college admissions, is usually taken by students when they are 17 or 18 — and even then colleges go to great lengths to explain that this test is just one of many criteria used to select students.

We live in a viciously competitive society. Economically, we are vulnerable all the time. As adults, this awareness presses on us day in and day out. But unlike the openly competitive educational system of other countries with their comprehensive examinations and tests, we have masked as much as we can the competition inherent in our own education system. It is too unseemly for us to ask that children compete at tender ages for scarce resources.

This is hypocrisy pure and simple. We compete on our children's behalf by buying access to schools that we believe will give our children an advantage. In Japan, a parent's anxiety can be focused on the comprehensive examinations all children must take. But here, this anxiety is diffused and often lacks a clear focus. Schools tell parents their children are getting A's and B's; but parents are not naive — they know that most children get A's and B's these days. Not everyone's child can be above average;

someone must be fudging the facts. As parents, we want to know where our children stand relative to other children.

The reality of testing today, however, often doesn't provide the kind of information parents desire about their children. For seven years, Maryland has used mandatory tests similar to those that the Clinton administration favors. Called the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program, or MSPAP, these analytical tests have the valuable goal of improving the quality of education. They are not designed to sort students into who is "more successful" and who is "less successful." In fact, scores are not even reported for individual students — only for schools and districts as aggregates. The theory is that schools will change in response to incentives and penalties resulting from performance on the required tests.

Would parents be relieved to know their children's individual scores? Probably not. The only thing most parents would learn is that their children are behind where they should be. This is because the official purpose of the tests is not to address parental concerns, but to raise standards in the schools.

These tests are challenging. They measure thinking skills and the ability to interpret complex data, not just memorization of basic facts. I believe this is as it should be, but the result is a test that looks nothing like the tests you and I took growing up. When a parent asked me recently how to help his child prepare for this kind of test, I described a series of activities for reading and math: Read everything you can together with your child and talk at length about the reading. What parts of the story do you like? How would you have changed the ending? What words in the story let you know a character was brave? Where does the story take place? Can you find the location on a map? How far is that from home? What is the climate there likely to be? How long would it take to get there by car? How long by plane?

This is not the kind of answer most parents are looking for when they ask about test preparation. Interesting ideas, perhaps. But most parents want a textbook or packet with sample questions and examples, and then many pages of drills that will result in a higher score. Unfortunately, textbooks, packets and drills of that kind are almost useless in preparing for these avant garde tests. What is useful are teachers or parents who ask thoughtful, probing,

well-informed questions, and who plan interesting, challenging experiences for children that reflect the complexity and interconnectedness of contemporary life.

All but a handful of Maryland schools, according to the tests, are performing at an unsatisfactory level. This is true even in more-affluent jurisdictions: in fact, many jurisdictions posted declines in performance in 1996. To no one's surprise, schools serving more-affluent populations almost always do better on these tests than schools serving less-affluent populations. But parents knew this already.

If the proposed national tests were mandatory and explicitly competitive — determining future tracking toward college or vocations — they would undoubtedly be a huge success in many ways. Affluent parents would be able to

focus their anxiety on a thousand commercial products that would claim to produce better test results; arguments about progressive versus traditional education would be muted since the traditionalist parents would fear they were harming their children by not preparing them for the new, mandatory tests; and the initial results would show demonstrably better performance by higher-income students, giving statistical support to the cherished idea that wealthier people deserve their advantages.

But there is another cherished idea that could not survive mandatory, competitive tests of this kind: the idea that a child's future should not be determined at age 8 or age 12. We want to hold open the possibility for our own

children, at least, that their full flowering may come late, or that one examination may not capture all their gifts. So we are not about to switch to all-or-nothing mandatory tests on the Japanese or British model.

We are stuck with something much less clean: anxiety about where our children stand relative to others; confusion about styles of teaching and learning that very few of us experienced when we were young; and the ugly hypocrisy of an educational system claiming objectivity and fairness, though it gives advantage year after year to the children of the well-to-do.

Jay Gillen teaches at the Stadium School in Baltimore, a public charter school for grades four to eight that he helped found. ■

76. Dayton Daily News

11/09/97; Edition: CITY; Section: OPED; Page 9B

CONSERVATIVES HAVE GOOD REASON TO OPPOSE CLINTON'S CIVIL RIGHTS CHOICE

By Mona Charen

'I don't think the United States Senate should be the forum for attacking Chinese Americans,' pronounced Sen. Barbara Mikulski, D-Md., at a press conference in support of Bill Lann Lee, President Bill Clinton's nominee to head the Justice Department's civil rights division.

Mikulski was answering to criticism of Lee's views on affirmative action, preferences and set-asides. But answering is not really the right word. Smearing Lee's opponents is much closer to reality — which Mikulski seemed to acknowledge in her muttered side comment to Sen. Ted Kennedy, D-Mass., as she left the podium. According to *The Washington Times*, Mikulski told Kennedy, 'I hate to do that, but we have no choice.'

No choice? Did someone hold a gun

preferences, set-asides, forced busing and racial gerrymandering — the entire architecture of group entitlements that the Supreme Court and American voters are starting to disassemble.

When California voters decided to outlaw all discrimination — including reverse discrimination — on grounds of race, sex or national origin by passing Proposition 209, Lee attacked the law as 'the bully in the schoolyard.' Repeatedly, Lee expressed the view that Prop 209 was unconstitutional, and the Legal Defense Fund, under his leadership, went to court the morning after the law was passed to have it declared unconstitutional.

Lee found a compliant judge in Thelton Henderson. But the Supreme Court has thrown a wrench into the works by letting the law stand. Lee has been a zealous advocate of the kinds of

was discriminatory. The LDF also challenged the use of reading and math tests in North Carolina schools. The tests were illegitimate, LDF argued, because minorities had a higher failure rate than whites.

In case after case, Lee has argued for goals and timetables, set-asides and preferences. He makes Lani Guinier look mellow in contrast. Any test or standard that minorities fail at higher rates than whites is ipso facto declared discriminatory. Lee has said, 'Forced busing' is a misnomer. School districts do not force children to ride a bus but only to arrive on time at their assigned schools.' Cute.

Obviously, there is ample reason for conservatives to oppose Lee. He represents everything conservatives oppose in the realm of civil rights law. Further, it is not at all clear that he would

88. Minneapolis Star Tribune
November 12, 1997

November 12, 1997

National K-12 tests

President Bill Clinton and his congressional opponents struck a good compromise last week that puts national reading and math tests on the back burner but keeps the concept alive.

The president has wisely advocated national tests to assess student

performance in fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math. However, some conservatives fear the tests mean federal control of education, while black and Hispanic caucuses in the House worry that they could be used to discriminate against minorities.

Meanwhile, some governors argue that states should set the rigorous standards and design their own tests. The state approach would work — if state assessments were consistent and comparable. An Education Week study earlier this year found that state standards

vary widely, and that fewer than half of all U.S. students can do challenging work in reading or math. American students must compete globally, so they must be evaluated against a national standard that allows comparison with their international peers.

Opposition to Clinton's testing proposal threatened to hold up passage of an \$80 billion spending bill for Education, Health and Human Services, and Labor departments. To get the bill passed, the administration agreed to delay test introduction by one year.

Under the compromise, the independent National Academy of Sciences will study state and commercial tests to see if they possess the same rigorous standards contained in existing federal exams. The academy would also decide which existing tests, if any, could

be compared to yield uniform results. That is a sensible solution. There need not be multiple tests for students each year. The objective is to have a complementary system of local and national tests that ensure that all students learn to read well and do basic math.

Last week, the National Education Goals Panel released its seventh annual progress report since the goals were established during the Bush administration. The update reported some state and national progress in math and science achievement, and pointed specifically to Minnesota as an example of what works — and what doesn't.

Panel researchers cited Minnesota students' stellar showing in eighth-grade science on the 1995 TIMSS (Third International Mathematics and Science) test. In earth science Minnesota students

tied for first place with students in Singapore. But in math, Minnesota students came in about the middle of the pack.

Why the difference? In science, there is agreement to focus on earth science — Minnesota teachers receive special training, then limit the topics covered and do them well. But in math, there is no corresponding statewide consensus on what students should know and be able to do.

The same point can be made nationally: The United States needs a national consensus about what students must learn. The Goals Panel rightly proposes setting tougher educational standards, strengthening teaching skills, and linking instruction and testing to the standards. National standards and testing are a crucial part of that formula. ■

89. Los Angeles Times

November 10, 1997

Bold Action for the Good of Kids

Sunt Factin -----

a few bucks getting their faces painted? Or roller or ice skating parties? Dinner dances for parents?

Area grocery stores, like Jewel and

Dominicks, have benefit days where a percentage of the day's take is kicked back to designated groups.

Anything—but anything—to get the

kids off the street, off my stoop and off my door knocker.

Andrew Herrmann is a member of the Sun-Times editorial board.■

72. Omaha World-Herald

10/05/97; Edition: Sunrise; Section: EDITORIAL; Page 13B

Guest Column

Need for Standards In Schools Is Great

By DOUG CHRISTENSEN

Sixty-four Nebraska educators, parents and citizens recently took the next steps in writing standards of learning for students. It's appropriate to begin now the public discussion about what we mean by standards, why they are important and why writing them is complex.

You remember learning to read, count, add and subtract in the primary grades. And you may remember learning those dreaded multiplication tables as a third- or fourth-grader. Didn't schools have standards of learning back then? And now, if they do, what are they?

Yes, school districts did have standards of learning back then. One of the first set of standards - the Official Course of Study for the Elementary Schools of Nebraska - was developed in 1929, revised during the next seven years and printed in 1936.

Here are some of the standards Nebraskans had for first-graders after the first nine weeks of school in the 1930s:

- an interest in reading;
- the habit of reading to get to thought;
- the habit of moving the eyes from left to right and from the end of one line to the beginning of the next;
- a reading vocabulary of 50 to 70 words.

The Official Course of Study for

Elementary Schools not only set the standards of learning but also outlined daily lessons in reading and other subjects, since it was intended to guide teachers who often were high school graduates with no college-level training in education.

The need for standards of learning in Nebraska is as great today as it was in the 1930s. But the reasons for standards are different, considering that teachers are now highly trained professionals who have not only college degrees but advanced degrees in education as well.

Nebraska needs standards of learning today to inform parents, students and taxpayers about what students should know and be able to do. Such standards also would inform teachers about what the public expects.

Outlining the learning expectations for Nebraska students will help teachers make decisions, considering the growing demands on their time in the classroom. Standards also will help teachers choose the best available textbooks and educational tools. Good standards of learning will make good teachers better.

Standards are the right thing to do. But writing standards won't be easy. In fact, identifying standards and garnering support from today's well-educated parents and taxpayers may be more difficult than ever before.

Do you set standards at the expectation level for the average student, or do you set them high to challenge students to achieve at greater heights? And who decides what the average student should be able to do?

If you support local control of schools and agree that standards should be voluntary, how do you assure that students are meeting the standards?

If you require schools to report test scores at certain grades to their local school boards and to the state, what test scores do you use? And who writes those tests? Will the tests describe what the students can do?

The Nebraska Board of Education has decided to write standards that challenge young minds. That's what parents and taxpayers across the state also want, according to statewide discussions on standards. And research shows that students achieve more when they are appropriately challenged. The state board also recognizes the importance of local control.

Some questions have been answered, but many complex ones dealing with testing and accountability have not yet been ironed out.

While standards by themselves won't change schools, Nebraska schools won't change without them.■

73. Buffalo News

10/04/97; Edition: FINAL; Section: VIEWPOINTS; Page C3

SCHOOL VOUCHERS PLAN IS QUITE A HOAX

By Carl Rowan

North America Syndicate

Poor people are perennial victims of many hoaxes, but probably none more cynical or threatening than the promise that school vouchers will deliver superior educations to their children.

The idea of giving tax dollars for parents to use to send their kids to private schools — or to a public school in a suburb or district they think is better — looks good on its face, especially when the voucher clamor is being sold as a "fairness" gesture that would give the

poorest parents the same power of "choice" as the affluent now enjoy. But this is a snare, and a delusion that is being promoted mostly by people who don't truly care for the indigent — people who in their hearts don't like being taxed for public education, who hate the

54. U.S. News and World Report

Oct. 13, 1997

National tests



EDITORIAL

55. Denver Post

10/03/97; Edition: Rockies; Section: Denver & The West; Page B-06

DPS Hangs Tough

Faced with sharp criticism from Hispanic groups and rejection by the U.S. Department of Education, Denver Public Schools officials are standing pat on their revised bilingual education program.

They are doing this based on their strong conviction that the new plan will yield the language grasp these bilingual students need, and we believe that conviction deserves support.

Acknowledging previous flaws in the program, school officials redesigned it

with the goal of making some 13,000 Spanish-speaking Denver students readers and writers of English in three school years, then easing them into the school mainstream. The plan includes provisions for close monitoring of students' needs as they enter the program and their achievements as they prepare to leave it. Students who need more than three years will get it, and those who succeed earlier will be moved ahead faster. In addition, we believe, the plan should include equally strong provisions

for continued evaluation of students' progress after they exit the bilingual classroom.

The rift with the federal education department's Office of Civil Rights revolves around its requirement that exiting students must perform at the 30th percentile of students nationally. DPS Superintendent Irv Moskowitz says such numbers mean little in individual evaluations, so the new Denver bilingual plan ignores the 30 percentile rule and concentrates on

COMMENTARY

35. The Washington Post

10/06/97; Edition: FINAL; Section: OP-ED; Page A19

National Tests: Good, Bad and Both

By William Raspberry

"I've been trying to figure out where I come down on this thing of national standardized tests," the cabby said. "Looks to me like maybe there's some good and some bad. What do you think?"

It's a subject I'd tried hard not to think about, considering how disagreeable the pro-test and anti-test partisans can be. "How 'bout those Orioles!" I said.

"As I recall the tests at my old school, they used them to divide us into 'bluebirds' and 'robins,'" the cabby said. "I don't remember any orioles. Besides, weren't those local tests? I was asking you about the national ones."

So much for subtlety. "Okay," I said, "if America is going to be one country, we'd better start acting like it. It doesn't make sense to have one set of academic expectations in one state or school district and different standards in another. If your nephew passes a test in Philadelphia, Miss., the results ought to have the same meaning to an employer in Philadelphia, Pa."

"Even if the parents and school boards in Mississippi and Pennsylvania want their children to know different things?" the cabby said.

"What different things?" I demanded. "Whether you're looking to work in a North Philly bank or an Indian reservation casino, you still need math, reading skills, a sense of history and some knowledge of what's going on in America and the world."

"In other words," the cabby said, "you're not just talking about national tests. You're pushing for a national

curriculum. And maybe national teacher exams and national school architecture czars too. Boy, you sure have a lot of faith in those Washington bureaucrats."

"Okay, Mr. Newt Lite," I said, "Why don't you tell me what we should do."

"Well, for openers, we need to improve the schools for the kids right where they are."

"And . . . ?"

"And then we need to get the teachers on the stick — and fire them if they don't straighten out. And we need to make sure the books and supplies get where they need to be and that the schools open on time."

"I agree with all that," I told him, "but isn't the bottom line whether the kids are learning or not? And how do you tell?"

"Why, by testing," the cabby said, looking at me as if I were some kind of idiot.

"So you're for testing?" I said. . . .

"I said there was some good and some bad, is what I said," he said. "This is the good."

"I see," I ventured. "But you'd have different tests for different places . . ."

"So the folks in the suburbs would have an excuse to discriminate against the kids from the inner city? Don't be silly. Of course we ought to have the same tests."

"And what if the inner-city kids, with all the problems they come to school with, score lower on the tests? Won't that give the suburbs an excuse to discriminate against them?"

"That's the bad," the cabby said.

"Why don't we drop the subject," I

said. "It's obvious you don't know what you're talking about. On one hand, you want local control of curriculum . . ."

"You think I can trust strangers on the other side of the country to see to it that my kid learns about his heritage?"

" . . . and on the other hand you want to make sure your kids learn the same things as kids anywhere else."

"You think they should learn less?"

"And after they've been taught, you want them subjected to local testing . . ."

"By people who love them."

