

1. Baltimore Sun

September 15, 1997

Columbia man designing national tests

After helping create MSPAP, educator broadens his sights

By Mary Maushard

SUN STAFF

It's not the test answers that keep Steve Ferrara up late. It's the questions.

A Columbia resident and one of the creators of the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) tests, Ferrara is considered among the nation's top test designers. He's been tapped to work on one of President Clinton's top priorities — voluntary national tests in math and reading.

The tests pass a milestone today when educators recommend test details to a national panel in Washington. Ferrara is on to the next phase — developing test questions and concentrating on the tests' reliability, validity and scoring.

It was with considerable reluctance that Ferrara recently left the Maryland State Department of Education after 12 years to become technical director for the company hired to develop the fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math tests that could be taken by millions of youngsters annually.

"What I'm interested in is having an influence on what's being taught and how it's being taught," said Ferrara, 46, who went to work in Washington two weeks ago for the American Institutes of Research, which has a \$13 million contract to develop the tests over the next 18 months.

The controversial tests, he predicted, "will start a discussion in families, in homes, about what is going on in schools and they will improve student learning."

Clinton proposed the tests in his State of the Union address in February, calling them crucial for setting standards and raising skill levels in an age of intensifying economic and technological competition. He has been stumping hard for them, stopping in a Gambrills classroom last week to make his latest pitch to those who will actually take the tests. The voluntary 90-minute tests — a combination of multiple choice, short- and long-answer questions — would be given every spring, beginning in 1999, and results would be reported directly to students, parents and teachers.

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Critics are many.

Conservatives claim the tests are intrusive and will result in a national curriculum. Liberals say the assessments will spawn unfair comparisons among widely diverse students and districts and may lead to teacher sanctions and cuts in federal funds.

Back-to-basics educators — many of whom support the tests in theory — say they are being developed too quickly and will further "dumb down" public-school expectations.

In the midst of this fray is Ferrara, a soft-spoken but intense New Englander.

Though AIR has contracted with publishers and other consultants to write the questions, Ferrara is responsible for their technical aspects and for making recommendations to the final decision-makers.

The former teacher must tackle not only the prosaic, but also the philosophical.

Do the tests have enough multiple choice items? Too many essay questions? Can students understand them? Will the answers really show how well a student knows the subject?

Will they change teaching? Will children learn more, or more effectively?

Much of the criticism he calls "misguided," using the same arguments he did when Maryland teachers and parents attacked the MSPAP tests.

As director of testing for the state department, he was in a core group of designers who created the controversial but groundbreaking MSPAP tests that try to measure not only what children know but how well they can apply it. Every third-, fifth- and eighth-grader in Maryland public schools has taken the test since 1991.

In May, Ferrara was hired as a part-time consultant for MPR Associates, the educational consulting firm responsible for the first phase of the federal test and which will make its recommendations in Washington today and tomorrow.

"They needed someone who understands the test design issues and who also understands curriculum and instruction issues. That's what I do," he said.

Ferrara advised content committees and reconciled technical issues. For instance, when the reading committee discussed what children would read and answer questions about in the fourth-grade tests, members initially settled on four lengthy readings.

"The number of readings is a technical question," Ferrara said. "I alerted the committee that four probably is too small a number" for a valid assessment of a child's reading ability. So the committee's recommendation will be six readings of varying lengths from authors of different racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, he said.

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"What Steve brings to this, in addition to his experience in Maryland, is that he's extremely well-respected by other test directors," said Archie Lapointe, director of AIR's center for assessment. "We courted him long and hard. We would not let him say no."

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As a special education teacher in Massachusetts, he was required to do formal and informal testing of students not always able to take traditional tests. So he had to create alternatives, he recalled.

"I wanted to know more about testing, and I was able to go to graduate school" at Stanford University, he said.

Ferrara has worked on Maryland's functional tests and the proposed high school graduation tests, scheduled to begin with the Class of 2004.

But it is the performance-based MSPAP for which Ferrara is perhaps best known in Maryland and around the country. Though he acknowledged being "tired" of MSPAP, he also upholds the tests that have been much criticized over the years.

"I'm very proud of what we've done with MSPAP. Technically, it is sound," and it has brought changes in the classroom," said Ferrara, whose two children have taken their father's tests in Howard County schools.

Though Ferrara is committed enough to the national tests to give up a job he was attached to, he is cautious about them.

"I think most people have adopted a wait-and-see attitude," he said. "I think people are wise to be happy about national tests, and wise to wait and see." ■

1. St. Louis Post-Dispatch

09/15/97; Edition: FIVE STAR LIFT; Section: NEWS; Page 10C

TIM POOR ON WASHINGTON COLUMN

BIG DEBATES LOOM OVER SCHOOL ISSUES

By Tim Poor

AS CHILDREN RETURN to school this fall, fights are brewing in Congress over ideas for improving their education.

Congress passed tax cuts and tax credits for education without much fuss a couple of months ago. That was the easy part. Now, more controversial proposals are coming up, like national testing, school vouchers and federal money to repair schools.

President Bill Clinton wants to develop standardized national tests for fourth-graders and eighth-graders so their parents can get a fair idea of how much their children are learning. While it doesn't seem a radical concept - there are already tests galore out there - it's one that has attracted opposition from both sides of the political fence.

Conservative Republicans think the tests would be a waste of money, an unnecessary federal intrusion into local school affairs. They say Big Brother is already on the way to becoming Big Teacher, and national standards would speed up that troublesome trend.

"Once you let Washington decide what kids should know, it will effectively control what and how they are taught," said Sen. John Ashcroft, D-Mo., in voting last week against a Senate proposal to develop the tests. That measure passed but isn't likely to succeed in the House, where some liberal Democrats, too, are opposed. Members of the Congressional Black Caucus fear the tests could discriminate against minorities.

Rep. Richard A. Gephardt, D-St. Louis County, favors the tests, which he thinks could help American workers stay competitive. Gephardt just returned from a trip to Mexico, where thousands of low-wage jobs have been sucked from the United States, probably for good. Not only can American companies pay workers less in Mexico, but the high-tech products the Mexican workers are producing are of the finest quality.