" . . . and have the results accepted by employers anywhere in America."

"I should want employers to ignore my kid's good scores?"

I took a deep breath. "Maybe I can get some sense into you if I explain the situation in terms you can understand," I said. "Think of the school system as a taxicab — in the case of the D.C. schools, a cab that's not running all that well. Wouldn't you want some reliable gauges to measure the car's performance?"

"Well, of course I would. I'd want standard gauges — either factory parts or parts that had been certified as just as good. . . . Hey, I see what you're trying to say. The gauges are like national standardized tests."

"Go to the head of the class," I beamed. "It took awhile, but you've finally got it."

"One more thing," the cabby said. "Those gauges."

"Will they make my cab run any better?" ■

36. The Washington Post

10/04/97; Edition: FINAL; Section: OP-ED; Page A21

Does Diversity on Campus Include Speech and Thought?

By Nat Hentoff

After Joe McCarthy and his acolytes had left the public arena, there was hope in some circles that the free exchange of

ideas would be at the core of college life — certainly among professors. But practically every issue of the Chronicle of Higher Education reveals that those of

us who believed tenure was no longer necessary to protect unpopular views are wrong.

An explosive case in point has been

1. Fort Worth Star-Telegram

September 23, 1997

National testing: It's not a terrible idea

By Molly Ivins

AUSTIN — Perhaps the most discouraging thing about the skunk-off over national education testing is that you can only conclude that it never would have become an issue at all if President Clinton hadn't proposed it. Truly, don't you think that if Steve Forbes or some other Republican figure had come up with this notion, they all would have signed on happily? The problem here is not the idea of national education testing, which is about as controversial as apple pie; the problem is the partisanship that is infesting all kinds of areas where it has no business, including and especially education.

Here are two silly things about this silly debate:

Numero Uno, the R's object to a voluntary national test to check fourth-graders for reading skills and eighth-graders for math skills because, they say, it is a dreadful federal intrusion into the schools, which should remain under local control at all costs — local control being the be-all and end-all of school politics. These are the same people who tell us that our public schools, under local control, are an utter failure, a complete disaster area, not educating our kids and causing us to fall behind the rest of the industrialized world. Do we see a contradiction here?

Numero Two-o, the objection that our kids are already being tested by a variety of state and private programs is quite true. On the other hand, there is no reason not to drop one or more of the other tests when a national test becomes available, is there? Is that real complicated?

Some minority representatives have taken against the idea of national testing on the theory that it will show their kids aren't doing well. Very likely. According to the National Education Association, "The income level of a child's family is still the major determinate of the quality and quantity of the education a child receives. The average child from a bottom quarter income family receives four fewer years of education than a child from the top quarter income family."

Is this because, as Professor Lino Graglia recently suggested, African-American and Mexican-American cultures do not regard failure as "a disgrace"? Talk about blaming the victim. A 1985 report from the National Coalition of Advocates of Students pointed to a couple of interesting things:

Many districts allocate fewer resources to schools in poor neighborhoods than to schools that serve primarily middle- and upper-income-level students.

Teachers alter expectations on the basis of a student's social class. (See the aforementioned Professor Graglia.)

Even harsher disparities occur between districts and states in per-pupil spending because of the weird way we fund public schools. Despite a 30-year effort to equalize school funding, often under court order, Texas schools are still heavily dependent on local property taxes. The poorer the school district, the poorer the schools, despite the fact that poor districts often tax at a higher rate than rich ones.

No, I am not arguing that money makes all the difference. On the other hand, it ain't chopped liver, either. We all know, or have heard of, extraordinary teachers who accomplish amazing things in very poor schools. But short of cloning extraordinary teachers, the next best way to get good schools appears to be spending some money on them.

The amount of money spent per pupil does not exactly track the educational achievements of the kids — it just tracks very, very closely. So when you're Mississippi, spending \$3,666 per pupil per year (from the National Center for Education Statistics), it's a safe bet that your kids will not be doing as well as those in Alaska, where they spend \$8,963 a year.

And you get variations within states; in Texas, where we've been trying to equalize school spending since Patton was a private, there are still differences in expenditures. In Dallas County, the Garland school district spent \$3,992 per pupil last school year, while the Highland Park school district spent \$5,119 per student.

I sometimes think the best thing we could do for our schools is to pass a law saying: "Politicians, keep out." Granted, the educational bureaucracy is slow, cumbersome (that good old local control) and given to speaking in horrible gobbledygook. But on the whole, I'd rather leave the schools to educators than to politicians. At least the educators aren't looking to score votes with simplistic solutions.

The purpose of national tests is to see where the schools are working and where they aren't, and then to apply what works where it's needed. That is not a terrible idea.

Molly Ivins is a columnist for the 'Star-Telegram.' ■

Beyond Lake Wobegon

BY DAVID GERGEN
EDITOR AT LARGE

American schools need tough national standards and tests to match.

History, Karl Marx once suggested, has a way of repeating itself, first as tragedy, then as farce. Incredibly, that dictum may just be right about American education. A few short years after a very good idea for education reform, Goals 2000, was crippled by a lack of leadership, another splendid idea may now be heading toward a similar fate.

The notion of national standards and testing holds rich promise for our schools. Mainstream reformers ranging from Chester Finn of the conservative Hudson Institute and Diane Ravitch of the centrist Brookings Institution to liberals like the late Albert Shanker of the American Federation of Teachers have embraced standards and testing; so have Presidents Bush and Clinton. Surveys show that two thirds of the public would welcome them.

Standards and testing go hand in hand. Printed standards set forth what a child should know and be able to do in subjects such as math and reading. They can also ensure that teachers have clear goals and that communities will fight for the resources to meet them. Tests tied to those standards then help parents and students know how well Suzy and Johnny measure up. If your daughter's class is performing above the national average and she isn't, you can take it up with her; but if her whole school is below average, you can march on city hall.

Hit the books. We have ample evidence that world-class standards and testing can be developed nationally without threatening local control of schools. An organization called the National Center on Education and the Economy, working with many states and school districts, is publishing such standards. It recommends, for example, that an elementary school student read 25 books a year. The center provides a sample list but leaves it to the school, if it chooses, to select alternative books of similar complexity. A tough, well-respected test called the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has long been used by the government to sample student performance nationwide. Together, these two approaches show the direction the country should take.

That's not the road we're on. Most states have established their own standards and tests but too often have watered them down, lulling the public into a false sense of confidence in their schools. In South Carolina, for example, 82 percent of fourth graders have met state reading requirements, but only 20 percent of them have passed the national NAEP test. Oklahoma has a 50-point gap in the pass rates between state and national testing, Wisconsin a 53-point gap. It's Lake Wobegon, where all the children are above average.

Lowering expectations for students to improve their self-esteem or to assuage parents may have short-term advantages, but over the long run, it is cruel. One day those kids will be thrown into real life, where they will rise or fall on their skills. We have a moral obligation to create world-class standards for them.

Early this year, President Clinton recognized that point, vowing a "national crusade for education standards." But since then he has quietly let the idea of standards slip away and is focusing only on national testing. Of course, it is politically controversial to declare what a child should know. But national tests alone are a weak substitute; as has been said, weighing a sheep won't make it grow.

And even the idea of testing faces trouble. Until recently, the president had bypassed Congress and told the Department of Education to develop the tests. An uproar followed as conservatives, alarmed by the prospect of the federal government intruding into local education, joined with civil rights groups, worried about the performance of minorities, in condemning national tests. Now, test development has been shifted to an independent board. National tests may yet pass Congress, but they risk being so mauled politically that few states will participate in them.

Clinton, who has a fine record in education reform, must now salvage all he can on testing. In coming months, he should rebuild a durable, mainstream coalition that will advance us toward national standards as well as testing. Parents and students want the best in education—and they certainly deserve it.

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1. Business Week

September 22, 1997

A BENCHMARK FOR IMPROVING SCHOOLS

What's wrong with benchmarking? Everything, apparently, if it is used in our schools. The raging debate in Congress over President Clinton's plan to create two standardized math and reading exams pits Corporate America against fringe elements of the U.S. body politic. Congressional conservatives worry about a federal government takeover of local schools that would impose an alien curriculum on students, while liberal legislators fear testing will benefit suburban children to the detriment of city kids. This doesn't make any sense to chief executives who used benchmarking as a tool to revitalize American industry. CEOs such as IBM's Louis Gerstner are calling for the creation of voluntary standardized tests that parents anywhere in the country can use to see how their children measure up against national and international benchmarks. Chief executives within the Business Roundtable believe standardized tests can be a tool to improve employee skills for the Information Age. Republican and Democratic governors also welcome a chance to choose tests that allow them to evaluate their state's performance vis-a-vis other states.

Efforts to hold schools accountable across the country are stymied by a lack of comparable data. Each state is responsible for its own curriculum and its own testing. Standardized tests would simply gather data, establish a uniform baseline, and allow states and localities to make judgments about resource allocation. Nothing more.

To make it, Clinton should follow the advice of Governor John Engler (R-Mich.) and give the project to the independent National Assessment Governing Board. The NAGB should then develop two simple exams measuring basic math and reading skills by adopting one of many such tests already in use by the states. In the information era, pragmatism, not paranoia, should guide America's education. ■

1. Lexington (Ky.) Herald-Leader

September 19, 1997 Category: Editorial

A national test

Congress should OK Clinton's plan, but then what?

President Bill Clinton's proposal for voluntary national tests in the fourth and eighth grades is not the hydra-headed bugaboo its detractors suggest.

Nor is it the salvation of American education.

Face it: We already know which schools and which children are falling short. We don't need another test to tell us where help is needed. What we need — but can't seem to muster — is the resolve to provide the help these children, schools, communities and families need.

With that (the obvious) said, Clinton's plan, modest though it may be, holds far more potential for good than harm. Its opponents in Congress (including Kentucky's five House Republicans) should quit blocking funding for the proposal. (The national test got a green light from both Kentucky senators, Mitch McConnell and Wendell Ford, and our lone House Democrat, Scotty Baesler of Lexington.)

As Congress and the administration begin work on a compromise, opponents and supporters alike should insist that the tests be based on high standards. The last thing American schools need is yet another multiple-choice, minimum-skills drill that serves to dumb down teaching.

Not to worry, says Kentucky Education Commissioner Wilmer S. Cody, who spent two days last week in Washington, D.C., heading a committee that's working on what the tests would measure.

The voluntary national tests, as now envisioned, would be a great improvement over what's now available for comparing individual students with their counterparts in other states, says Cody.

Students would spend half of the 90-minute test answering open-ended questions. (These would require students to apply what they have learned.) The other half would be multiple-choice questions. (This would provide a quantifiable measure of what students know.)

Questions would change yearly, unlike traditional achievement tests whose scores creep upward as teachers become familiar with the material. And comparisons would be based on a national standard of what kids should be able to do, not a national average of their scores.

If all that sounds familiar, it's because the principles are those of the Kentucky Education Reform Act. Of course, Kentucky's tests can't provide national comparisons, which has been a major worry for many parents who, understandably, want to know how their kids are measuring up nationally. Clinton's tests could fill that gap, albeit in only two grades and two subjects. Fourth-graders would be tested in reading, eighth-graders in math.

Opposition to the Clinton plan is remarkably diverse. Political and religious conservatives see it as a move toward federal takeover of public education. Liberals fear that minorities and low-income children, who traditionally do poorly on standardized tests, will be penalized for low scores. The national test, it appears, works as a magnet for everyone's pet political or social fears.

Yet, no one is trying to take over local schools. The Clinton plan simply seeks some benchmarks by which everyone can measure the performance of schools and students. Industries use benchmarks to measure the quality of their work. Educators and parents should welcome this new national yardstick.

As for the arguments on behalf of poor and minority children, well, this is where the nation will be tested. The measure of our mettle — the benchmark of our commitment — will be whether we marshal the money and people to teach every child to read, write and figure.

A national test doesn't solve our problems. It doesn't create good schools where they don't exist. But the tests will give the nation an unvarnished report on what our children are learning. We don't see any way that can be a bad thing. ■

1. Hartford Courant

September 19, 1997

More testing isn't the answer

1. What should Connecticut's position be on President Clinton's plan for national reading and math tests?

A. Heartily endorse the proposal.

B. Reject the notion of establishing a test that would allow states to compare how their students are doing relative to others throughout the country.

C. Join those who believe that the federal government should stay out of public schools.

D. None of the above.

It's difficult to get too enthusiastic about Mr. Clinton's plan for national testing in a state where students already are on the verge of overusing their No. 2 pencils.

In Bridgeport, School Superintendent James A. Connelly recently estimated that at least two weeks are spent on testing. Add Mr. Clinton's proposed fourth-grade reading test and eighth-grade math test - each of which would take about 90 minutes to complete, plus preparation and review time - and more instruction time disappears.

Testing and national standards are needed to hold teachers accountable and ensure that students have the skills and knowledge to go on to college or find employment.

A recent study shows a troubling trend toward grade inflation in schools throughout the country. More students are receiving A's, but Scholastic Assessment Test scores are declining. And Sandra Feldman, president of the American Federation of Teachers, makes a valid point that a national standard could help curb the promotion of children who should be staying back a grade.

But will a test that is administered only in two elementary school grades and only in some states solve these problems? Not really.

To head off opposition, Mr. Clinton made participation in tests voluntary. How can there be national testing with only part of the nation participating? Where are the incentives for states that have less rigorous testing programs than Connecticut's to get on board? Wouldn't states with low-performing schools be reluctant to have their test scores circulated throughout the country?

Connecticut already knows how its students are doing. Schools already administer tests which compare students with a national sampling. Usually, the students stack up well.

Mr. Clinton's target population - fourth- and eighth-graders - already take the Connecticut Mastery Test and the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

A vote Tuesday by the House rejecting federal funding for the tests, means there will have to be a compromise if the plan is to move ahead.

With a plan more palatable to all states, Connecticut should consider joining, but only if the national test were to replace some existing tests. Connecticut students are tested enough.

Answer: D. None of the above. ■

1. Houston Chronicle

Sept. 18, 1997 Category: Commentary

VIEWPOINTS: SEPTEMBER 18, 1997

Basics national tests vital

To help ensure that students master the basics, President Clinton is leading efforts to develop voluntary national tests to measure the reading skills of America's fourth-graders and the math skills of eighth-graders. The Chronicle editorial "National exams: Leave the public schools in state and local hands" (Editorial page, Aug. 30) oversimplified both the need for and the potential benefits of this vital initiative.

As a former governor of South Carolina, I understand and fully support the American tradition of state and local control of public education. These tests are completely voluntary, and each state and school district will decide for itself whether or not to offer them.

In an age of increasingly intense international competition, it is in our interests to make better education a top national priority. If we are to maintain and expand our economic strength, we must make certain that all children are being challenged to meet high standards of achievement. Challenging voluntary national tests will provide parents, teachers and principals with a clear picture of whether students are mastering the basics and are ready to learn more advanced skills.

The tests not only will tell parents how their children are doing, but also can be used to compare schools or school districts so needed changes can be made to address shortcomings. Unfortunately, the editorial wrongly implied that the U.S. Department of Education would "prescribe" national standards that "would be dumbed down." The standards for the voluntary national tests are very rigorous and demanding and have been established by a bipartisan, independent group.

Further, the assertion that "national tests would merely confirm what Americans already know" was incorrect. Parents and teachers do not know how children are performing in relation to national and international standards of excellence. Rigorous voluntary national tests, linked to high standards, will do just that.

Richard W. Riley

U.S. Secretary of Education

Washington, D.C.■

1. Fort Worth Star-Telegram

September 18, 1997

The Real Issue

In the discussion of the Clinton administration's proposal for national standards and national testing to see how students and schools are doing in reading and mathematics, the case 'for' the plan has been presented weakly, and the wrong reasons have been cited against it.

Indeed, the whole mess is becoming a sort of stalking horse for the larger question that America isn't quite ready to debate: the future of public schools.

The president and his allies believe in public schools and think that standards and tests would help improve those schools. They also think it would be useful for local school districts to know how their product stacks up against results elsewhere in the nation.