While American workers may not be able to compete well for low-skill jobs, they'll be able to win the battle for higher paying, higher skilled jobs if they are prepared in school. Gephardt thinks the tests could help ensure students aren't just going through the motions but learning useful things.

One idea that some Republicans are shopping around again is one for federally funded vouchers for parents who want to send their children to private or parochial schools. So-called "school choice" has always been high on the conservative agenda, but it's gained some momentum lately with polls that show more parents coming around to the idea, especially those living in poor neighborhoods.

Of course, any federal aid for such a plan will run into constitutional challenges, but that's a subject for another day. Now, House members like James M. Talent, R-Chesterfield, are scurrying to come up with a proposal that has a chance of being enacted.

Talent's Community Renewal Act includes a proposal for "scholarships" in up to 100 low-income areas that would pay for parents to send their children to public, private or religious schools of their choice. He said the program has been tried in Milwaukee, where it has increased test scores and improved performance in the public schools.

"Parents whose children must attend schools that don't teach and aren't safe are demanding a choice in education, and when they get it, the response is overwhelming," wrote Talent in a recent article.

Many members of Congress from those areas that would be affected by Talent's proposal are Democrats who strongly oppose the idea. They fear it would weaken the public schools.

One is Sen. Carol Moseley-Braun, D-Ill. In recent testimony to a House Education subcommittee, she said the market-based approach suggested by vouchers would benefit a few students at the expense of the majority.

"By definition, markets have winners and losers, and our country cannot afford any losers," she said. "Vouchers are about putting individuals over communities," she added. "A federally funded voucher program would not fix a single public school."

Moseley-Braun thinks better management is the best solution to the ills of public-schools. She also wants to spend some federal money to fix up deteriorating school buildings.

Her spending proposal was cut out of the budget deal at the insistence of Republicans, who are giving no hint of being more willing to consider it now.

The GOP prefers to put those federal dollars in the hands of parents - including those whose lack of involvement in their children's education is a big part of the problem.■

1. Houston Chronicle

September 15, 1997

HISD's Paige rejects U.S. test in English only **Spanish-excluded reading exam prompting concerns**

By MELANIE MARKLEY

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While Congress debates President Clinton's proposal to test students nationally, some urban superintendents — including Houston's — are unhappy with plans to give the reading exam in English only.

If the test is approved by Congress, Houston Superintendent Rod Paige said he will recommend giving only the eighth-grade math portion since the Clinton administration decided not to give the fourth-grade reading portion in Spanish as well as English.

Paige, one of 15 urban superintendents who initially agreed to give Clinton's proposed voluntary tests, said it would be unfair to exclude such a large percentage of Spanish-speaking students who aren't yet fluent in English.

The proposal, which was approved by the U.S. Senate last week, will be considered by the House this week. Some predict it will fail in the House.

The proposed testing program, which would first be administered in 1999, involves a reading test for fourth-graders and a math test for eighth-graders.

While acknowledging the proposal's questionable fate, Paige said he still supports the idea behind the national test.

"Our interest is in accountability," Paige said. "Our interest is in getting to compare our students with students across the United States.

"TAAS (the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills) is a Texas test and I think a very good one. But we also are interested in how our students compare with those students in New York, Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles and Miami. So we are willing to step up to the bat and take national examinations."

The Council of Great City Schools, which represents the nation's 50 largest school districts including Houston, has issued a statement criticizing the Clinton administration's decision not to develop the reading test in languages other than English.

"The decision would exclude from the benefits of the program many of the nearly 300,000 fourth-graders from the 15 cities that have recently volunteered to take the national tests," the statement says.

Henry Duvall, the council's director of communications, said Los Angeles has decided not to give the reading portion and others also are considering volunteering for the math portion only.

The issue, however, may soon be moot if opponents in the House have anything to say about it next week.

"We do not believe there should be standards set by Washington bureaucrats," House Majority Leader Richard Armey, R-Irving, said after the Senate's vote. "We're going to try our very best to stop the president's program — period — because we don't think it's well advised, and we think it will lead to a national curriculum."

In truth, the issue has not touched off much support among Texas leaders.

"I am very skeptical about the federal government becoming involved in a state and local matter, and as importantly, I'm skeptical about a national test which the federal government could use to promote a feel-good curriculum or mushy curriculum," Gov. George W. Bush told The Associated Press.

Paul Sadler, chairman of the House Public Education Committee, told the AP that he is "a little skeptical of national testing standards." ■

1. Education Daily

September 15, 1997 Category: Trade

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

The Senate last week passed a fiscal 1998 education funding bill that would send most federal K-12 funds to local districts in block grants and would give an independent board control over voluntary national tests. The House hopes to pass its version of the appropriations this week, after voting on whether to bar spending on the national tests.

Awaiting the President's Signature ...

Student Aid Guidelines H.R. 1866: Would allow colleges and universities using need-blind admissions to award

institutional aid based on financial need, and to exchange information through an independent third party. The bill would extend a provision in the 1994 Improving America's Schools Act that is set to expire Sept. 30.

Last action: The Senate passed H.R. 1866 on July 30, but amended it to extend the provision for four years, rather than permanently. The House approved the change by voice vote Sept. 8 (ED, Sept. 9).

Next action: President Clinton is expected to sign the bill.

Recent or Upcoming Action ...

Fiscal 1998 Appropriations/National Tests H.R. 2264: Would boost the Education Department's budget from nearly \$29.47 billion this year to about \$34.3 billion in fiscal 1998, including mandatory spending on programs such as student loans. It would increase spending on Title I and special education, set aside \$205 million for comprehensive school reform, level-fund Safe and Drug-Free Schools grants, and cut Goals 2000 funding from \$491 million to \$387 million (ED, Sept. 11). It also would provide \$100 million for charter schools and \$435 million for state formula grants for school technology. State Student Incentive Grants would be eliminated. S. 1061: Would send about \$11 billion in Title I, Goals 2000, bilingual, technology and vocational education funding to school districts as block grants (ED, Sept. 12). Special education state grants for school-age children would get a substantial boost, to \$3.95 billion. School construction would get \$100 million, and State Student Incentive Grants would be cut to \$35 million. A reconstituted National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) would oversee President Clinton's voluntary national tests. Both bills would set aside \$260 million for a childhood literacy program in fiscal 1999 and raise the maximum Pell Grant to \$3,000.

Last action: The Senate passed S. 1061 on Thursday, 92-8.

An amendment to grant NAGB oversight of the national tests passed 87-13, while an effort to halt the block grant plan failed 51-49. The House debated its bill last week, moving funds among programs and out of Goals 2000 and into special education.

Next action: The House is scheduled to continue debating and could pass its bill tomorrow. One pending amendment that is part of a bipartisan deal would block ED spending on the national tests. House and Senate negotiators will draft a compromise plan for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1.

Key Senate Democrats already have said they would bar the block grant plan, and the White House is threatening a veto if the legislation would halt Clinton's testing initiative.

Omnibus Education S. 1: The GOP bill would allow states to use existing Title VI block grant funds for public and private school choice, would raise special education funding starting with a \$1 billion hike next year, and would authorize a school choice demonstration program for low-income families (ED, Jan. 23).

S. 12: The Democrats' bill would require the federal government to pay up to half of the interest on school construction bonds and authorize \$1.75 billion for reading programs and \$1.8 billion for school technology.

Last action: House Speaker Newt Gingrich and other top Republicans lobbied for school choice and tax breaks for K-12 education savings accounts last Tuesday, during a House Early Childhood, Youth and Families Subcommittee hearing (ED, Sept. 10). The House Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee held a hearing Friday in Cleveland to discuss ways to improve K-12 education.

Next action: The House early childhood panel plans a charter schools hearing tomorrow.

Private School Tax Breaks H.R. 2373, S. 1133: Would allow parents tax-free withdrawals from an education savings account to be used for expenses including private K-12 tuition, transportation, tutoring and computers (ED, Aug. 4.) Last action: During a House Early Childhood, Youth and Families Subcommittee hearing Tuesday, House Speaker Newt Gingrich and other top Republicans lobbied for several school choice plans, including tax breaks for K-12 education savings accounts (ED, Sept. 10).

Next action: The House Ways and Means Committee is expected to work on H.R. 2373 this month. No action is scheduled in the Senate.

Vocational Education H.R. 1853: The House plan to reauthorize the Carl D.

Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act would allot school districts at least 90 percent of the basic state vocational grant, up from 75 percent, and shave the state set-asides to 2 percent for administration and 8 percent for leadership. It also would lower the minimum school district grant to \$10,000. Increases in vocational funds would be allocated under a census and poverty formula for the next three years. By 2002, the formula would be weighed 40 percent on the same population and 60 percent on its poverty rate (ED, July 24).

Last action: The House passed its bill, 414-12, on July 23.

Next action: The Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee expects to vote on a combined vocational and job training bill Wednesday. The draft bill would keep the programs' funding authority separate (ED, Aug. 28).

HEA Reauthorization H.R. 6: The bill would reauthorize funds for all existing Higher Education Act (HEA) programs, which expire Sept. 30. After the House writes new legislation for student aid and other programs under HEA, it will be substituted into H.R. 6.

Last action: The Education Department's inspector general pressed the House postsecondary education subcommittee in July to create a post for a nonpolitical student aid manager (ED, July 30).

Next action: The House Postsecondary Education, Training and Life-Long Learning Subcommittee has scheduled a hearing for Thursday on ED's troubled direct loan consolidation center (ED, Aug. 29). The Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee expects to work on its bill next year.

Juvenile Justice H.R. 1818: Would authorize an unspecified amount for state block grants that could be used to fund programs that encourage juveniles to stay in school; help coordinate local education, juvenile justice and social service programs; and leverage funds for scholarships in troubled neighborhoods.

H.R. 3, S. 10, S. 718: Would allow schools access to FBI juvenile felony records as part of an omnibus juvenile justice bill. H.R. 3 also would require states to have plans for schools to notify parents if juvenile sex offenders are enrolled in their child's school. S. 882, H.R. 2408: Would authorize \$50 million per year through fiscal 2002 in grants for after-school activities aimed at cutting juvenile crime.

Last action: The Senate Judiciary Committee passed S. 10 on July 24, with a 12-6 vote. The House passed H.R. 1818, with a 413-14 vote July 15. H.R. 2408 was introduced Sept. 4 by Rep. Zoe Lofgren, D-Calif.; referred to the House Education and the Workforce Committee.

Next action: The Senate could vote on S. 10 in October.

Just Introduced ...

Education Infrastructure S. 1160: Would provide \$1.9 billion over five years to pay interest on state and local bond issues to finance K-12 school repair, renovation, modernization and construction projects, similar to S. 12.

Last action: Introduced Sept. 10 by Sen. Thomas Daschle, D-S.D.; sent directly to the Senate floor.

Next action: No action is scheduled.

Property Taxes S. 1149: Would ensure property taxes, which often provide most local education revenues, are paid by bankruptcy estates and corporate debtors. The bill would prohibit bankruptcy courts from devaluing property during legal proceedings under most circumstances and would ensure property tax liens are paid before other bankruptcy expenses.

Last action: Introduced Sept. 4 by Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa; referred to the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Next action: The committee could take up the bill this month, and it could move to the Senate floor by October.

Higher Education Day Care S. 1151: Would authorize \$60 million over three years to support on-campus child care for low-income parents pursuing postsecondary education.

Last action: Introduced Sept. 5 by Sen. Christopher Dodd, D-Conn.; referred to the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee.

Next action: No action is scheduled.

Technology Donation Awards H.R. 2427: Would recognize businesses that donate technology to local schools in special ceremonies hosted by the Education Department.

Last action: Introduced Sept. 9 by Rep. Lynn Woolsey, D-Calif.; referred to the House Education and the Workforce Committee.

Next action: No action is scheduled. — Lauren Lazarovici, Jonathan Fox■

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1. The Washington Post

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

National Tests: A Yardstick to Learn By

By William J. Bennett and Chester E. Finn Jr.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For example, today's "standardized" tests do not actually contain any standards. They merely provide a statistical average: where you are within the group. Testing "at or above grade level" merely indicates how a student is performing relative to other students, not how much the student knows. And performing "at or above grade level" is not encouraging if the grade-level bar is set low — which is now the case.