The folks on the other side, instead of emphasizing that the tests would be only a tool and more would be required, are arguing that tests would be a federal infringement on local control, even though the president has agreed to let the tests be designed by an independent bipartisan panel rather than by the Education Department, and use of the tests would be voluntary for the nation's schools.

Many conservatives who oppose the plan advocate a voucher system so that parents can more easily send children to private schools rather than public schools, and think funding for national standards and tests would get in the way of that; yet some Democrats oppose the plan because they fear the result of minority children scoring badly on the tests.

Sadly, as it heads toward a House-Senate conference, the Clinton plan probably does not deserve the heat it is generating. It is only a stand-in for the real issue — whether America believes in quality universal education or just talks about it.■

1. Sacramento Bee

September 17, 1997

A national test: Clinton's assessment program deserves support

After a lot of haggling and, finally, some sensible compromise with the Legislature, Gov. Pete Wilson is getting the statewide academic skills test he had made a cornerstone of his agenda this year. Unfortunately for President Clinton and his equally high-profile effort to get a national testing program through Congress, there looks to be less room there for common ground.

If the president isn't able to convince Congress — a prospect that now looks unlikely in the House — parents and students will lose the chance for an objective comparison of their individual, school and school-district performance to their counterparts across the nation. That kind of measurement, developed and administered with care, has the potential to drive needed reform in public education.

The Senate has overwhelmingly approved the national test, to be given to fourth-graders in reading and eighth-graders in math in districts that volunteer to administer it. But a growing number of critics in the House threaten to scuttle the plan altogether. They are an odd alliance of conservative Republicans, who claim a national test would constitute dangerous federal meddling in local school matters, and urban Democrats, who say the tests would unfairly stigmatize poor and minority schoolchildren who are relegated to impoverished schools that don't prepare them to perform.

It's hard to see how a national test could amount to federal intrusion when Clinton has stipulated it would be entirely voluntary. Those districts that don't see any value in the test simply don't have to participate. (In doing so, however, they may anger parents who are increasingly wary of inflated grades and want some objective assessment.)

The president has also agreed, at congressional urging, to transfer control of the formulation and administration of the test from the federal Department of Education, which conservatives complain is run by liberal partisans, to the National Assessment Governing Board, an independent body that enjoys broader trust.

As for the complaint about stigmatizing poor and minority children, wouldn't a national test, scored by school, finally expose the shameful inadequacy of so many impoverished urban and rural schools, thus making a powerful argument for the additional attention and resources they deserve? Is it OK to let children languish in such conditions as long as we don't attach any numbers to them?

Many of the test's details remain to be worked out — the kinds of questions the tests would contain, how they would be scored and so on — and more controversy will undoubtedly follow. But parents want and deserve concrete measures of their children's progress and the performance of schools their tax dollars support. Clinton is trying to give them that, and the House should get on board.■

1. The New York Times

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

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.

■

1. The Washington Post

09/15/97; Edition: FINAL; Section: Editorial; Page A22 Category: Editorial

Wrong Move on Education

THE SENATE voted almost casually last week in effect to abolish most of the current forms of federal aid to elementary and secondary schools for the year ahead by merging them into two block grants to school districts. The 51-49 roll call after only perfunctory debate seemed mainly meant to score a political point — that Republicans, all but four of whom supported the amendment, favor local control of the schools, while Democrats, all of whom opposed it, would have the federal government dictate school policy. But the issue is phony. Democrats no more than Republicans favor anything like federal control of the schools, of which there is scant danger — and the schools deserve better from the Senate than to be used as political stage props.

The federal government pays only a small share of the cost of elementary and secondary education — about 6 percent. The rest is state and local. The federal role thus never has been to sustain the schools, but to fill gaps and push mildly in what have seemed to be neglected directions. About half the federal money — some \$6 billion a year — has been aimed since the 1960s at providing so-called compensatory education for lower-income children. The block grant amendment, by Sen. Slade Gorton, would have the effect of converting this into general aid. The requirement that the money be spent on poorer students would be dropped in favor of letting school districts spend it as they "deem appropriate." That's more than just a shift to local control; it's a shift away from a long-standing sensible effort to concentrate the limited federal funds on those in greatest need. Does Congress really want to reverse that policy?

Most other **Department of Education programs** — though not such popular ones as aid to the disabled — would be bunched in the second block grant. As in most departments, a pretty good case can be made for some such bunching. Some programs are always floating around for which the original rationale was weak or has faded and that are too small to warrant separate administration. But that's true of only some, not all, of those Mr. Gorton would dispatch. Example: the Senate voted Thursday in favor of a compromise version of the national testing program the president supports — but in voting for the block grant, as Education Secretary Richard Riley observed, "It then voted to eliminate the funding for this purpose."

Other special-purpose programs in aid of particular groups or in support of reform likewise would disappear, the secretary said, including several the president has touted as evidence of his commitment to education. The president and Democrats generally have made effective political use of the education issue in the past few years. Block-granting would leave them less of a stage from which to do so.

The Gorton amendment would be only for a year, at which point the appropriations bill to which it was attached would lapse, and the issue would have to be fought all over again. That's another reason why, even if mainly for show, it was the wrong way to do business. Mr. Riley was authorized to say it was "unacceptable" to the administration, meaning presumably that the president would veto the bill if the amendment were to survive in conference. He'd be right to do so. ■

1. USA Today

September 15, 1997 Category: Editorial

Why fear national tests?: They just add information. OUR VIEW: This is no intrusion on local choice. Its a way for parents and educator's to evaluate their schools.

Thanks to the wonders of the Information Age, Americans can compare the performance of airlines, telecommunications companies, health plans and even mutual fund managers.

But when it comes to schools, meaningful comparisons are more difficult. Much as we value high-quality education tests don't tell parents how their children are performing academically compared to the students ---- nationally or abroad.

This week the House Republicans will try to maintain that sorry status quo.

They hope to block funding for a Clinton administration plan to introduce voluntary, national standardized tests beginning in 1999. The exams would measure reading skills in fourth graders and math progress in Grade 8 ---- two critical points when mastery of the basics is linked to future academic success.

Critics complain the national tests would threaten local control of schools, duplicate state testing efforts and stigmatize low-performing schools districts.

They're wrong on all counts.

As any sweaty-palmed student can attest, nearly every state and school district administers standardized exams. Yet federal comparisons show that states' home-grown tests are frequently less stringent than national tests. And the only national exams in general use measure just a sampling of U.S. students for broad international comparisons ---- useful for drawing a national picture but of no help to individual school districts.

As a result, students who are preparing for life in an increasingly global economy are denied a realistic picture of how their knowledge and skills stack up beyond their own state's borders.

Under Clinton's national testing plan, states could decide for themselves whether to use the voluntary tests. There would be no federal penalties for poor-performers. And thanks to a compromise worked out with Senate last week, an independent board, not the federal government, would develop the exams.

In school districts using the new tests, students would receive individual breakdowns comparing their performance to national and international standards. Parents, teachers and taxpayers would get their first clear look at which schools are teaching effectively and where there is trouble.

State exams are not equal to that task.

On recent state exams, 88% of Wisconsin students were ranked as proficient readers. A much smaller sample of Wisconsin students found only 35% were proficient. In Georgia, 81% of students passed the state math test, but the national sampling found only 16% made the grade.

The new national tests would be a warning system for academic weaknesses. From there. Though, it would be left up to local educators, students and parents to act.

In an age when information is knowledge, national tests promise a new measure of academic performance. That's the type of intelligence consumers need.

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■

National Testing's Pedigree

By Neal Kumar Katyal



Lloyd Dangle

NY Times
Op Ed
9/12/97

BURLINGTON, Vt.

Though the Senate approved a modified version of President Clinton's plan for national reading and math tests yesterday, the battle isn't over. There is strong opposition in the House of Representatives, which is expected to vote next week on a measure to block Federal money from being used to develop such tests. Representative Bill Goodling of Pennsylvania and other conservative opponents of national testing insist that it could be a Federal intrusion on local control of education.

As Senator Chuck Hagel, a Republican from Nebraska who voted against the Senate plan, put it, "Our founding Fathers knew very clearly what they were doing when they determined that education should be a local issue."

Their argument has some intuitive appeal. Many of us think of schools as local institutions financed by local property taxes. But the Federal Government has been involved in providing education for more than two centuries, and national testing is not a significant expansion of that role.

The Northwest Ordinance, written in 1787, while the Founding Fathers were drafting what would become the Constitution, declared that "knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged." And Article IV of the Constitution, which calls for a republican form of government, was widely viewed until the 19th century as a Federal guarantee of education. During the 19th century, the Government gave large land grants to townships — more than 77 million acres — to raise

revenue to pay for education.

The Civil War ultimately cemented Federal involvement in education. Many abolitionists described it as a "war over education" because a victory by the North would permit African-Americans to reap the benefits of citizenship, including education. After the war, the Government refused to let Southern states — among them Virginia, Texas and Mississippi

The Federal role in education goes way back.

pi — back into the Union until they specifically guaranteed a right to education in their state constitutions.

The United States Education Department was created in 1867, on the same day that Congress passed the first Reconstruction Act. (A separate Education Department was again created in the Carter years.) And the Freedmen's Bureau helped build more than 4,000 schools in the South from 1865 to 1877.

Even after the end of Reconstruction, the Federal Government continued to play a role in education. Under Franklin D. Roosevelt's Administration, that role was expanded considerably; the Government spent billions of dollars refurbishing local schools.

It is against this backdrop that we should evaluate President Clinton's idea of testing students nationwide.

Such tests can hardly be described as extensive Federal involvement in education. For one thing, states would not be required to participate. And under the compromise measure that the Senate and the White House worked out, the tests would be overseen by the National Assessment Governing Board, an independent bipartisan agency created by Congress, rather than the Education Department.

National tests would provide uniform standards that people could use to assess the performance of the schools to which they entrust their children. And by giving parents an objective way to measure whether their communities' schools are working, these tests could actually enhance local control. National testing is not an answer to the problems that plague schools throughout the country, but it's one way to hold officials accountable. Such tests can also help point out which schools need the most help.

Even before we had a Constitution, this nation had begun forging a Federal role for education to insure that our children have some semblance of equality in education. National testing is a welcome step in that direction. □

Neal Kumar Katyal is an associate professor of law at Georgetown University.

National Testing's Pedigree

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About the Author: Neal Kumar Katyal is an associate professor of law at Georgetown University.

04:45 EDT September 12, 1997■

Editorial When Schools Go Soft

DOCUMENT 7 OF 28

IBDY9725500013

* Editorial

When Schools Go Soft

538 Words

3419 Characters

* 09/12/97

Investor's Business Daily

A26

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* While Congress debates national standards for America's students, a new report on the widespread practice of "social promotion" raises a more basic issue: How do you get schools to take any standards seriously?

* The American Federation of Teachers, in a new national study of student promotion policies, says school districts all over the country are hiding students' failure by moving them along to higher grades before they're ready.

AFT President Sandra Feldman said this week that social promotion is "rampant across the country." Even though no school district explicitly endorses it, the AFT says, plenty of systems encourage it with various rules that limit schools' ability to hold students' back.

Social promotion is galling to teachers who try to set high standards for their classes and who see students advance in spite of failing work. So it's no surprise that a teachers' union would come down hard on it.

But the practice isn't just a teachers' grievance. It's bad for everyone involved. It fools students into thinking they are getting an education. It leaves employers with the job of training workers in basic skills that should have been learned in grade school. It's educational malpractice, and the AFT is right to call attention to it.

The AFT is also right in calling for "rigorous grade-by-grade standards" with tests and curriculum to match. Without clear standards, it's hard for a teacher to show a principal and reluctant parents that a student is not ready for the next grade and needs special help.

Most districts don't have such standards now. That's one reason

* why the idea of national tests has wide support, even among those who criticize the specifics of Clinton's plan.

But it's clear from the AFT report school districts already could set standards if they wanted to. They don't have to wait for

* Washington to hand down a test. They already know what kids need to learn at each grade level.

A few are putting this knowledge to work. The AFT cites the schools of Corpus Christi, Texas, for "combining clear and rigorous standards with an end to social promotion and an emphasis on intervention" (that is, the schools seriously try to help students in trouble, not just hold them back).

It's clear, though, that Corpus Christi is not typical. Most school systems set vague goals that allow them to cheat kids out of an education. They pay lip service to standards but fail to insist that students meet them.

* When and if the federal government comes up with a national test
* it is sure to be voluntary - otherwise, you can say goodbye to state control of public schooling. So some districts will find excuses to
* avoid using it. (We can see one of these coming now: "The test is unfair to poor and minority children.") The schools that take the
* test to heart will be those that already believe in standards.

So while Washington haggles, the real battle for standards will have to be fought locally. Public schools already know what they ought to do. It's just that many of them have to be forced to do it. And if the public doesn't hold them to tough standards, they won't demand much of the kids, either.

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A TEST CONGRESS HAD BETTER PASS

DOCUMENT 2 OF 13

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* EDITORIAL

* A TEST CONGRESS HAD BETTER PASS

391 Words

2751 Characters

09/11/97

Chicago Tribune

NORTH SPORTS FINAL; N

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(Copyright 1997)

Most Illinois parents probably would jump at the chance to

- * find out how their children's education stacks up against the
- * education kids are getting in, say, Iowa, or Michigan, or Texas.

President Clinton's proposed national testing for reading and math would give them that chance, but Republicans in Congress are working furiously this week to block funding for the tests. It sort of makes you wonder what they're afraid of.

Clinton's aim is to establish high academic standards and

- * allow school districts to test their students against them. In the process, districts also would find out how their kids are doing compared with others around the country taking the same tests.

The proposal is actually pretty modest, calling for 90-minute tests of 4th-grade reading skills and 8th-grade mathematics starting in 1999. No district would be required to give the tests; it's an opportunity, not a mandate.

- * Of course, districts that chose not to test their students would need to have some good answers for parents--and taxpayers--as to why they don't want to know how their students fare academically compared to their peers in other parts of the country. National testing, while not a definitive measure, will be a powerful tool for holding teachers, administrators and yes, politicians,
- * accountable for whether students are getting the education they need and deserve.

Six states and 15 large urban school districts, including Chicago, have signed on to participate in the tests, and many more have expressed interest. But if congressional Republicans succeed in blocking the \$16 million allocated for development, there may be no tests at all--even for districts that want them.

House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) has tried to muddy the

- * issue by pushing a rival education plan that calls for vouchers and other measures to help expand a family's choice of schools. Nothing

wrong with that, but it's not an either-or proposition. There's no reason those measures can't exist alongside national testing.

More foolish still are the objections of special-interest groups claiming that national tests would stigmatize the poor and minorities or would be unfair to kids with limited English skills.

* If poor and minority children are getting substandard education in this country, then their parents have a right to know it and to ask why.

* In fact, that may be one of the questions test-shy politicians don't want to have to answer.

I0607 * End of document.

Philadelphia Inquirer / Wednesday, September 10, 1997

A proficie t p a

National tests would raise education standards.

Sound the alarm, hit the streets, man the barricades: Washington has found another way to exert control of the minds of innocent schoolchildren — a national test of how well fourth graders read and eighth graders do math!

That's been the reaction of many people to President Clinton's modest proposal to establish voluntary, national proficiency tests, to begin in March 1999. So far, six states and 15 school districts (only the city of Philadelphia in this region) have embraced the plan.

Just think what the tests could lead to: consistently collected data on what students need to learn to master these skills and what more adults can do, including higher academic standards. Shocking!

It strains common sense to view such a limited project as the thin edge of a federal wedge into the long-cherished local control of schools. (Of course, most local school boards grab for every dime of federal money they can get for extra books, aides and computers, but that's different, right?)

The price tag is modest: The President's program would cost an estimated \$16.5 million for two years to develop and implement the tests. It's not clear whether the federal support would continue after 1999.

The tests' value lies in their potential to build the case for continuing the struggle for higher academic standards by providing yet another link between standards and achievement. In international competition, American students are among the best in science and well above average in math. It's no accident that good news comes in the two areas where most schools have adopted standards developed by a national educational organization.

The project's most formidable congressional opponent is U.S. Rep. William Goodling, the Pennsylvania Republican who chairs the House Education Committee.