As for the argument that voluntary national tests would reduce local and parental authority: If they are done right, the opposite will occur. The tests will empower parents by providing them with information critical to the success of reforms such as charter schools and school choice. And keep in mind: these tests would be voluntary. We are a nation at risk — and our flawed testing regime is one reason why. A good voluntary national test would be an important step forward. A bad testing program, on the other hand, would be a giant step backward, which brings us to the Clinton proposal.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. Associated Press

09-15 8:36p

Education secretary pitches testing idea in North Dakota visit

By DALE WETZEL

Associated Press Writer

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) - U.S. Education Secretary Richard Riley used a North Dakota appearance Monday to campaign for national reading and math testing, but the idea got a frosty reception from Gov. Ed Schafer.

"We cannot create a federal government monitoring system that will provide better oversight, guidance or concern for student learning than do parents ... who live and work and educate their children in local schools," Schafer said.

Riley, who finished a two-day visit to Bismarck on Monday, said the proposal to administer reading tests to fourth graders and math tests to eighth graders would be voluntary. President Clinton is pushing the idea, but is encountering resistance in Congress.

A similar exam already is administered to selected students, with the results used to extrapolate national results. Riley said North Dakota students have scored well on the existing test.

Clinton's proposal seeks to expand use of the test to all students, allowing parents to know how their children compare to those in other states, Riley said.

"We think it will empower parents, and will help students and teachers work together," he said. "It will have the effect of ... focusing America on making sure every child reads well by the end of the third grade."

Rep. Earl Pomeroy, D-N.D., said he supported Riley's effort. The national tests will point out which schools are doing well in meeting educational goals, he said.

"I want to know how ... my children are doing relative to the country," Pomeroy said. "It will ultimately be against the country that they compete as they play out their own lives, and their own careers."

Riley promoted the testing proposal at a Bismarck news conference and at a subsequent appearance at the North Dakota Conference on Education Improvement.

But Schafer, speaking at the conference, questioned the tests' usefulness and said they could threaten state and local education prerogatives.

He is afraid the exams could eventually be required, and be linked to federal education aid, the governor said.

"All too often, today's voluntary tests become tomorrow's mandatory tests," Schafer said. "The federal government should, as a rule, be developing programs ... that have fewer restrictions and mandates, not more."■

1. Los Angeles Times

* 09/16/97; Edition: Home Edition; Section: National Desk; Page A-5

National Perspective / EDUCATION

Debate Over National School Tests Offers Real-Life Lesson in Politics

Clinton's proposal to create exams seems modest, but it is enmeshed in epic dispute over who decides what society teaches its children.

By ELIZABETH SHOGREN

TIMES STAFF WRITER

WASHINGTON — The intensity of the battle over national education tests seems way out of proportion with what's at stake: only \$15 million in initial funding to develop the exams, and no federal mandate requiring anyone ever to take them.

But education officials and political analysts agree that by trying to institute the first national academic tests in reading and math, President Clinton is wading into a debate of epic scale.

It is a dispute that is likely to engulf the House this week, when opponents of national exams try to prohibit the Clinton administration from proceeding with the testing initiative. They are expected to win handily, setting the stage for a later showdown with the White House and Senate.

At its heart is a struggle as old as the republic itself, one that has waxed and waned in intensity but has never been fully resolved.

"This is the latest installment in the age-old dispute about who controls the schools—the federal government or the states," said Neal Katyal, an associate professor of law at Georgetown University. "It goes back to the Civil War, when the states

did not want to educate blacks and the federal government forced them to put a guarantee of education for all citizens in their constitutions."

One of Clinton's top legislative priorities is to create a national test of reading ability for fourth-graders and mathematics ability for eighth-graders. All states and school systems would be encouraged to participate in the testing program, but none would be required to do so.

The proposal has become a legislative lightning rod in Congress, particularly in the House. Rep. William F. Goodling (R-Pa.), chairman of the House Education and Work Force Committee, is sponsoring a proposal to prohibit the administration from spending any money to draft or administer the tests. The Goodling provision will be offered as an amendment to a sweeping education- and labor-spending bill as early as today, and House leaders are confident it will pass.

The Senate last week voted in favor of the tests, but its measure would alter the way they are developed and administered. After the House vote, the Senate and House will try to strike a compromise. The outcome is uncertain.

Clinton's advisors and Education Secretary Richard W. Riley say they will urge the president to veto the final education and labor appropriation if it includes the House provision to deny funding for national tests.

The latest skirmish in this long-running battle has created strange alliances. The Congressional Black Caucus, the National Assn. for the Advancement of Colored People and many liberal Democrats have joined forces with Republicans and groups like the Christian Coalition, Eagle Forum and Traditional Values Coalition to oppose the exams.

The motivations for opposing the tests, however, are very different. Conservatives argue that the federal government is about to usurp a power that the country's framers meant to belong to the states. Liberals worry that the tests could stigmatize students who, through no fault of their own, are receiving inadequate educations at their public schools.

"Our founding fathers knew very clearly what they were doing when they determined that education should be a local issue," said Sen. Charles Hagel (R-Neb.).

Conservatives fear that national tests represent a first step along a slippery slope of federal involvement in neighborhood schools.

"Parents want to continue to have control over education, and they feel this is another attempt by the Clinton administration to push on parents what they believe," said Andrea Sheldon of the Traditional Values Coalition, a conservative lobbying group. "It's based on the assumption that the parents don't know best; government knows best."

Conservatives fear that once the national tests are in place, local schools will feel pressure to adapt their teaching plans to ensure that their pupils perform well on the exams. "We're concerned with the effect it will have in creating a national curriculum," Sheldon said.

Even supporters of the tests say the opposition is understandable in light of the traditional feeling that education is a local and state prerogative.

"Historically, there has never been a national test that potentially all students could take," said Wayne Martin of the Council of Chief State School Officers, which represents the heads of state school systems across the country. "It's something brand new, and some people are viewing it as suspicious."