Rep. Goodling wants to kill the plan on the grounds that it is unnecessary. Over the last decade, he argues, 46 states have set higher standards and administered tests. His analogy is: "You can keep weighing a hog, but he won't get any fatter."

There's a flaw in that sound bite. State standards vary widely, and some are so weak they're meaningless to teachers and useless to parents. Consider Louisiana, where 88 percent of the fourth graders meet the state's standard — but only 15 percent show proficiency on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NEAP).

Senate Republicans reportedly are ready to compromise. On Monday, negotiators said they were close to an agreement that the GOP withdraw its amendment to block the Education Department from developing the test. Instead the tests would be designed by the bipartisan, independent National Assessment Governing Board.

Testing goes hand-in-hand with accountability, which should resonate with promoters of choice, vouchers and competition. If public money is to fund such experiments, then the public — parents, especially — should be able to hold the schools accountable for results, using a common yardstick.

Coming on the heels of a bipartisan budget agreement that left partisans of both parties unhappy, this clash seems more like an effort to stake out turf for the 1998 congressional races than a crusade to save schools from the evil feds.

Measuring student mastery of basic skills across school districts and state lines is too vital to America's future to fall victim to political tomfoolery.

■ To comment briefly on these editorials, call 215-854-5060. The Editorial Board will respond to as many calls as possible

1. USA Today

September 10, 1997; Page 14A; Letters to the Editor

Letters

National tests' local benefits

I heartily agree with USA Today's call for all U.S. students to take algebra early in their school careers ("Schools cheat on math." Our View, Debate, Sept. 2). You're right that students who get a solid foundation in basic math do better in school and in the working world.

I also am pleased that you say the Clinton administration should include eighth-grade algebra in our initiatives to improve education. We already have. The president has called for a rigorous, voluntary national test in eighth-grade math that would include some algebra and geometry.

D.L. Cuddy, former senior associate with the U.S. Department of Education, says, "Each state should decide if and when algebra, or other subjects, should be required." I agree that states and communities should make this decision. But we all should keep in mind that most U.S. students begin their study of algebra later than students in most of the nations that are our international competitors.

The president's test proposal, which also includes a fourth-grade reading test, is strictly voluntary. Each state and school district will decide for itself whether to participate. The president and I believe that voluntary national tests will empower parents and teachers by giving them more information than they've ever had about how well students are doing in relation to national and even international standards of excellence.

In this way, the tests will help local communities shape their own curricula and trigger grass-roots improvement efforts.

Richard W. Riley
Secretary of Education
Washington, D.C.

1. Boston Globe

September 8, 1997

Worthwhile tests

By Globe Staff

President Clinton's push for national testing in the fourth and eighth grades deserves enthusiastic support. In a broad national commitment to improve the nation's schools, testing is only one part, but a part that is crucial in two ways:

Evaluating the myriad attempts at reform.

Identifying states and districts that are performing poorly, often without realizing just how poorly, and giving them a swift kick.

An odd mix of liberals and conservatives opposes national testing, but with different arguments that have ready answers.

Some liberals feel that testing detracts from learning - that teachers interrupt their own classroom strategies to prepare for standard exams. But limited testing of accepted material does not dictate teaching methods. The American Federation of Teachers supports Clinton's plan.

More troubling is the fact that testing can accentuate the weak performance of many poor, often minority, students, potentially widening the learning gap. This problem can be overcome if it is faced head-on with special programs for those who do not test well.

From conservatives, the chief complaint is that national testing will lead to national curricula, with big government in Washington dictating politically correct course materials for classes across the country. This worry bears no relation to the proposal from Clinton, who is only recommending a single reading test for fourth graders and a math test in the eighth grade. No ideology is needed to solve an algebraic equation or to agree that every eighth-grader should have that skill.

In fact, Clinton is proposing that the tests be voluntary, while universal testing would provide much more useful information.

Americans treasure local control of schools and should not give it up, but it has failed millions of children because of too little oversight. In many states, only the courts have saved the poorest districts from the dust bin.

Tests do not teach, but they help identify what teaching works and where it is needed.■

1. Portland Press Herald

September 8, 1997

PRESIDENT'S PROPOSAL: With national testing, schools will improve

Changing times challenge American schools. Testing should be part of the response.

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The United States has the most decentralized education system in the industrialized world. Unlike Europe or Japan, Americans leave decisions about education standards and curriculum largely to local school boards, usually with some state input.

This system has served the nation well, but it is being challenged by changing times. Those challenges can be met, in part, through nationwide standardized tests.

Local control of education policy has traditionally given our schools an ability to respond to the local needs. Rural schools could relate their courses to farming. Urban schools could have courses geared to factory work.

More importantly, local control has given parents a greater voice in their kids' schools. This has created school systems that reflect local values. It has also drawn parents into the system, something which can greatly enrich a child's educational experience.

In recent years, though, a changing economy has strained the system.

Distinctions between local economies have diminished as new technology and freer trade practices have allowed goods, services and capital to flow more freely from place to place. To succeed in today's economy, graduates of every school system need basic skills. Work on the farm or factory floor is highly technical, and any good-paying service job also requires a good education.

That's why President Clinton's proposal to create national testing makes so much sense. Such testing will give school systems, parents and kids an idea of how they stack up in a competitive world. As a result, the testing will be a powerful incentive for teachers and administrators to raise standards when needed.

Clinton's testing program is also worthy because of what it will not do. The president does not propose a comprehensive test that would lead to a national curriculum, but a basic test that will measure math and reading skills. Rather than have the test developed by the party in power, Clinton proposes a bipartisan, independent panel draw them up. This will assure that the test focuses on the basics.

This approach will leave local school boards in charge of vast areas of the curriculum, keeping intact the ability of parents to have an impact on their schools. At the same time, it will set standards that, in our global economy, all schools should be meeting. ■

1. The Washington Post

09/05/97; Edition: FINAL; Section: Editorial; Page A22

Yes on Tests

PRESIDENT CLINTON wants to create a national reading test for fourth-graders and a math test for eighth-graders. House Republicans propose to deny him the funds. They say the tests aren't needed, won't help raise achievement levels and may in fact do harm if they lead to a national curriculum or cause underperforming students, schools or school districts to be written off. The critics are wrong. The funds should be provided.

The critics create the specter of federal control of education. That's what gives the issue its political resonance. The tests become a symbol of the big government that Republicans like to say Democrats are for and they are against. But things are a long way from that. The president and **Education Secretary Richard Riley** both are former governors; neither seeks to encroach on traditional state prerogatives in education. The testing they propose would be voluntary. No federal aid would be conditioned on participation.

Under a compromise just offered to assuage the critics, the tests would be developed and administered by an independent national board that is successfully administering some national tests already. The main difference is that the results of the new tests would be available for individual students, classes, schools and school districts, rather than expressed in broad national or regional terms. The idea is that, yes, they might then become instruments for change, but not dictated from above. Rather, parents and others would use them as a standard for comparison, and for demanding improvement on the ground, at the local level.

The subjects were chosen to avoid the controversy that has sometimes, rightly, surrounded other efforts to develop national tests. There are great disputes about how best to teach reading and math. Sometimes these become surrogates for the deeper disputes about going back to basics, imposing stricter discipline, etc. But reading and math aren't value-laden subjects like, say, national history or literature. They are basic, measurable, necessary skills in the democracy and work force alike. Business groups are among those seeking the improvements in the schools that the national tests are meant to help bring about. Their concern is with the quality of the work force of the future: Will it be competitive?

Nor does it make much sense to look on tests as a threat to students or districts or schools that don't score well. In the long run, it seems to us that it can only help to have it known how well or poorly a school or its students are performing. Tests don't tell you everything, but they are what the schooling is, or ought to be, about. You balance risks in enterprises such as this. The danger is not that the federal government is going to take over the nation's schools. The danger rather is that poor performance will continue to be tolerated and obscured. A high, albeit voluntary, national standard embodied in tests such as contemplated here will help combat such performance. It was conservatives who early on proposed such tests as a kind of discipline for the schools. They should pocket their victory and move on. ■

Test of wills President Clinton gets high marks ...

DOCUMENT 8 OF 44

SFEX9724900071

NEWS

- * Test of wills
- * President Clinton gets high marks for backing national exams; the Republicans need remedial work to grasp the concept
- * EXAMINER EDITORIAL WRITER

619 Words

4059 Characters

* 09/05/97

San Francisco Examiner

SECOND

A-18

* EDITORIAL

(Copyright 1997)

WITH the kiddies tucked safely - or not so safely - back in their classrooms for another school year, questions about education policy are up for discussion. Raise your hand if you want to speak.

American schools are a terrible failure, critics carp. We're submerged in the international rankings. Maybe there's no longer a Sputnik gap, but there are plenty of other reputed scholastic chasms showing our kids to be dumber than Korean kids, Irish kids or Slovenian kids. Horrors abound - not enough books, too many drugs. Our kids can't read, they drop out and they don't have a clue who the secretary of Energy is (do you?). Employers complain that high school grads have to be trained all over again in basic skills.

Such dire analyses seem strange stacked next to the fact that the United States leads the world in technology, biomedical research, space exploration and dozens of other fields. Americans win more than our share of Nobel prizes.

Still, the suspicion sticks that American education is not all it could be. Millions of children aren't learning to read, write and do sums well, and millions more are deprived of a truly excellent educational experience.

What to do?

President Clinton is pushing hard for standardized

- * national tests, much to the horror of Republicans who aim to safeguard local control of schools. To us, the

president's plan makes sense. Why, in an age of global competition and instantaneous communication, would we expect - or want - students in San Francisco to learn a totally different set of skills from kids in Red Bank, N.J.?

Then there's the issue of accountability. School administrators, teachers and students ought to be held to answer for what is, and isn't, learned in the classroom. Failure should be recognized and dealt with. Sometimes there are so much fuzz and feel-good that the real business of school - educating students - is demoted.

- * National tests are a good way to get back to basics.

What's at stake here are not moral values. No one's talking about teaching witchcraft, or even birth control - just hard-nosed math and science and reading.

When Johnny can't read, we often find about it through tests. California went back to phonics after testing showed that fewer students were learning to read proficiently in the early grades using the trendy whole language method.

Local control isn't a bad idea. And the president doesn't disagree. He's glad to leave course content and teaching technique up to local educators. But it's fair to everyone, especially parents, to see how well the curricula and methods fare in comparison with other programs around the country. Then, ideally, the rest would learn from the best.

- * Clinton has agreed to make the tests voluntary and to leave their composition up to a bipartisan panel of experts independent from the U.S. Department of Education, a GOP candidate for extinction.

The only thing that really makes the president's proposal disagreeable to Republicans is the slippery-slope argument: Let the feds get a foot in the schoolhouse door and pretty soon they'll be running the place. But by that time, the GOP will have everyone in private schools courtesy of government vouchers. Ah, well.

Dread not. The more probable consequence of standardized

- * national tests is that more kids will learn more. The GOP should appreciate the wonderful marketplace competition that will help make this happen. Everyone will want to keep up with New Trier High School.

It's said we learn from our mistakes, and one of our

- * mistakes has been not having national tests to act both as a gauge of how well we are educating our youth and as a stimulus to doing the job better next term.

Source: San Francisco Examiner, September 5, 1997

1. USA Today

September 2, 1997

Our View: Schools cheat on math

If you want to improve your children's chances of academic success, here's a proven strategy: Make sure they take algebra by the eighth grade and geometry by the ninth.

Heavy doses of reading, writing and science are important, too. Yet it's early exposure to algebra and geometry that studies link not just to future math achievement, but also to overall academic success and, ultimately, college enrollment.

Given the clear connection, requiring these advanced math courses of all students in their early teens makes sense.

Other developed countries require the math early. But U.S. schools lag badly. By the end of eighth grade, only 20% of American students have taken algebra - primarily the elite few picked for their schools' most advanced education tracks.

Not-so-elite students are forced to mark time in pabulum courses that repeat basic arithmetic operations. More disturbing, many never move on to more advanced math. Among high school graduates, 34% receive a diploma without passing basic algebra, and 30% never take geometry.

That math deficiency, according to researchers, explains why U.S. students perform well through grade school on international math exams, only to see their math standings plummet in high school. After graduation, these same students find themselves ill prepared for today's high-tech jobs - a common complaint of employers.

It's a unique failing. Comparative international studies show the United States is the only country that uses education tracks to exclude all but the academically gifted.

But tracking itself is not the problem. Used correctly, tracking students by ability can allow all to move at a smooth pace. The problem is that those outside the top track aren't adequately challenged.

In a few places, that's changing. The College Board is conducting a pilot program with 16 school districts aimed at enrolling all students in algebra by grade 9 and geometry by grade 10. Students in Milwaukee and San Jose schools take both courses by their early teens. And after boosting the number of students in advanced math, Nashville increased the number of public high school grads advancing to college.

Other school districts should follow the simple, successful formula. And the Clinton administration should include it in forthcoming national education standards.

Until all students get equal access to advanced math, many will continue to be left out of the employment equation.■

1. The Washington Post

08/30/97; Edition: FINAL; Section: OP-ED; Page A26

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Measuring Success in School

Rep. William Goodling's Aug. 13 column attacking voluntary national tests was based largely on the Pennsylvania Republican's belief that "Americans don't want and don't need a new national reading test for fourth-graders and a new national math test for eighth-graders." This statement demonstrates a misunderstanding of the importance of these tests to families, students and teachers, who want to know if our students have mastered the basics no matter where they live and work.

This is not simply "another test." It is about setting high expectations and standards for students and then measuring achievement based on these goals. The new voluntary tests of fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade mathematics will offer, for the first time, an assessment of individual student performance in these two critical subject areas based on national and international standards of excellence. No current test achieves this goal.

After the tests are given, all the test items will be made available and will be accompanied by information that lets teachers and parents know what goes into the tests, what they mean and how parents can help their children get ready for them. Raising expectations and standards in education motivates students to learn more and work harder.

I differ with Rep. Goodling's view that these tests are inconsistent with Goals 2000. Like the rest of the president's education initiatives, these tests will give local schools and states new opportunities to improve.

As former governors, President Clinton and I strongly support the essential state and local nature of education. Providing a voluntary reading test in grade four and a mathematics test in grade eight has nothing to do with creating such a national curriculum. We want to strengthen local education by giving state and local governments and parents the chance to know how well their students have learned to read and to do math.

The administration also will ask Congress to expand the authority of the National Assessment Governing Board to include setting test policy for the two national tests as it does now for the National Assessment of Educational Progress. This is the best way to make sure that the new tests are overseen by an independent and bipartisan organization. I hope Congress will pass this legislation without delay.

Perhaps the most disappointing suggestion by Rep. Goodling is that a national test would be "inappropriate" for some "disadvantaged" students. We must stop perpetuating the cycle of low expectations that keeps so many young people from achieving their full potential. Only if we are willing to break free from the tyranny of low expectations and help individual states and schools to challenge students can we achieve higher standards of learning for all students. Fifteen large urban school districts already have committed to having their students take the test.

These tests, along with the efforts to improve education, will raise standards of learning for students across America.

RICHARD W. RILEY

Secretary

U.S. Department of Education

Washington■

When New Math Is Put to the Test, Will It Pass?

To the Editor:

Lynne Cheney (Op-Ed, Aug. 11) is right that there are too many fads in mathematics education and that they vacillate from one extreme to the other. But she is wrong to cite silly extremes in one direction to make her point, while not mentioning the overriding reason for modifying the curriculum.

Recent technological advances have affected what we teach and how we teach it. We don't teach logarithms to simplify complicated arithmetic computations; the calculator does it faster and more accurately. The computer allows us to demonstrate geometric relationships dynamically and give students a deeper understanding of these properties. The hand-held calculator frees us from tedious computational work so we can focus on problem solving.

The most important modification needed in mathematics teaching is to focus on problem solving, not only as a means to an end but also as an end in itself.

ALFRED S. POSAMENTIER
New York, Aug. 11, 1997

The writer is a professor of mathematics education at City College.

Conquering Fear

To the Editor:

While Lynne Cheney catalogues the slipping performance of late-elementary American schoolchildren in her defense of traditional methods of mathematics instruction (Op-Ed, Aug. 11), she fails to recognize the most crucial characteristic of a successful math student: confidence. That is precisely what "whole math" seeks to instill in students.