The debate over control of the schools is a battle the administration has fought before. The same charges were lodged against Clinton's Goals 2000 initiative, which is providing money to every state to develop improved academic standards and help students attain them. Last year, when congressional Republicans tried to abolish the Department of Education, they argued that getting rid of the agency would restore power over the schools to local communities and states.

When they attacked the Department of Education, however, many Americans interpreted their actions as an assault on education in general.

"Republicans have a very hard time distinguishing their antipathy for a department they don't like and a public commitment they say they have to improving education," said William Galston, professor of public affairs at the University of Maryland and a former Clinton advisor on education.

This murkiness turned out to be politically damaging for Republicans in 1996. Some Democrats are marveling that Republicans are willing to take up the battle again so soon.

"If they want to be known as the party against public education, so be it," said Paul Begala, an assistant to the president whose focuses are education and politics.

Polls show that the Education Department is among the government's most popular agencies. In fact, many Americans seem to overestimate its role in education, given that federal funds account for only about 6% of school budgets on average.

Ironically, the last time national tests were on the drawing board, it was a Republican president, George Bush, who proposed them. Most Republicans seemed to support them at the time, although some conservatives maintained they would undermine state and local authority over education. Many Democrats opposed them, arguing it would be unfair to test children without first improving schools so they would have a chance to score well.

This time around, most Democrats support Clinton's initiative. Notable exceptions are the House black and Hispanic caucuses, whose resistance reflects their sensitivity to the discrimination that minority children have faced through much of the country's history.

"Widespread misuse of educational testing has disproportionately penalized poor and minority children," said Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Los Angeles), chairwoman of the Congressional Black Caucus.

The Republican battle against national testing seems politically risky. A recent Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll, for example, indicates that about two-thirds of Americans believe national tests would significantly improve student performance. Nonetheless, Galston and other administration officials note that the GOP campaign against national tests seems even more fierce than previous education skirmishes.

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"As a veteran of the education wars, I am stunned by the intensity of the paranoia on this subject and its disconnection to any facts that I can observe," Galston said. "I can't imagine a sensible human being who would be threatened by broad-based rigorous tests in core subjects like reading and mathematics."

But some independent policy analysts say the vehemence of the debate is not that surprising.

"The amount of debate and tension is about what you would expect it to be, not because education has become so political, but because education is political, in the sense that it is about how we pass on our legacy to the next generation of folks," said Michael Casserly, executive director of the Great City Schools, a Washington-based organization that represents big-city school systems.

"That's an eminently political activity," Casserly said. "Nothing is fought over more passionately than people's kids."■

1. Sun-Sentinel Ft. Lauderdale

09/16/97; Edition: FINAL; Section: NATIONAL; Page 1A

NATIONAL TESTING, LOCAL DEBATE; THE QUESTION: WOULD IT BE YARDSTICK OR COSTLY REDUNDANCY?

By JILL YOUNG MILLER
Washington Bureau

The debate has raged in the hallways of Congress and the hallways of South Florida schools: Should the federal government be involved in local school districts' business?

President Clinton's call for national student tests faces a showdown vote in the House this week, possibly today. Clinton says the tests would give the nation a clearer picture of how students are performing.

But critics say they worry about federal intrusion into school curriculums _ and about the growing test burden on students.

"I don't see any need for it," said Van Ludy, executive director of the Palm Beach County Classroom Teachers Association. "We're tested to death already, especially in Florida."

Clinton wants to make his proposal to test the nation's fourth-graders in reading and its eighth-graders in math a hallmark of his second term. Those grade levels are considered crucial for measuring reading and math skills.

If Congress approves, the voluntary program would start in 1999. But getting school districts to buy into it may be difficult.

Only seven states and 15 urban school districts _ including Broward County _ have volunteered to adopt the program, which Clinton began pushing in his State of the Union address in February.

"We test our youngsters anyway," said Broward County School Board chairman Abraham Fischler. "We figured that we would then be able to compare ourselves with other large urban districts throughout the country."

Florida has not endorsed the plan, which is supported by Alaska, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Carolina and West Virginia. Among the urban districts signing on are New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Atlanta and Philadelphia.

The U.S. Education Department has estimated that the tests would cost about \$32 million to develop. Rep. Bill Goodling, R-Pa., chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, said he would rather send the money to the classrooms.

"Yet another test isn't going to improve the academic performance of a single American child," Goodling said. "As every American farmer knows, you can keep weighing a hog, but it won't get any fatter."

Goodling has sponsored an amendment that would effectively kill the tests by banning the use of federal money to develop them. The House GOP leadership is backing the measure, along with the "vast majority" of Republicans, a congressional aide said.

Despite strong opposition in the House, however, Clinton scored an important victory last week when the Senate overwhelmingly supported his plan.

The Senate-approved measure would shift control of the new tests from the U.S. Education Department, as the president proposed, to an independent board. Still, Clinton praised the Senate's 87-13 vote as "very good news" and a step to ensure that "children will master the basics of reading and math."

1. CNN Crossfire Sunday

September 14, 1997

National Education Tests

ANNOUNCER: National education tests for fourth and eighth graders in reading and math. A good way to measure achievements, or a bad way for the Feds to get into local affairs.

From Washington, CROSSFIRE SUNDAY. On the left, Bob Beckel, on the right, Lynne Cheney. In the crossfire Senator, Chuck Hagel, Republican from Nebraska and Marshall Smith acting Deputy Secretary of Education.

BOB BECKEL, CROSSFIRE: Good evening and welcome to CROSSFIRE SUNDAY. President Clinton has long favored national testing of student achievement of reading for fourth graders, and math for all eighth graders. The proposal reached the Senate this week and passed overwhelmingly, but not without changes. The Senate Bill took control of the testing away from the Department of Education and gave it to an independent board. The bill faces strong opposition in the House, where conservatives believe national testing is an unwarranted intrusion by the Federal Government in local affairs and liberals, who believe the tests are biased toward minorities. Proponents say the tests will provide parents and school systems with a yard stick to compare their students with the rest of the nation. Opponents say, this could be the ruination of American Education and surprise, surprise. Lynne where are you on this.

LYNNE CHENEY, CROSSFIRE: Well, I agree about that ruination part. Marshall Smith, thank you for being on CROSSFIRE with us. The President began this effort for national testing by saying math is math and reading is reading. But, in fact, these are highly controversial areas, aren't they?

MARSHALL SMITH, ACTING DEPUTY SECRETARY OF EDUCATION: There are certainly controversial in how to teach, but these tests are going to measure the end of teaching. That is, in the United States, we end teaching reading in fourth grade. So it's not whether you learn it through phonics or learn it through some other method. It is whether or not you can do it, whether you can read paragraphs, whether you can understand them, and so on. And in math, at eighth grade, if you haven't learned some algebra and some geometry and so on, you're not going to go into those college tracks.

CHENEY: But the real issue, of course, is whether you can compute in eighth grade and whether the things...

SMITH: Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no.

CHENEY: ... that this examination...

SMITH: The issue is not whether you can compute. The real issue...

CHENEY: Oh, you think that we should just...

SMITH: ... is whether you can go beyond computation to other things.

CHENEY: No, no, no, no, no, no. You — all right. Well, this is a very interesting debate because you're saying essentially it doesn't matter whether we test our...

SMITH: No, I'm not saying that at all.

CHENEY: ... eighth graders directly ...

SMITH: It's saying...

CHENEY: ... for addition, subtraction, multiplication, division...

SMITH: Absolutely you should test them directly for that...

CHENEY: Well, the test that you...

SMITH: ... but you've got to...

CHENEY: ... came up with said don't do it.

SMITH: We haven't come up with a test yet...

BOB BECKEL, ANCHOR: Well, let me — Senator Hagel, let me...

SMITH: ... and it will test that.

BECKEL: The — anybody think there wasn't going to be passion on this subject? You can forget that. Senator, the Constitution says we're one nation under God, and I — you know, with that in mind — you know, we're not 50 independent islands out there — what's wrong with giving parents and school administrators a measure of their performance compared with kids around the country who ultimately they may have to compete with for jobs?

SEN. CHUCK HAGEL, (R), NEBRASKA: Well, I start with this maybe old-fashioned premise. I think education's a local issue. Constitutionally, it has always been that way. I don't know what the federal government can do, should do, or bring to the enhancement of education. I'm concerned, always have been about — not about testing — good or bad, obviously, there has to be some measurement to understand how well our students are doing — but what will develop, and I think what has developed is that our teachers teach to the test. We should be motivated by learning and not by testing, and so I prefer to believe that education is most effective and efficient and should reside at the local level with the parents who have the most to win or lose by educating their children, the teachers who we ask to teach our children, not the Washington people. I don't have anything against government or the Department of Education, but they're not closest to the issue. Our people who have the most to win or lose should, the people who are most motivated — parents, teachers, school boards — should be making the decisions whether we test, how we test, and what we test but, more importantly, what we teach.

BECKEL: OK, but, Senator, lest we leave the impression here that this is a Republican versus Democratic issue, I will remind you that this week Bill Bennett, former Secretary of Education, came out for this compromise legislation in the Senate, thought we needed national testing, and lo' and behold, I see that the Bush administration — Lamar Alexander, Secretary of Education, didn't call for just one test. He and President Bush called for 15 national tests. Now if Bush and Alexander and Bennett, who are immersed in this, believe it's a good idea, why don't you?

HAGEL: Well, I'm not here to defend President Bush or the former secretaries of education. They must have...

BECKEL: Obviously.

HAGEL: They have their point of view, and all are experienced and enlightened and care about the future of our children, our students. I just take a different view as some of my colleagues in that I don't believe continuing to allow the federal government to creep further and further into education, every dynamic of education, learning, testing, dictating what should be done, are our children smart enough or not smart — again, I go back to three fundamentals really, Bob. One is who's money is this? It's the parents' money, the taxpayers' money who's financing this. Gee, I think they ought to have some opportunity to put their money where they think their children can be best educated. Second, who has the most to win or lose out of good education? The parents. And, third, who do we ask to teach? The teachers. So what does that mean to me? It means to me that we should be focusing in helping those people at the local level teach what's most important to...

BECKEL: Well...

CHENEY: I have...

BECKEL: Go ahead, Lynne. I'm sorry. Go ahead. Go ahead.

CHENEY: I'm going to make a confession. I mean, I don't do this often on CROSSFIRE, but I...

BECKEL: That's for sure.

CHENEY: ... too used to be an advocate of national testing, as President Bush was. I worked for President Bush. However, Mike, don't you think...

SMITH: And we were on a committee together where we both came out and signed a document that said...

CHENEY: Don't you think...

SMITH: ... we should have national...

CHENEY: ... that we should learn from experience? After that...

SMITH: Absolutely.

CHENEY: First of all, we had national history standards that were a total disaster, that made it look like this was the most racist, sexist country that had ever existed. After that, we had English language...

SMITH: Which you did support at the time.

CHENEY: ... that were so bad — oh, and I condemned them when I saw them.

SMITH: Oh, I understand.

CHENEY: We had English language arts standards that your own department, after putting...

SMITH: That's right.

CHENEY: ... a million dollars into, had to condemn. Now we've had the specifications for this math test — and please don't act like you don't know what these are — which say we are not going to test direct — or we are not going to directly test full number computation, and just in case we indirectly test it, we're going to give every kid a calculator throughout. This is a disaster, too. Don't you think we should...

SMITH: Well, let me answer that in two ways.

CHENEY: ... learn from experience...

SMITH: First of all...

CHENEY: ... that national standards in testing are a disaster?

SMITH: No, I don't. I — first of all — and I think we'll find, in fact, that it's a very strong element of American education in the future. First of all, on that — on the — on this test specification, that's a — one committee that's proposed that.

CHENEY: The committee that the Department of Education put in place.

SMITH: No. No, that was put into place in exactly the same way it was put into place for NAEP, and NAEP is — National Assessment of Educational Progress has turned out to be a very strong...

CHENEY: The Department of Education has no responsibility for this, you're telling me?

SMITH: That's right. We set up...