To emphasize rote computation over original thought shuffles a student into one of two rigid categories: a person with the confidence to attack math problems and someone who never considers himself a "math person" and flees math at any cost.

TIM RAY
Washington, Aug. 12, 1997

Research Backs Reform

To the Editor:

Re "Creative Math, or Just 'Fuzzy Math'?" (Op-Ed, Aug. 11): Based on my familiarity with mathematics education research and my own research, I strongly disagree with Lynne Cheney's comments about the lack of a research base for instructional reforms in mathematics and the lack of achievement by children in classrooms that support the standards of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.

Children fortunate enough to have math teachers who allow them to build on their own understanding and experiences have outperformed children who are products of rote drill on mathematical problems.

81, so 3 times 27 is 81."

He did this as mental math his way, as a result of teaching that encourages him to build and defend his math knowledge. In the past he might have felt he needed paper and pencil, or dismissed the problem as something he "hadn't learned yet" at school. It is crucial that students not only be able to solve problems but also write them.

CHRISTINA LEGO

Auburn, N.Y., Aug. 11, 1997

When Fads Fail

To the Editor:

As the parent of a second grader who has completed the first year of a math program associated with the University of Chicago, I found Lynne Cheney's cautionary comments on the latest fad in teaching math (Op-Ed, Aug. 11) striking close to home. My frustrated child quickly became a competent and interested student of math upon a few weeks of "traditional" remedial instruction at the same school.

LEWIS GOVERMAN

Brooklyn, Aug. 11, 1997

Parents Pick Up Pieces

To the Editor:

Lynne Cheney (Op-Ed, Aug. 11) put my own frustrating experience as a parent in perspective. For four years my son, a fourth grader, has been a student at a Chicago public school that uses an experimental "concept math" program developed

precision, tools and language of mathematics, in the hope that our children will understand more, engage more and create more. But we've denied them the very things they need. Math's rigor and its tools will not stifle our children; it will empower them.

SUZANNE SUTTON

Rockville, Md., Aug. 12, 1997
The writer teaches math in the Montgomery County, Md., schools.

The Building Blocks

To the Editor:

Thomas Romberg (Op-Ed, Aug. 11) defines mathematics as a "human activity involving the ability to represent quantitative and spatial relationships in a broad range of situations." The Oxford English Dictionary defines it almost the same way but adds: "It includes as its main divisions geometry, arithmetic and algebra."

Mr. Romberg is really saying we should not teach arithmetic in the early grades but all aspects of mathematics throughout the curriculum. But he fails to present evidence that learning the "signs and symbols of mathematics" is superior to learning arithmetic as a foundation for the other divisions of mathematics. Unfortunately, unlike in my field of science, new hypotheses can't be tested in animals before being applied to humans.

BERNARD F. ERLANGER

Whitestone, Queens, Aug. 11, 1997
The writer is professor emeritus of microbiology, Columbia University.

A Need-to-Know Basis

To the Editor:

To most students, math concepts are as abstract as some of Thomas Romberg's arguments (Op-Ed, Aug. 11). For instance, he calls mathematics "a human activity involving the ability to represent quantitative and spatial relationships in a broad range." Huh? Most people do not need to know math concepts. What everybody does need to know is arithmetic.

DAVID KANOWSKY

Albion, N.Y., Aug. 11, 1997

MathLand Fantasy

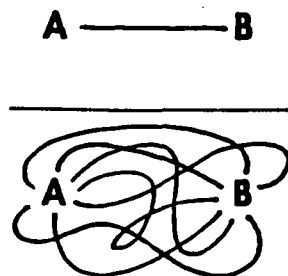
To the Editor:

Your citations from the MathLand curriculum guide (Op-Ed, Aug. 11) left me wondering if members of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics have ever met an actual child who gets together "with peers in cooperative learning groups to 'construct' strategies for solving math problems"?

I recommend that we try to learn from successful systems, whether in Singapore or the Czech Republic, but not from the Never Never Land of MathLand.

GEORGE J. KOESER

Princeton, N.J., Aug. 12, 1997



Sam Steward

with the University of Chicago. In the second year, I started comparing what he learned with the problems a second grader in Bulgaria solves. I did not want my son, upon returning to our native Bulgaria, to be behind.

By the end of second grade, Bulgarian students are at ease with multiplication and division. That is not the case in my son's school. His program doesn't use textbooks, and homework is given on loose sheets of paper. I was told textbooks and drills "develop inhibitions." It was hinted that I was

and on traditional standardized tests.

Thomas Romberg's call for "new teaching for a changing society" is a challenge to improve our teacher preparation, to support professional development and to strengthen communication among school, home, business and government. This takes planning, time, money and cooperation.

FRANCES R. CURCIO

New York, Aug. 14, 1997
The writer is an associate professor of mathematics education at N.Y.U.

Rocket Science, His Way

To the Editor:

When I went back to school to become an elementary-school teacher, I dreaded learning to teach math. As a student, I memorized math rules and then forgot them. I didn't know how they would ever be used. Imagine my surprise to learn that the way we now teach, students understand much more than we thought they could when we "told" them everything.

One third grader said to me, "3 times 27 is 81." When I asked what had made him think of that, he answered: "Well, I had 3 sets of 27 rockets on my space ship and I wondered how many I had. And 3 times 3 is 9 and 3 times 9 is 27 and 9 times 9 is

the latest product of progress by University of Chicago experts.

I now teach my son math in addition to what he learns in school. But this isn't a solution for the millions of working parents who want their children to do well beyond elementary school. Besides, this responsibility should not be shifted to parents.

MILA M. GANEVA

Chicago, Aug. 12, 1997

Don't Deny Math's Rigor

To the Editor:

"The danger already exists that the mathematicians have made, a covenant with the devil to darken the spirit and to confine man in the bonds of Hell." Sixteen hundred years after St. Augustine, we're still struggling to teach and learn this lovely subject, with questionable success. Lynne Cheney and Thomas Romberg's Aug. 11 Op-Ed articles begin at the same point: We're failing.

Both sides of the "whole math" debate recognize the need to equip our children with the mental acumen to investigate, pursue, discover and create. It is argued that if we begin with creativity, our children will learn to create. This misses the point.

We have turned from the rigor,

A Question of Choice

To the Editor:

At first I thought: How odd that Lynne Cheney and Thomas Romberg would debate an esoteric question of mathematical pedagogy on your Op-Ed page (Aug. 11), a venue usually reserved for politics and public policy. But then I thought: "Yes, quite right." Right, because the ills that afflict public education are not technical but political. The technical differences between Ms. Cheney and Mr. Romberg are of far less interest to me, the father of a 4-year-old, than the fact that they are making the decisions for my son, not I.

Once the like-minded people of the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers and the teachers' colleges decide on a particular method, it is impossible to escape it unless one can afford private school or home schooling.

While the problem may look to them like mathematical pedagogy, the answer looks to me like public school choice. I can be persuaded on whether choice should be implemented by vouchers, charter schools or another method, but choice is the answer.

EDMOND DAVID

Brooklyn, Aug. 12, 1997

NY Times

8/17


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August 11, 1997

DIALOGUE: Creative Math, or Just Fuzzy Math?**Mediocre Is Not Good Enough**

By THOMAS ROMBERG

MADISON, Wis. -- For the past quarter-century it has been obvious that Americans need a better understanding of mathematics, science and technology if our society is to prosper.

Although some schools, teachers and parents are satisfied with the way math is being taught, a recent study of math and science education in 41 countries described most math curriculums in the United States as "a mile wide and an inch deep." Given the fragmented, unchallenging material, taught by teachers who have little opportunity for professional development, it is no wonder that student performance is mediocre.

Mathematics is not just another subject to be covered in class. It is a human activity involving the ability to represent quantitative and spatial relationships in a broad range of situations, express those relations using the language of mathematics and use various techniques to carry out numerical procedures. Mathematics is also about making predictions, and interpreting results.

That is the view of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, which in 1989 drew up new standards for teaching math and evaluating student performance. The council carefully considered changes in mathematics and its applications in our increasingly technological society. Council members also examined how math was taught in other countries, and recent work of psychologists on how children learn.

The council maintains that the systems of signs and symbols of mathematics must be learned and experienced as genuine languages -- languages everyone needs to communicate, reason, compute, generalize and formalize 20th-century experience, and to serve 21st-century needs.

Answers and 'Solutions Techniques'

The "standards-based" mathematics curriculum, as its proponents call it, or "whole math," as its critics describe it, encourages students to invent their own ways to solve problems.

In one widely used curriculum, called MathLand, teachers are told how to guide sixth graders through the following problem:

"I just checked out a library book that is 1,344 pages long! The book is due in 3 weeks. How many pages will I need to read a day to finish the book in time?"

The old way to solve the problem would be to use

Moreover, systematic logical forms of reasoning and argument must be learned through personal and social experiences.

Yes, students need to develop certain skills. They need to be able to construct, follow and judge arguments. They need to be able to deduce and induce from context and formulate counterexamples. They need to be able to apply spatial, proportional, algebraic and graphic reasoning, and to construct proofs.

The standards the council created to help students learn these skills have received wide support from mathematicians and math educators. These standards consist of 50 brief statements about what all students should learn in math classes, organized into three levels through 12th grade.

At each level, there are four general standards -- problem-solving, communication, reasoning and connections -- and specific content standards about topics like algebra, geometry and statistics. The council supports introducing some of these topics in earlier grades (algebra in the middle grades, for example), and putting more emphasis on subjects like statistics.

The council has provided schools and teachers with examples of lessons and instruction guidelines. Though the rhetoric in the council's recommendations argues for balance between proven procedures and new activities, the examples tend to emphasize the new activities.

For instance, students should see the question of what kind of calculation procedure to use in a numerical problem as a decision that depends on the problem at hand. Although the council wants all students to learn to estimate and use mental calculation and to be equally comfortable using paper and pencil, calculators and computers, nowhere does it argue that students do not need to memorize multiplication facts. Nor does the council say that students should use a calculator for all computations.

Similarly, the examples the teachers council has produced often portray students working on real-world problems, providing oral or written explanations of how a problem was solved, or collaborating with other students. But the council never meant to imply that such approaches are appropriate for every lesson.

Many horror stories cited by the standards' critics, if accurately portrayed, are indeed bad. Sometimes teachers initially put too much emphasis on the general standards without considering mathematical content. For example, they may teach problem-solving without having students learn algebraic procedures.

Sometimes honest attempts by well-meaning teachers to try a new method

the algorithm for long division: 1,344 divided by 21. The curriculum guide calls for a new approach, explaining that "division in MathLand is not a separate operation to master, but rather a combination of successive approximations, multiplication, adding up and subtracting back, all held together with the students' own number sense."

Teachers are advised to ask students to write down how they would solve the problem. When they are finished, the guide suggests, "Encourage a variety of solution techniques that go beyond just the numeric answer to descriptions and convincing sketches."

of instruction, like having students work in groups, have led them to initially give up class discussions or individual assignments. Sometimes publishers' claims that their texts met the council's standards were mere puffery.

Sometimes material that in an author's mind seemed wonderful proved to be less than wonderful in a classroom. And sometimes even appropriate material is ineffective because the teacher using it doesn't have enough math background or the right training to turn the recommended activities into a learning experience for students.

Despite these problems, test scores tell us that teaching math by using the council's recommendations makes sense. Teachers and teacher trainers know that we need a new approach to math instruction, and most defend the standards. And while criticism is essential to refine the suggested techniques, it's unfair to attack the entire program because of initial missteps and isolated examples of misapplied guidelines.

Unless we reform math education so that our children can be prepared for the immense technological changes already occurring, our nation will lose -- and so will our children.

Thomas Romberg, a professor of mathematics education at the University of Wisconsin, was chairman of the commission on standards of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics from 1986 to 1995.

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1. The New York Times

08/11/97; Edition: Late Edition - Final; Section: Section A; Editorial Desk; Page 15, Column 1

Dialogue: Creative Math, or Just 'Fuzzy Math'? *Once Again, Basic Skills Fall Prey To a Fad*

By Lynne Cheney

WASHINGTON — For Stacy Christ, a fourth grader in Fairfax County, Va., a homework problem about pencils and packages was an exercise in frustration. "The answer required division," her mother, Susan, explained to me, "but she'd never been taught to multiply."

Susan Christ saw this as one more sign of the miseducation of her child, but to advocates of what is sometimes called "whole math" (or "fuzzy math" or "new-new math"), Stacy's assignment was exactly right. Students don't need to know multiplication tables in order to divide, they say. Using objects and calculators, they can figure it out — and thus begin to create their own mathematical knowledge.

The idea that knowledge is something to be constructed, rather than acquired, has been moving into American schools since the 1970's. This approach is obvious, for example, in language-arts teaching that encourages invented spellings.

But now "constructivism," as it is sometimes called, has become a force in teaching mathematics — and the paradox is immense. In a field distinguished by reliance on proof, an unproven approach is being taken in thousands of schools.

The saga of whole math began in earnest in 1989, when the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics published standards that denounced a "longstanding preoccupation with computation and other traditional skills." According to the council, stressing addition, subtraction and, worst of all, memorization made students into "passive receivers of rules and procedures rather than active participants in creating knowledge."

The standards recommended that students get together with peers in cooperative learning groups to "construct" strategies for solving math problems, rather than sit in class with teachers instructing them. Calculators were a necessity from kindergarten on, the council said, because students liberated from "computational algorithms" could pursue higher-order activities, like inventing personal methods of long division.

Dr. Frank Allen, a former council president and whole-math opponent, has noted that as the standards were being developed, the council's research advisory committee expressed concern about the failure of the standards commission to provide research support for its recommendations. But the standards' writers were undeterred, and today their views drive the direction of curriculums and textbooks in both public and private schools.

Those who regard the council's recommendations as revealed truth have been rewarded: a panel named recently to oversee the development of President Clinton's national test in mathematics is composed entirely of supporters of the math teachers' council. Critics, meanwhile, have been shut out. In a recent speech, Prof. E. D. Hirsch of the University of Virginia noted that a leading journal, *Educational Researcher*, had refused to publish a section of an article debunking constructivist teaching even though its authors were "among the most distinguished cognitive scientists in the world."

The entry of whole math into the schools has angered many parents. Particularly in California, where schools have enthusiastically embraced the constructivist fad, parents have complained about students unable to do simple mental computations, about high school graduates who get A's and B's in whole-math classes and have to do remedial work in college.

A woman in Oceanside, Calif., wrote to The San Diego Union-Tribune that her child had been "used like a laboratory rat, experimented on with new, untested curricula." A parent whose child attended one of the overseas Defense Department schools, which have adopted two constructivist programs, MathLand and Interactive Mathematics, reported on a Web site, "We all feel our children are guinea pigs in a bad experiment."

Parental backlash has sent whole-math advocates scrambling for evidence to prove that what they do works. When American fourth graders did fairly well on an international test, a prominent whole-math advocate credited constructivist teaching. Her claim would have been more convincing had another leader in the movement not earlier explained away the dismal performance of eighth graders on the same test by saying that whole-math teaching had not sufficiently penetrated American classrooms.

Constructivist views were also undercut by survey data accompanying the international results. In high-performing countries like Singapore, Japan and Korea, teachers primarily teach the whole class rather than having students in small groups invent knowledge for themselves, and classroom calculators are extremely rare. Creative Publications, publisher of the MathLand program, recently released an analysis of eight California districts purporting to show that at the least its curriculum does no harm: after one year, "when compared to students across the nation, MathLand students showed one year's growth in both computation and concepts and applications." The districts were not identified, however, nor the reason for choosing them rather than others. The analysis also failed to explain whether the test scores of all students within a district were considered.

Meanwhile, new evidence bears out the gloomy assessment of parents. The median percentile scores in mathematics on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills taken by more than 37,000 students one year after the Defense Department introduced whole math show that students gained little in conceptual understanding from being encouraged to construct their own knowledge. Scores in concepts and applications were roughly the same as the previous year. De-emphasizing computation, on the other hand, cost them dearly. Scores on that section of the exam dropped 9 points for third graders; 12 for fourth graders; 11 for fifth graders, 10 for sixth

graders, 10 for seventh graders, and 4 for eighth graders.