CHENEY: Oh, for heaven's sake.

SMITH: No, no, no, and now...

CHENEY: It's your money.

SMITH: ... and now with the Senate...

CHENEY: It's your people.

SMITH: What the Senate did was create — the Senate created...

CHENEY: You were in charge of all those meetings, Mike Smith.

SMITH: But I didn't set up those...

BECKEL: But...

CHENEY: This is the most amazing thing.

SMITH: ... test specifications, and there are other speci — there are other committees that are going to come along and, I believe,

change them...

BECKEL: Now can I...

SMITH: ... and the Department doesn't agree with that.

BECKEL: All right. I — let me in here for a — I sort of got lost on — what is this, whole math or — anyway, could I get back to the basics here?

CHENEY: That's what we all want to do.

BECKEL: I know. That's fine. I just want to get back to the basics. Chuck, the — you made a point about, you know, it's local tax dollars and all that, and they've got the most to win or lose, but who really has the most to win or lose here, we all agree, are our kids, particularly in the public school system. Certain states provide pretty good education, certain school districts do, but a lot do not. I'll give you a point. In Louisiana, the Louisiana standard for math when tested by Louisiana said 79 percent of our kids in Louisiana are — have passed our criteria for math. When the kids were tested using essentially the same kind of test that is being proposed here by the federal government, only 8 percent of them — 8 percent of them — passed that criteria. Now who's being punished here are the kids from Louisiana who have to compete with kids from Connecticut who do much better in these tests.

HAGEL: But, Bob, I'm not sure what that has to do with anything.

BECKEL: It has to do with a lot!

HAGEL: By testing, you're finding out the kids in Louisiana are not getting the — as good an education as the children from Connecticut? That's interesting, isn't it? What does that do to help — just a moment here. What does that do to help focus not on the problem, but how do you get better? How can you then teach what you

need to teach? Are you saying the parents and the teachers in Louisiana don't care as much about educating their children?

BECKEL: Well, I'm certain that they care, but let me put it this way. That kid from Louisiana may some day compete with a kid from Connecticut for a job in Pennsylvania, and if his math skills are lousy and the kid's in Connecticut are better, that kid in Louisiana's going to lose out because...

HAGEL: Well, of course.

BECKEL: ... frankly, of a not very good education system where they are.

HAGEL: Well, of course. So what are you saying then? The federal government is the only one smart enough, big enough, tough enough, and caring enough to go in and force the people — the parents and teachers...

BECKEL: Well, somebody damn well better care about these kids.

HAGEL: That is an arrogance that is what...

SMITH: Well, let me get in...

HAGEL: ... is ruining the system.

SMITH: Let me get in here. This is a voluntary test. The people in Omaha have said they would like to take the test. It seems to me that's a local control issue or state control issue. If the people in New Orleans want New Orleans students to take that test, they should have the opportunity to do it. Now...

HAGEL: That's just part of the equation, though.

SMITH: That is part of the equation, exactly, but that is — it is a voluntary test. It's going to go out there, and it's going to give a common standard for parents so they understand how their student — how their child would be doing if they were in Minnesota or in Louisiana or New Jersey.

HAGEL: Don't you believe that the parents and the teachers, the school boards at the local levels have that ability to be able to get some sense of, first of all, what should we teach, why should we teach, math, reading, all the things that need...

SMITH: I think if they want to get new...

HAGEL: ... for our young people?

SMITH: If they want to get new information by having — by using a voluntary test, they should be able to do that.

CHENEY: But, Mike Smith, let me just — you're being a little disingenuous here. In these many meetings that were held about developing math and reading tests, you said repeatedly, "This test is about driving instruction and curriculum." You said it repeatedly.

SMITH: Right, exactly...

CHENEY: Even before the test is in place, you said, "We are..."

SMITH: ... and that was based...

CHENEY: "... going to control, drive..."

SMITH: No, no, no. I never said control.

CHENEY: "... curriculum and teaching across this country."

SMITH: I never said...

CHENEY: What's the difference between drive and control?

SMITH: What I was doing was citing the Third International Math and Science Study which showed very clearly that our students in mathematics scored below the international median. That's horrendous. That means...

CHENEY: That's right.

SMITH: ... it's going to be very tough for us in the future...

CHENEY: That is horrendous.

SMITH: ... and if we don't change...

CHENEY: On this rare note of agreement...

SMITH: If we don't change...

BECKEL: We're going to take this up...

CHENEY: On this rare note of agreement....

BECKEL: Go ahead, Lynne.

CHENEY: ... we're supposed to go to break, but we'll be back to discuss this some more.

(BEGIN GRAPHIC)

CNN/"Time" Poll: Do you support a national testing standard? Yes — 56 percent. No — 35 percent. September 10-11, 1997

(END GRAPHIC)

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

PRES. CLINTON (Monday): We'll know if the children need help measuring up to national standards. We'll know if a class needs help. We'll know if a school needs help.

REP. NEWT GINGRICH, (R), HOUSE SPEAKER (September 4): The President's focusing on the wrong end. He's focusing on Washington bureaucracy, Washington regulation.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

CHENEY: Welcome back to CROSSFIRE SUNDAY.

Who should be in charge of our schools — the federal government, or should it be the state? That's one of the questions that will be debated this week as the House of Representatives considers an amendment to shut down President Clinton's plans for national tests.

Here with us tonight to talk about this, Marshall Smith, Mike — also known as Mike — acting deputy secretary of education, and Senator Chuck Hagel, a Republican from Nebraska.

BECKEL: Man, you can tell Lynne Cheney feels strongly about this. Federal takeover of education? That is a bit strong. Let me get back...

CHENEY: Did I say that?

BECKEL: Yes, you did. I...

CHENEY: Well, if I didn't, I meant it.

BECKEL: And — well, that's — man, what a leap of — that is, but let me go back to your point about local choice. A number of states and cities and school districts, including, I believe, in your own state of Nebraska, have welcomed this idea. They want it because they believe that they need a measurement vis-a-vis the rest of the country. That's their choice. This is a voluntary exercise, Chuck. Why in the world would you not allow a local school district or a state to have the choice?