After these results, the Pentagon decided to change its test to one "better aligned" with whole-math instruction. This move may produce better scores but at the price of masking student weaknesses in basic skills.

When medical researchers administering a protocol find it has negative consequences for human subjects, they do not ignore those results and change their test. They end the experiment to avoid imposing further harm.

Surely it is time for educators to realize that the same ethic should apply to them. In the face of strong evidence that constructivist mathematics does not help and even hurts, they should consider closing down the whole-math experiment. If we want our children to be mathematically competent and creative, we must give them a base of knowledge upon which they can build.

About the Author: Lynne Cheney, former chairwoman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. ■

Daily Education News

Friday, August 8, 1997

1. The Washington Post

08/08/97; Edition: FINAL; Section: OP-ED; Page A21

Why Aunt Fern Is Smiling

By Jay Mathews

My wife's Aunt Fern DeWees, a kindergarten teacher in Redlands, Calif., is thrilled about the coming school year, for which she can thank a particularly artful distortion of what's happening these days in American schools.

California Gov. Pete Wilson and the state legislature have spent \$1 billion to lower class sizes in elementary grades, in part to arrest a perceived drop in reading scores. President Clinton is using the same distressing statistic — that 40 percent of fourth-graders read below the basic level — in his campaign for national tests.

The eye-widening statistic is the latest of several that have fed the American angst about education. There was nothing wrong with the way researchers at the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) derived the number. But unlike the GNP or the Orioles' bullpen ERA, most school statistics are unavoidably mushy and malleable, the 40-percent-below-basic figure being no exception. Policymakers use such figures, and Americans react to them, in ways that have little to do with decimal points and correlation coefficients.

In this instance the statistical consumer is led to believe nearly half of American children have yet to learn to read at the grade level where teachers begin to depend on them to absorb information on their own. The speeches fail to note that the under-basic-level fourth-graders are more complicated than that, their image blurred by what is an NAEP snapshot of thousands of young minds in motion.

When the test was given in 1994 (with none of the rewards and sanctions that tend to produce better effort in tests that count for a grade), 40 percent were judged able only to comprehend "surface meaning" and "explicitly stated ideas and information" in what they read, rather than "demonstrate an understanding of the overall meaning of what they read" needed to put them at least on the basic level.

Among the data not mentioned by Clinton was a survey of students who scored between the 20th and 30th percentile, deep within the below-basic group. It indicated many were on their way to becoming better readers — 36 percent read for fun daily or almost daily, and 52 percent read more than 10 pages each day for school or homework. Indeed, NAEP officials say, follow-up tests indicate they are improving.

Statistical license of this sort extends to the private sector. In his opening address to the national education summit last year, IBM chairman Louis V. Gerstner cited several "grim statistics" on the country's schools, including 60 percent of new California state university students needing remedial courses and 80 percent of adult Americans lacking the work skills or education to be competitive in the global market.

A call to California reveals that the percentage of new Cal State students needing remedial work was actually about 49 percent and indicated rising standards, not the opposite. The university system has raised its requirements, ensuring more learning rather than less. MIT economist Lester Thurow, the source of the 80 percent noncompetitive figure, said in an interview that the number is closer to 60 percent and is the fault not of the schools but of businesses like Gerstner's.

Deconstruction exercises are fun, and some contrarians never tire of them. Two able researchers, David C. Berliner and Bruce J. Biddle, filled an entire book, "The Manufactured Crisis," with such misapplications of data and worked themselves up into a high state of indignation about it. But I wonder if that is the right way to go, particularly if we all agree that schools are one place where more money and effort equals a better country.

Those who want to improve the public schools have a ticklish problem of emphasis. Many urban schools are in unmistakably terrible shape, but their parents have little political clout. Suburban schools' problems are more subtle. In most cases they are doing well enough when measured against the past and the rest of the world to keep their parents, who do have electoral and financial influence, reasonably happy. But without anxiety in the suburbs, little progress is going to be made anywhere.

So conscientious educators note the recurrent statistical bombast and identify the excesses so that they know their own work is well grounded, but otherwise keep their mouths shut. Due to the latest round of benign hyperbole, Aunt Fern will have only 22, instead of her usual 32, kids this year, with enough time she thinks to get every one of them well started on a life of reading. That is enough to justify a stretched number or two, if done as Gerstner and President Clinton do in the right spirit.

Jay Mathews is an education writer on The Post's Metro staff. ■

The Washington Post

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

Get On With Student Testing

IN FEBRUARY'S State of the Union address, President Clinton challenged states to go further than the familiar call to adopt high education standards. "By 1999, every state should test every fourth-grader in reading and every eighth-grader in math to make sure these standards are met," he said. Six months later, the bureaucracy is revving up to create the envisioned voluntary national test, but the plan has bogged down in politics and process.

National testing for individual students of the type used by our trade competitors in Europe and Asia is a good idea. Currently, the only available "nation's report card" is the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a sampling of student achievement in groups. Families and schools need uniform measures with which to identify a child's academic weaknesses and plan improvements. The entire movement for national standards over the past decade always included the eventuality of some kind of assessment, discussed most frequently as curriculum-tailored and voluntary.

But so far the Education Department has attracted only six states to its testing plan. Home-schooling advocate Michael Farris warns that testing is "the last nail in the coffin of local control." Some in the minority community fear testing merely will embarrass low-performing

students. The most active opponents—rallying around House Education chairman Bill Goodling (R-Pa.)—will seek in September to block funds for development of testing. They see it as a power grab by the Education Department and educators whom they accuse of ignoring Congress and favoring hazy "critical thinking" skills rather than a back-to-basics philosophy.

The "process" question is whether the tests should be created and run by a contractor, an approach the Clinton team is already well into preparing, or whether a new statute should be enacted to permit administration of the tests by the National Assessment Governing Board, the politically independent board that runs the NAEP tests.

That's hardly a debate to stir the hearts of parents, educators and local officials who approach the issue with a vocabulary of test scores, achievement and progress. Rather than cut off funds, Congress should sit down and work with the administration to come up with a suitable role for the governing board. Given that many states are waiting to see some pilot testing before committing, there is more interest in testing than Mr. Clinton's meager score of six takers would indicate.

1. The Salt Lake Tribune

August 7, 1997

Test National Test

Before getting riled about this state's refusal to participate in President Clinton's program to develop national academic tests, Utahns should consider reasons for holding off. Primarily, Utah public schools already conduct a variety of academic tests that take up students' time and taxpayers' money. Adding another one — one still in the experimental stage — would increase those costs with no guaranteed benefits. That is not to say President Clinton's efforts to establish national tests in math and reading are unwise. Quite the contrary. Testing all American fourth and eighth-grade students on the same material would establish new benchmarks for students and schools to pursue. It would focus attention on trouble spots so extra attention could be focused on improving specific skills and knowledge. The new test itself must be tested before adopted nationwide, and the nine states and several cities that so far have signed up will help determine its effectiveness; that is, whether the test establishes and measures appropriate learning standards. But the pitfalls of Utah either adopting a new national test or putting it in place of another are significant. This state now tests students at least three times a year. The National Assessment of Educational Progress — the organization that would create the new national test — already tells Utah how its students stack up against their national peers. The Stanford Achievement Test, given at three grade levels, compares Utah schools against one another. A more localized test gauges students' grasp of the state's core curriculum. College-bound students also take voluntary tests. Each of the mandatory tests interrupts student learning and costs the school system money. The first year, 1999, the federal government would help states pay for the new test, but then states would have to finance what might be a redundancy. Of course, the new test would not be redundant if it replaced one of the existing measurements. However, that would interrupt the compilation of the comparable historical data now used to assess whether schools are improving or slipping from year to year. Before switching tests, Utahns must be sure they do not lose valuable information from the past. Given Utah's early acceptance of statewide testing (since 1990), its reluctance to join President Clinton's current campaign cannot be interpreted as avoidance of accountability for school quality, as some suggest. Instead, the state's stance can be seen as an effort to ensure that any new test will provide more useful information at a reasonable cost to local taxpayers. ■

Attitudinal New math digs a whole

By MONA CHAREN

WASHINGTON — So, you think the '60s have been licked, eh? You think all those bead-sporting, sandal-wearing, pot-smoking hippies have donned three-piece suits, bought Ford Tauruses and gone to work for Microsoft?

Wrong. The spirit of the '60s — small-minded, Third-World worshipping, standards-loathing — is alive and well and living in the public-school curriculum.

The latest outrage to be perpetrated by these Woodstock refugees is Whole Math, or what some displeased parents have labeled "Rain Forest Algebra."

In the early 1960s, humorist Tom Lehrer memorably satirized "New Math" as an effort to help students "understand what they're doing *rather than* to get the right answer."

In the world of Whole Math, the kids are not expected to get any answers — just to have the right attitude.

One popular textbook, "Secondary Math: An Integrated Approach: Focus on Algebra," begins by extolling the virtues of teamwork, offers the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in three languages, states that computers will do all our math computations in the future and asks the kids what role they suppose teamwork plays in conserving natural resources.

The text then introduces characters named Taktuk, Esteban and Minh, who offer thoughts on life, environmentalism and such. But equations don't show up until page 165.

Stupid idea

"It isn't that Whole Math is pure propaganda. There is an idea behind it. It's just a stupid idea."

Whole Math, like its sister, Whole Language (which has been abandoned by the state of California after disastrous results), is based on the notion that learning should not be a top-down process in which teachers impart knowledge to students.

Rather, it should be a cooperative enterprise in which teams of students, through a process of discovery, figure things out for themselves. Accordingly, in Whole Math, children are often asked to figure out division before they've learned to multiply. If they run into difficulties, no problem, they

are handed a calculator.

In Fairfax County, Va., third-graders are taught to think mathematically by discussing how they would recreate U.S. currency. They learn place value by punching numbers into a calculator with a partner. Susan Christ, a mother of four, reports that never in the course of four years of public schooling for her four children did she ever see a teacher standing at the front of the classroom.

No more "sage on a stage," counsels the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. Teachers are to be "facilitators." Do you hear the echoes of the '60s? The resistance to authority? The naive faith that "children have so much to teach us?"

And what are the results? Well, columnist John Leo reports that in Palo Alto, Calif., in the year following the introduction of Whole Math, public school students fell from the 86th percentile in math to the 58th. When the approach was moderated the following year, the kids bounced up a bit to the 77th percentile.

Whole Math is everywhere. And, like every other educational innovation, it is being met with precious little parental resistance.

Most parents are supine in the face of this assault on the life chances of their children.

The irony is that these curricula, devised by leftists who profess to care so much for the poor and disadvantaged, have the effect of handicapping the students who are trapped in public schools.

Wealthy or even comfortable families often look at nonsense like Whole Math and pull their kids out. These children will learn what they need to score well on the SATs at St. Vincent's or Phillips Exeter Academy.

But the children in public schools, who may be very bright, are left with multicultural propaganda and calculators.

Mrs. Christ, an accountant, had hoped to stay at home until her kids were grown. But Whole Math has convinced her that the public schools cannot be trusted. In the fall, her kids will enroll at a Christian school with a traditional curriculum, and she will have to return to work to afford the tuition.

How much more dumbing down can the schools push before parents awake?

Mona Charen writes a syndicated column.



GEORGETT MOSS

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By GWYNETH I.

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1. Orlando Sentinel

July 30, 1997 Category: Commentary

National education standards make sense for 'united' states

By Myriam Marquez of The Sentinel Staff

The little, red schoolhouse was fine for an agrarian country in the 1800s, when each little American town decided what to teach its children in between the summer plantings and fall harvest.

But now we're entering the fast and furious global economy of the 21st century, and kids in, say, Florida won't be competing only with children in Iowa or California for jobs of the future. They'll be competing with children taught in industrialized countries from Europe to Asia. They'll be competing in an international environment, with men and women whose nations hold up national standards as the key to their success.

Why, then, do so many conservatives find President Clinton's idea for national education standards and testing so abhorrent?

A majority of Americans certainly don't agree with such horse-and-buggy thinking. The latest scientific survey I saw of American attitudes toward public education — a Gallup poll in February — showed that a majority of Americans supported President Clinton's call for national education standards. Those standards would spell out clearly what children should know in key subjects at each grade level.

Conservatives say that education is the responsibility of the states and that the federal government should stop trying to dictate one set of standards in a country where each region, each state, has its own identity.

Oh, please. English may be spoken with a twang in Texas or rushed along at mega-urban speed in New York City, but the rules of the language are consistently the same anywhere in this country. Addition, subtraction, algebra and geometry are no different in any language. And American history certainly can be taught in a way that takes into account the different perspectives of the people who struggled through this nation's turmoil and still be based on factual dates, names and places.

So what is all the fuss about?

The national standards that Clinton wants states to adopt wouldn't be dictated by the federal government. The president has called on each state to draft standards that would measure the outcomes of what is being taught in the public schools. How could conservatives, who often criticize public school systems for focusing on gimmicks to teach kids instead of on the outcomes of such teaching, be against such a common-sense approach as the measurement of outcomes?

Each state can decide whether to involve, say, parents, business people and educators in crafting those standards. That certainly would answer conservatives' concerns that public education is too focused on hoity-toity teaching techniques developed by academics who have little to do with the real-world skills necessary for a high-technology society.

Haven't underprivileged children stuck in poorly financed inner-city schools suffered enough from a lack of standards?

That's the point that the American Federation of Teachers, a 900,000-member teachers union, made this week when it unveiled its annual progress report on state-by-state standards.

The good news is that most states already have drafted standards for each grade level, but fewer than half of those states have defined clearly what kids should know in four key subjects — reading, writing, mathematics and social studies. (Florida is among 17 states that have endorsed clear standards for the four subjects. Another 29 states have approved specific standards in at least three of the core subjects.)

And as many as 12 states endorse the concept of having a national test to measure how students fare, whether they live in Alaska or Florida.

Last time I checked, this is the United States of America — emphasis on united. That's hardly the dirty word that some conservatives make it out to be when talk turns to the need for national education standards. ■

D.S.J. 7/16/97

Mandate for Sharply Focused Math

In response to Lynne V. Cheney's June 11 editorial-page commentary "President Clinton's Mandate for Fuzzy Math," on the voluntary national mathematics test: Ms. Cheney asserts that the efforts to raise standards by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) have resulted in students failing to learn the basics of math. While a colorful claim, this just isn't true. Ms. Cheney blatantly mischaracterizes NCTM's philosophy in claiming that it believes students needn't learn basic arithmetic.

Her views toward NCTM are an apparent change of heart. She was a member of the National Council on Education Standards and Testing. In its final report to Congress, which Ms. Cheney signed, the council specifically cited the work of NCTM as an example of how "standards and assessments can serve as catalysts for raising expectations." The model national mathematics standards, introduced by NCTM in 1989, are the basis of many states' own mathematics standards.

The recent results of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) show that our nation's fourth graders are doing better than ever in mastering the basics of arithmetic. While we must aim even higher, TIMSS shows that our fourth graders perform above the international average in mathematics. These findings were in contrast to last November's results showing that eighth graders scored below the international average in mathematics. This suggests that it is in the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth grades—when our students should be moving beyond arithmetic to learn elements of geometry, algebra, and measurement—that our schools need to do more to raise expectations and achievement. This is exactly what the voluntary national test in mathematics is intended to promote. The test will be demanding—far from the "fuzzy math" that Ms. Cheney asserts. The test will be based on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which shows how we are doing in

the core academic subjects by regularly testing a small sample of students. One good way to understand how badly Ms. Cheney has mischaracterized the situation is to look at two representative items from recent NAEPs.

The first question asks students to estimate the amount of a 16% tip on a restaurant check of \$24.99. Students could solve the problem in two basic ways, by rote calculation (multiplying 0.16×24.99) or by estimation. A common approach to estimation would be to realize that 10% of \$25 is \$2.50 and that 5% (or half of 10%) of \$2.50 is \$1.25. Thus, the total for a 15% tip of \$24.99 is approximately \$3.75. While most adults need to do this sort of calculation on a regular basis, and certainly whenever they dine out, only 38% of the nation's eighth graders could choose the correct answer.

The second question asks students to analyze data presented in a chart and text, which involves determining which data is relevant and which should be grouped together. To correctly answer the question, students must calculate the amount of population growth, must understand the differences between an absolute population growth and a population growth rate, and they must determine which type of population growth is being described in each section of the question. Finally, they are required not only to give a number answer, but to clearly communicate and defend their arguments, using both written English and mathematics. Only 35% of our eighth graders successfully answered this question. In business and civic life, being able to analyze this sort of data and make arguments based on it is critical. This problem shows, as often happens in the real world, that there can be more than one way of interpreting data. To be successful in the workplace and society, our students need to be able to understand and solve these sorts of problems.

MARSHALL S. SMITH
Acting Deputy Secretary
Department of Education

Washington

PUBLISHING

Time magazine has announced the September launch of a new classroom edition aimed at students in grades 7-10. *InTime*, to be published twice a month during the school year, will be a companion to *Time for Kids*, which is designed for the 4th through 6th grades.

InTime will center around current events and breaking news of interest to teenagers. The magazine is a collaborative effort between *Time*'s editorial staff and an advisory board of middle school teachers. Though written by journalists, *InTime* will also include occasional involvement from readers. The magazine's editors promise up-to-the-minute news coverage, colorful graphics, profiles of popular authors, musicians, and actors, as well as analysis of social issues.

Subscriptions to *InTime*, which include a teacher's guide and occasional classroom videotapes, are available for \$7.50 per student for 10 or more subscriptions.

□

Four Japanese mathematics textbooks have been translated into English by the American Mathematical Society for use in the United States. The release of these books is designed to provide insight into math instruction in Japan, where students scored well on recent international tests.

The four books cover basic analysis, algebra and geometry, Mathematics 1, and Mathematics 2, which are taught during the 10th and 11th grades in Japan. According to the publisher, they illustrate the ways in which Japanese instruction resembles that recommended by reformers in the United States.

Each textbook costs between \$24 and \$29, plus a \$3 shipping charge, and may be ordered from the AMS by calling (800) 556-7774.

□

In response to the national push for higher K-12 achievement in science, the Educational Research Service has released a book and videotape titled *Improving Student Achievement in Science*. The resources are designed to aid teachers in understanding the most effective practices for science instruction.

The 28-page book details these practices and offers suggestions for applying them in the classroom. It also discusses research relevant to effective science education. The companion video illustrates the practices outlined in the book by showing them in use in actual classroom situations. Also included are interviews with teachers who use the practices and offer words of advice.

Improving Student Achievement in Science is available in book form for \$12. The video package, which includes the book, the video, and a copy of the Educational Research Service's *Handbook of Research on Improving Student Achievement*, is \$260. Both are available from the ERS, 2000 Clarendon Blvd., Arlington, Va. 22201; (800) 791-9308.

—DAVID FIELD

An Open Letter to the President On Reading Tests and Standards

By Edward Fry

Having read with some care your February State of the Union Address and the speech you gave before the Michigan legislature in March, I confess myself delighted that you share not just my high opinion of the importance of reading but the same high value placed on reading by most educators and parents. Thank you for bringing it up before Congress and the nation.

But there are a few problems associated with the goal you have stated—"Every 8-year-old must be able to read"—and with your plan for the U.S. Department of Education to develop a reading test that will determine whether every student in the land is meeting national standards in reading. (The reading test won't be mandated by the federal government, you say, but "by 1999 every state should test every 4th grader.")

I understand, Mr. President, that you are something of a "policy wonk." Certainly, this reading test and standards policy need some working. Having "every 8-year-old read" is a little too simple.

Your first problem is to define what you mean by "be able to read." We could probably agree that most 4th graders can't read every word in a daily newspaper. So the problem becomes, how many words should they be able to read? Stated more generally, for any reading test, the standards problem is "How many test items should students get correct in order to meet some national standard? And what should the items look like?"

This is really the practical core of the standards problem. Standards work pretty well in math, or spelling, or geography, where a finite body of knowledge can be specified. Can a student correctly add three four-digit numbers? Can he or she correctly spell the 1,000 most common words by the end of the 4th grade? Can a student fill in a map naming all 50 states?

But when it comes to reading, setting standards is more formidable. For example, can a 4th grader read a story like "Peter Rabbit" and understand it? Well, what do we mean by "understand"? What's

the main idea of "Peter Rabbit"? (not a very sensible question). Is the story of Peter Rabbit an allegory? (not too good for 4th grade). Does Mr. MacGregor like Peter? (a little simplistic).

Well, you get the idea. It is more difficult to have national standards for reading. Of course, it won't hurt to try to set some standards. It might even help a little. But let's not take this reading-standards idea too seriously.

Just a year or two ago, the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English wrestled with the problem of setting reading standards, and some of us think the problem threw them to the mat. The Education Department even withdrew funds from the project, and I applaud them for having the good judgment to do so.

The Clinton Agenda: a closer look

You see, one way to set standards is to get a lot of experts to sit around a table, or their computer keyboards, and say, "I think a

4th grader should be able to do this or that." Since experts don't usually agree on many particular things, much argumentation and many revisions are necessary. The results are fuzzy, or compromised, "standards," and they often contain little that test makers, or curriculum developers, or classroom teachers can use.

The other way to set standards is to give a reading test, standardize it on some population like a random sample of all U.S. 4th graders, and say anybody below some point, such as the 40th percentile, needs to be brought above that point. Since both methods of establishing a "national standard" have their policy and real-life difficulties, I say don't take the idea of "national standards" too seriously, certainly not as an absolute for every student or every school.

Incidentally, you and Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley sometimes publicly state the headline-grabbing statistic that some 44 percent of 4th graders don't even come up to a "basic reading level." Let me point out that a "basic level" is merely the subjective opinion of some unnamed group of "experts." It is sort of a "wouldn't it be nice if they could" basic level of achievement. It is not a condemnation of public education that a large group of students can't do what some experts just thought up as a new "basic standard."

There is another very basic idea you must grasp, and that is that most human abilities follow a normal distribution curve. This means that any group of children or adults have different amounts of most any ability; the ability to throw a basketball accurately, to play the saxophone, to grasp mathematical concepts, or to "read." Some people play

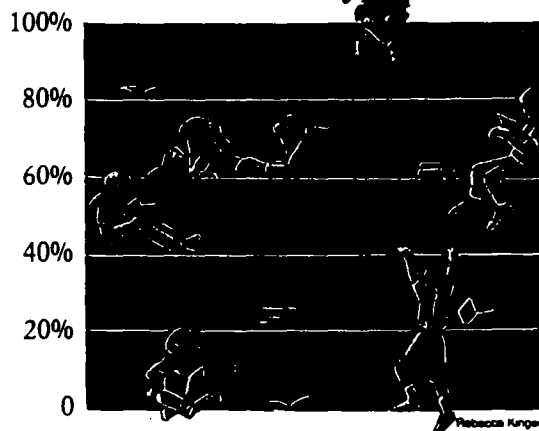
the saxophone better than you do (excuse me), some play it about as well, and some play it worse.

I know that you have publicly visited some elementary schools, and this has served the valuable purpose of showing your concern for education. If you have time to leave the Oval Office once again and go into the nearest 4th grade, though, you will find quite a range of reading ability. You won't have to call up the Education Department for a test, just take in the daily newspaper and ask every kid to read a few short paragraphs aloud. This could be more revealing than an hour-long Cabinet meeting or a one-hour session with national reading experts in demonstrating the range of reading ability found in every classroom.

On a more technical level, the fact that reading ability follows a normal distribution curve is quite well known. You can look at the test data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress or any standardized test. This simple statistical fact causes all sorts of trouble when we report reading achievement in grade-level scores. A grade level on a standardized test is really a description of what is average (normal) for a 4th grader. It is usually a little broader than just a midpoint exact

Continued on Page 34

Edward Fry is an emeritus professor of education at Rutgers University and a former adviser to the National Assessment of Educational Progress. He lives in Laguna Beach, Calif.



It is a great goal to have every child reading, but you can't just take the bottom half of any large population and get it in the top half of the normal distribution curve.

A Letter To the President

Continued from Page 33

score, but still it is a small range of scores right around the midpoint. So in a typical district, or a typical county, or a typical state, many students in 4th grade are near the average or midpoint and they get a 4th grade score. But some students don't read too well and score a little below—we say

The Clinton Agenda: a closer look

they have 3rd grade reading ability because they score like average 3rd graders. A few of the 4th grade students are really lousy readers and they score like 2nd graders or even 1st graders. Conversely, some good readers score like 5th graders, and a few score like 6th graders or even better.

We usually don't get very excited about 4th graders who read like 5th or 6th graders but, oh boy, when we see scores of 4th graders who read like 3rd graders, or even like 2nd graders or 1st graders, then it's cause for alarm—or at

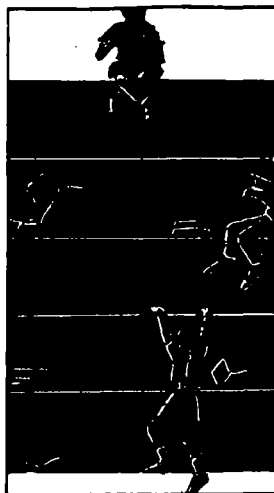
least curriculum reform, or a push for thousands of volunteers flooding into our schools. You can pick any point on the reading continuum you like, such as your 40th percentile or the 3rd grade midpoint, or any place else, and you will still have some children ahead of that point and some below. This will occur either before or after special programs.

Mr. President, I hate to tell you this, but even the president of the United States can't get rid of the normal distribution curve by making speeches or appropriating money. You can't get rid of it with phonics or whole-language instruction, with more tutors, or with computers in every classroom.

This does not mean that better methods, or better teachers, or more tutors won't help. And after all, doing something is better than doing nothing or just accepting the status quo.

It is a great goal to have every child reading, but you can't just take the bottom half of any large population and get it in the top half of the normal distribution curve. In fact, you can't even take the bottom 25 percent and get it above the 40th percentile. Oh, it has been tried many times. Perhaps your Education Department has records that go back just a few years to the federally funded Right To Read Program.

Please don't get me wrong. I am



Rebecca Kungrey

not opposed to putting more money and effort into reading instruction. I welcome anything that can be done to improve our population's reading ability. But what I am trying to bring to this policy-wonk discussion is an appreciation of the fact that there are serious problems in having a national reading standard and hoping or trying to get "every 8-year-old" to meet that "standard." When you get beyond the nice-sounding generalities, the whole test and standards proposition comes down to these very real,

When you get beyond the nice-sounding generalities, the whole test and standards proposition comes down to some very real, practical difficulties.

practical difficulties:

1. What do the test items look like? (difficulty, type, or content?)
2. How many of those items should an 8-year-old be able to read?
3. What percentage of the 8-year-olds should read those items?

There is one further problem that bothers me, and that is your hope to cure much of the reading problem by using volunteer tutors. Getting a million people to work for a year or two for nothing

might be difficult. But beyond that is the problem of *what* a million? In the public schools, so: of the very best and most experienced teachers teach remedial reading. And you want to do with untrained volunteers? Well, let's be hopeful. A tutor sitting down with a small child and voting a full hour every day, every week, to helping him or her read could be nothing but help (for both of them). But it has been my observation that most countries, including the United States, achieve most of their literacy attainment through the use of professional (paid) teachers.

Despite all my problems with testing and standards, I strongly support your efforts to get a national reading test for every state and student. It will give one type of concrete information to parents, school administrators, and legislators. National testing can also keep us from going down curricular blind alleys. There has never been any shortage of people who have just found the "correct way" to teach reading or restructuring schools. National tests can find out if they are right.

But if you are going to encourage volunteers, please provide them with training, materials, and supervision.

And thanks again for your interest in reading as one of the most important and fundamental skills in the field of education.

Getting Better By Design

Continued from Page 48

and changes over time; a reporting system that regularly informs the public, the school system, parents, and students of school performance in accomplishing results and degrees of improvement; and a set of both rewards and sanctions tied to changes in schoolwide performance over time.

• Reinforce principal leadership. Under an effectively decentralized system, principals need a wider array of skills than traditionally has been required. They must be able to provide opportunities for teachers to engage in curricular and instructional leadership and to help educators create a culture of shared decision-making. They must also serve as brokers of information, knowledge, and resources between their faculty and the broader community. The district must be respon-

sible for providing the level of professional development needed to assure that these principles of effective leadership are put in force by school principals.

One of the crucial changes in district-level governance that must take place involves identifying new roles for the school board, superintendent, and central-office staff—roles that enable the district's leadership to set the direction for the schools and run the accountability system, while at the same time freeing up the schools to do the hands-on work to accomplish their performance goals.

Boards of education can provide the impetus for school change and be powerful advocates. They can also present difficult roadblocks to successful school transformation. Effective efforts by boards include these: establishing long-term contracts and solid working relationships with the superintendent; serving as advocates for high-performance schools of design; and sustaining support for ongoing, design-based professional development for teachers. In a decentralized system, the board should also create the operating conditions that allow schools to engage in the site-based restructuring and resource-

allocation processes and ensure that all children receive a high-quality education. For instance, the board might negotiate performance contracts with each school, setting benchmarks within the system.

In a decentralized system, the superintendent's main role is to provide leadership—creating the expectations that every school will have a comprehensive and workable plan to ensure that all children meet high standards. The superintendent serves as the CEO of a highly diversified organization, a system of high-performing schools of designs that meet the articulated needs of diverse school communities. Part of that leadership also requires that the superintendent work to foster a shared commitment among all the members of the school community by inviting parent involvement in schools, encouraging activities that connect students to the local businesses and organizations within the community, and supporting intensive design-based professional development for all teachers in the district.

In such a system, the central-office administrative structure as we know it—with large numbers of staff-development, curriculum, and supervisory specialists—no longer exists. Instead, central-office staff members are responsible for seeing that schools gain access to independent sources of help in these areas and supporting them as they implement their individual improvement plans. The main instructional functions of

the central office are to create curriculum-content and student-performance standards and develop and administer an assessment system to monitor student, school, and system performance.



Patricia Rame

The central-office staff also maintains a school-based information system; allocates funds to schools with minimal restrictions on their use; and provides automated fiscal services. Finally, this staff should also serve as a liaison to parents and the community, providing them with information about improvement-related changes in schools and informing the school choice process.

In the nearly six years since New American Schools was founded, we have refined our approach to respond to the changing

circumstances and the lessons we have learned in the field. While we have never altered our mission—helping to create schools where all students achieve at high levels, we are now also working at the scho-

Too often, improvements are implemented in a single school or one lonely classroom—unable to gain influence and acceptance outside of that microsphere.

system level to make high-performance schools the norm, not the exception. Perhaps the lessons we are learning about how to align systemic changes with meaningful school-by-school transformation represent the most significant contribution we can make to the wholesale improvement of our nation's schools.

"Getting Better By Design—New American Schools How-To Guide" will be available this summer from NAS. Further information is available via the Internet at www.naschools.org.

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Emphasize proficiency | Education standards are ...

DOCUMENT 25 OF 44

SDU9715400043

OPINION

Emphasize proficiency | Education standards are difficult to raise

440 Words

3250 Characters

06/02/97

The San Diego Union-Tribune

UNION-TRIBUNE; 1,2,3

B-8

* EDITORIAL;

(Copyright 1997)

Gov. Bill Clinton's political resurrection during the 1980s was achieved in large part by his aggressive campaign to upgrade Arkansas' dismal public school system. During his second term as president, Clinton seems no less determined to lead the charge for

- * national education standards.
- * The standards issue surfaces whenever politicians sense a national unease about how poorly U.S. students are faring when compared with their counterparts around the globe. That unease has been fairly constant since a presidential commission concluded 14 years ago that the nation was at risk because of its mediocre schools.

- * Clinton's call for voluntary national testing to gauge how students are performing comes as no surprise. After all, he was promoting the
- * same idea as head of the National Governors' Association when George Bush was in the White House. Like many good intentions, however, this one never materialized. But Clinton aims to change that by combining several existing programs and then gift-wrapping the package with some rhetorical flourishes.

What makes this standards gambit intriguing is its sheer audacity. Most of what Clinton is proposing already exists in one form or another.

- * He wants to use the National Assessment of Educational Progress
- * (NAEP) fourth-grade reading test and eighth-grade math test and adapt them for use by the states. The testing process would be far less extensive than that proposed by Bush during the early 1990s. States that wished to participate could do so, while those opposed to the concept could decline.

The biggest drawback to Clinton's plan is the lowest-common-denominator factor.

Because NAEP tests are basic in nature, we would prefer an exam that places greater emphasis on proficiency. The downside in raising the academic bar, of course, is that some students will not be able to meet the loftier standards. This would rile educational psychologists as well as many parents.

Consider, for instance, the fate of state Sen. Dede Alpert's bill to strengthen California's high school math, science and English requirements. The Coronado Democrat's common-sense measure was waylaid in the Senate Education Committee and cannot be revived until next year.

Critics worried that more-rigid classroom requirements might discourage low achievers and thus increase the dropout rate. As a result, the measure was shelved, despite widespread calls on both sides of the aisle for tougher standards.

Most Americans support the concept of testing students to see how
* they stack up against national standards. The challenge is to devise
* a test that is both academically sound and politically palatable. In light of the competing special-interest groups that have a stake in this process, that will be no small achievement -- even for a master pitchman such as Bill Clinton.

I0607 * End of document.

58. San Diego Union-Tribune

June 2, 1997 Category: Editorial

*Emphasize proficiency***Education standards are difficult to raise**

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59. Dallas Morning News

June 1, 1997 Category: Editorial

*Hopwood aftermath***Texas must find ways to boost minority enrollment**

Everyone in Texas should be concerned about the alarming impact of the Hopwood court decision on minority enrollment at the University of Texas Law School.

slots are not completely filled. The remaining 6 percent will be filled from a waiting list. Law school officials hope that some black students in the pool will agree to come.

enrollment. The broader admission range also does not apply to Texas graduate schools.

Another option is to challenge the Fifth Circuit's ruling. Two Texas

in Dearborn. "It's like being with family."

The NAIA also provides services for the American-Indian community, including job training. Wanda Dockstader, 40, of Detroit completed the training program there and works as a school service assistant at Detroit's Medicine Bear American Indian Academy.

She moved to Detroit in 1966 after leaving an Oneida reservation in Ontario.

The mother of three, Dockstader teaches American-Indian crafts at Medicine Bear American Indian Academy, a public school centered on the cultures and traditions of American Indians.

"I earned my GED in 1988, and I plan to attend Wayne State University," she said. "I'd like to see all Native Americans get their education because, to me, that's the only way to fulfillment."

The South Eastern Michigan Indian center in Center Line is another gathering place for American Indians. The organization provides direct services for Macomb, Oakland and St. Clair counties, including a food distribution program

and job training among others.

Ragsdale, of the South Eastern Michigan Indians, said: "We are one of the most complex of all people because we come from over 500 tribes, but we simply want the same respect that everyone else wants."

Who is a Native American?

The definition of Native American keeps changing among tribes and government agencies.

For example:

* **U.S. Department of Education:** A person is a Native American if he or she belongs to a state or federally recognized tribe, including tribes terminated by the federal government after 1940. The agency also recognizes immediate descendants of those people, all Alaska natives, and some special cases.

* **U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs:** A Native American is someone recognized by one of the 510 federally recognized tribes, or who can document their link to people on tribal rolls or government records kept in the 1800s. Members of tribes the U.S. government tried to

disband are not eligible. To receive hiring preference, BIA employees must be a member of a federally recognized tribe or at least one-half Native American blood.

* **Michigan Indian tuition waiver:** People who are a quarter or more Native American and who have lived in Michigan for at least 12 months are eligible for the state college tuition waiver.

* **Tribes:** Each tribe has the sovereign right to determine membership. Most Michigan tribes require one-quarter blood except for the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, which admits all descendants of tribal members, and the Hannahville Potawatomi Indian Community, which requires members to be at least half Native American. Caption: Allan Gabriel carries a sacred incense of sage, tobacco and grasses during a Native-American religious ceremony at Christ the Good Shepherd Church in Lincoln Park. James Borchuck / The Detroit News■

COMMENTARY

The Wall Street Journal

05/01/97

Letters to the Editor: Standards Tests Minus The Fear and Loathing

Lynn Cheney's diatribe against voluntary national tests ("Whose National Standards?" editorial page, April 2) misstates the problem and the proposed solution. Ms. Cheney contends that the president's proposed tests — which will help gauge how American students are doing compared with each other and with other nations' students — will lead to a national curriculum dictated by often unorthodox learning styles. But defining the proposed test as something it is not does not make it so. An examination of this issue minus the fearful hyperbole reveals the soundness and significance of the president's proposal.

As President Clinton and Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley have stated, reading is reading and math is math, throughout the country. That is, the

expectations for reading and math are, or should be, the same everywhere. Researchers agree that by the fourth grade, when the reading test is to be given, all students should know how to read well, no matter how they learn to do it, or they will be at a significant risk for a lifetime of diminished success in school.

Contrary to Ms. Cheney's view, President Clinton's plan for a voluntary national test will not endorse any of the teaching methods she so fears — or for that matter any instructional method at all. We want states to challenge students to master basic and advanced academic skills, but it remains up to states, local school districts, and teachers to determine the best method to teach their students. What these tests, which states

are not required to use, will do is offer states, local communities, teachers and parents a yardstick by which to assess whether their students and children are mastering critical basic skills early enough to succeed.

The tests will be based both on the well-established and respected National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) test, which has been a crucial and reliable national indicator of student achievement for many years and is used by more than 43 states, and on the widely accepted Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS), used by the U.S. and many other nations.

Marshall S. Smith
Acting Deputy Secretary
Department of Education
Washington■

arising from the new technologies. taxation of electronic commerce is "complicated to the point of absurdity" because of the overlapping jurisdictions of sales, property and infrastructure taxes; he observes too that the prevailing libertarian, anti-tax ethos of Net culture runs into direct conflict with the eagerness of localities to develop into high-tech hubs and make some money off that development.

two-year period. That might prove a hollow exercise. The staggering financial interests that could be created by the way the Internet market sorts itself make it's highly unlikely that much of the next few years will unfold as anyone plans.

Adding to the Scores

EDUCATION REFORMERS seized with jubilation on the news of a discernible leap upward last year in elementary school math scores. And why not? Good news along these lines has been hard to come by. Just a few months ago, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and the Education Department were striving to outdo each other in the volume and intensity of alarm over the mediocre showings of American students on the Third International Math and Science Survey. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future was calling, not for the first time, for a "complete overhaul" in the way American children learn mathematics in school.

How significant, with all this, is the improvement in math scores? The answer is that the improvement, as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP tests, remains concentrated among the students who already are doing the best, comparatively, at math—9-year-olds. It's long been recognized as the problem of American mathematics and science teaching alike that kids do quite well with the basics, only to founder massively on the advanced concepts that turn up on tests given to eighth-graders and 12th-graders. The NAEP

tests, given to those three age groups, show that pattern persisting; for that matter, math and science aside, the pattern tracks with the well-known tendency of kids to do comparably well across race and class lines until about age 9, when they start "sorting out" into groups that very few will later be able to leave.

The intense usefulness of tests that measure this kind of achievement in this unsparing way is tied up in the exact qualities that make them so hard a sell politically. A school that does badly on some specific subject—*especially* when another, somehow comparable school is doing well—will look bad, and those who run it will be lucky if they have a federally sponsored test to blame. But a school that reacts gutsily to the sting of being measured and coming up short—such as the Milwaukee schools cited in a recent story that, prodded by poor test results, got their graduation rate from below 20 percent to well above 50 percent inside of a few testing cycles—may eventually reap the visibility and satisfaction of an increase like the recent NAEP ones. A test that gives a good result, even a limited one, is as strong an argument for this particular tool of education reform as a test that gives a bad one.

April '97 date?

EDITORIAL

Investor's Daily

April 17, 1997

Will The White House Pass The Standards Test?

Of President Clinton's 10 ideas to improve the schools, one holds real promise: his call for national standards and testing. But the wrong standards would be worse than none at all.

The president's plan would let each U.S. fourth-grader take a national reading test and every eighth-grader a math exam. Parents could then compare their children's scores to those of the district, state and nation. Any data would be an improvement. As things now stand, parents, teachers and principals have no good way to compare student performance.

We have only a handful of measures: the Scholastic Assessment Test, the National Assessment of Educational Progress and the odd international exam. None is even close to universal, and few schools use them to evaluate their own performance, let alone students. And the NAEP has only broken down its results by state in the last few years. *

Why does testing matter? It lets education "consumers" and "providers" know how their service stacks up. That's the best way to spur improvement. Take California. In '92, the NAEP let the Golden State know it had tied Louisiana for last place in fourth-grade reading.

Shocked, parents and concerned citizens forced the state to abandon "whole language" - an inferior way to teach reading that "experts" had inflicted on California a decade before.

Most parents respect teachers, often rightly so. But teachers have little control (or responsibility or accountability) in today's schools. Bureaucrats and unions set the real priorities, and those don't include letting any "consumer" be king.

At best, they promise to do better if offered more money - while fighting the search for ways to do more with less. * A touch of education glasnost can wake parents up to the bitter truth. The slight rise in testing over the past 15 years has put the schools' poor showing in the spotlight - and helped fuel today's drive for reform.

But not all tests are equal. The education "blob" is happy to offer mush under the label of real tests. The Golden State establishment, for one, sunk millions into setting up the California Learning Assessment System. But the "state-of-the-art" result was * useless psychobabble. It set out to probe student feelings and beliefs, not their skills or knowledge. The establishment can mess

up efforts to raise standards, too. The first set of national history standards, released in '94, made so much room for "alternative" views that the result was blatantly anti-Western, even anti-American. One more danger: If the "blob" produces standards that are too low, they could become a ceiling beyond which few schools aim. Clinton's plan would avoid that by basing his tests on the NAEP's. *

The president seems to truly care about education. He said the right things to the Democratic Leadership Council in December: "We must dramatically reform our public schools, demanding high standards * and accountability from every teacher and every student, promoting * reforms like public choice, school choice and charter schools in every state."

But will he fight for what he knows is right? His testing plan already falls short of President Bush's call for 15 national tests. Yes, a more modest plan has a better chance of becoming law. But if Clinton waters it down much more, we'll have the politically correct history standards, or California's psychobabble testing, all over again. ■

The Washington Post

04/18/97; Edition: FINAL; Section: Editorial; Page A24

Maryland Schools: Who's Paying?

THIS YEAR'S battling over state aid for Maryland schools bared an arbitrary and unfair system of distributing money and highlighted some outdated assumptions in Annapolis about the needs of the Washington suburban counties. Defenders of one deal that will steer \$254 million to Baltimore City schools over the next five years — compared with \$167 million to all other public school systems combined — portrayed Montgomery and Prince George's counties as rich and undeserving. With all that wealth, the

charges went, the two shouldn't have serious problems maintaining their schools.

Now, as Gov. Glendening, House Speaker Casper Taylor and other legislative leaders are conceding that maybe the school aid distribution isn't all that systematic or fair, they ought to take a fresh look at the profiles of the two counties' schools:

Enrollments: Maryland Department of Education numbers show that as of September 1995, total state public school enrollment was 805,544, of which 42

percent was minorities. Largest system in the state? Prince George's, with 122,415 at that time. While Baltimore's school population is declining, the suburban populations are growing fast. In Montgomery, the enrollment is increasing by more than 1,700 students annually — more than enough to fill three new elementary schools a year. The county already uses 200 portable classrooms while continuing to build more schools, according to county school officials.

Students from lower-income families.

LEVEL 1 - 115 OF 264 STORIES

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Roanoke Times & World News

February 27, 1997, THURSDAY, METRO EDITION

SECTION: EDITORIAL, Pg. A11

LENGTH: 911 words

HEADLINE: TEST AMERICA'S STUDENTS

BYLINE: CHESTER E. FINN JR. and DIANE RAVITCH

BODY:

PRESIDENT Clinton's proposal for national testing makes sense. As former assistant secretaries of the Department of Education in the Reagan and Bush administrations, we urge Congress to support it.

When George Bush and Lamar Alexander suggested something similar, which they called American Achievement Tests, congressional Democrats scoffed, and no such bill was ever introduced.

And in 1992, when a bipartisan panel called the National Council on Education Standards and Testing recommended a form of national testing, a convoluted scheme that involved different tests based on common standards, the idea was ignored by congressional leaders and attacked by prominent educators.

Still, it was a good idea then, and it's a good one now.

In fact, Clinton's version of national testing is better than Bush's in these important respects: It doesn't require any new standards or tests to be devised, and it does not hinge on dubious efforts to attach multiple tests to uniform (nonexistent) standards.

The administration has figured out that the nation already has two excellent tests that measure student achievement in reading and math, the most basic of basic skills. Accordingly, the president has proposed that states and school districts be permitted to use a respected national test for fourth-grade reading and an equally admirable international test for eighth-grade mathematics.

Nobody is obliged to use these tests. The federal government will pay for the first round of testing, and after that it's up to states and districts.

They can, however, embed the national tests into their own testing programs, which virtually every jurisdiction has, and commercial publishers would be licensed to offer them, a welcome form of 'outsourcing' that would hold down costs, bureaucracy and allegations of unfair government competition.

Most important, they're good tests, incorporating standards far more rigorous than those most states are now using.



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The **reading test** is based on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which has been around almost three decades but has never been used by districts or schools to report the progress of individual students. The NAEP **reading test** is solid, multifaceted and has rigorous standards built into it.

For **eighth-graders**, the White House proposes to make available the **math** part of the Third International Math and Science Study, given to a half-million youngsters in 41 countries. The standards are built into the international comparisons. It's TIMSS results that enabled us to see that our **eighth-graders** perform poorly in mathematics compared with their peers in many other industrial countries.

Consider how powerful it will be for parents and teachers to compare the **math** prowess of their **eighth-graders** in, say, Phoenix or Minneapolis, to the performance of their peers in Korea and the Czech Republic. Consider the impact of parents in Denver or Boston actually seeing how well their **fourth-graders** read in relation to a national standard of proficiency.

According to every major poll, an overwhelming majority of the American people want national standards and **tests**. Until now, there has been no way for parents or public officials to get good information about how students are doing.

Instead, they've been stuck with college-entrance **tests** that are not representative of the full population and that, in any case, aren't even administered until the end of high school. Or they have had to settle for **'standardized' tests** that yield spurious results about youngsters being **'at or above grade level,'** even though **'grade level'** is simply a statistical average, not a true standard.

Only with such information in hand can parents make wise choices among schools; can parents and legislators appraise how well their school systems are doing; can teachers and principals determine how effective their efforts are, and take corrective action where needed.

To those worried about **'local control,'** we say that these **tests** are a yardstick, not a harness. They give the federal government no new powers.

The **test** results, in fact, will actually enhance local control by empowering consumers, policy-makers and professionals to know what actions need to be taken locally to improve education.

So important is national **testing** that it must be safeguarded from politicization, a temptation sure to arise if the student results are as bleak as everyone expects.

To prevent this possibility, responsibility for national **testing** should be removed from the federal Education Department (and congressional committees) and placed under the control of an independent, nonpartisan body. Such an entity, called the National Assessment Governing Board, already exists.

The White House's current plan to give control of national **testing** to the Department of Education would, we think, be a big mistake.



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If Clinton will agree to turn the program for national testing into an autonomous agency, akin to the National Science Foundation (where the National Science Board sets policy) or the National Transportation Safety Board, then Congress should endorse this part of his education package. This proposal deserves their support.

Once upon a time it was even a Republican idea. Now it is a good American idea.

Chester E. Finn Jr. is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute; Diane Ravitch is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.

- The Washington Post

LOAD-DATE: February 28, 1997



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p. 06

Toward a national test

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 givethe ...

DOCUMENT 99 OF 122

FBEE9704200001

METRO

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

489 Words

3385 Characters

02/09/97

The Fresno Bee

HOME

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