HAGEL: Oh, it's not at all not allowing. It's just the opposite. I think Newt Gingrich is exactly right, and he capsulized it effectively. The President, as well intentioned as he is, and my friend, Mike, and others at the Department of Education, all well intentioned — I don't impugn at all their motivation, but I think they are coming at it from the wrong end. We ought to be starting with — in my opinion, at the base level, the fundamentals, the local level, and working our way up. It is — it is a local issue. I don't believe that the President or anyone else — starting at the top and forcing down standards is the right way to go. If the local school boards, teachers, parents, state, wish to engage in standards, in testing, and other issues that are all part of education, appropriately so, then it should be their choice. Allowing the money to go back, as we did with the Slade Gorton amendment, by the way, this week, which I think tells a very interesting story of what's happening out in the country today — so let...

BECKEL: But, Senator...

HAGEL: ... them decide.

BECKEL: Senator, wait a minute. I — let's assume that this does pass and the State of Nebraska, by their choice, decides that they want to participate in a national testing program. Are you going to oppose that?

HAGEL: Of course, I will not. That's my whole point. Let them decide it, but why do they need...

BECKEL: Well, why not give them the choice?

HAGEL: Why do we...

BECKEL: I mean, why not give...

HAGEL: Well, we are giving them a choice. That's the whole point.

BECKEL: It would seem to me that's the most American thing to do.

HAGEL: No. No, we are giving them a choice. Let's look at all the dynamics. First of all, the Senate voted for the Gorton amendment this week to bypass the Department of Education on much of the federal monies going to the states. Go back, give them choice, give the local school boards and the states choice as to where they apply that money, number one. Number two, another dynamic of education is testing. Testing is at the other end. The first part of education should be — I've always believed, is actually teaching and learning and thinking and doing the things that you need to get you to where you test. Now...

CHENEY: Let me just...

HAGEL: One other thing on this, Lynne. What I am concerned about — and if the people in Nebraska or anywhere else in America wish to engage in national testing, that's their business, that's fine, but...

BECKEL: Fine.

CHENEY: All right. Let me just get in here. Let me get in here with a point because I think Bob makes entirely too much out of this voluntary euphemism that the administration has put on these tests. This test will be an 800-pound gorilla. Let me show you how that works. There are parents in California right now in a war about how to teach math. I happen to be on a particular side of that, but it doesn't matter which side you're on. They're fighting it out. They're going to reach a result. They're going to do their best for

the kids of California. This national math test could well come out quite differently, and it will affect teaching in California. It will override all that effort that these parents, that policymakers at the local level have put into deciding how their kids should learn. What right does the federal government, what right does the Department of

Education, what right does the National Assessment Governing Board have to interfere in this perfectly legitimate discussion and decision-making going on in California?

SMITH: The National Assessment Governing Board is a representative group of people, many of them elected officials, who hold meetings out in the open, and you've been talking a lot about statements I've made. Every one of those statements has been out in the open. Everybody's been able to discuss them with us. The — as the Senator said, if the local — if the locals or the states want to use something like a national test to see whether or not they are, in fact, educating their kids in the way that they would like to, they ought to be able to use it.

CHENEY: Let's get back to this question...

SMITH: I mean, let's...

CHENEY: ... of openness for a minute because you have not put up any transcripts on the Internet since the end of May. You have been as secretive about the decision-making that has gone into President Clinton's national testing plan as Mrs. Clinton...

SMITH: No, I mean, that's...

CHENEY: ... was about the healthcare proposal. They aren't...

SMITH: No, no, Lynne. That's just...

CHENEY: ... there. I have looked and looked.

SMITH: I don't know...

CHENEY: You promised to be open. You haven't been open.

SMITH: We absolutely have been open. All those meetings have been open, Lynne. You know those...

CHENEY: Do you promise that these transcripts are going to be available...

SMITH: Well, I'm not sure what transcripts you mean.

CHENEY: ... to the public next week? Of all the meetings that have been held at taxpayer expense that should have been open...

BECKEL: Can I...

SMITH: They are not — there have not been meetings...

CHENEY: ... to the public and should have been on the Internet.

SMITH: There have not been meetings that have been — there have not been open meetings. There have not been meetings about the — I haven't held meetings about the tests.

BECKEL: All right. Could I...

CHENEY: That's ridiculous. You know exactly what I'm talking about, and you're being disingenuous, and that's...

SMITH: No, I'm not.

CHENEY: ... one of the things I really resent about the administration's efforts on national testing.

BECKEL: All right. You can all...

CHENEY: They aren't being honest.

SMITH: We have made...

BECKEL: OK. You can all tune in to Wide World of Wrestling later for these two on this subject. I don't know — I'm the least educated at this table here, but...

HAGEL: By what standard? By testing? Or how do you know that?

BECKEL: By a football scholarship that barely got me through school, but — I don't know about the reading side of this, you could argue, because I, frankly, have a little problem with Hispanic children and using English for the testing, but as far as I know, math is math is math. Two plus two is four. Now wouldn't it be good to know that the kids in Louisiana — half of them can add numbers together, and the other half can't, whereas in another state, 90 percent of them can add the same numbers together. That means that there's something wrong with the teaching process in Louisiana, and if we don't have some way to judge that, these kids are suffering in — because of some antiquated idea of states' rights and let these teachers do — you and I both know a lot of these teachers are not very good. There are still patronage teachers in America. Some of these school districts are being run by Christian Coalition people, for God's sake, who ought to be dumped out of the school system. I mean, come on!

HAGEL: Well, Bob, you just made...

BECKEL: You're assuming that everybody is just a wonderful teacher. We have all their — the kids' hearts in mind here. We don't. Let's get back to math. Two plus two is four. If a kid in Louisiana ain't got that right and a kid in New York does, the kid in Louisiana has a bad school system.

HAGEL: Bob, you've just made every case I know of for why we need to have choice, why we need to pass the Coverdell amendment, why we need...

BECKEL: What is choice about two plus plus? What am I missing?

HAGEL: ... allowing — well, first of all, I have enough confidence in the parents in Louisiana, which we're — since we're picking on poor Louisiana here, but any parent from any state and the teachers, that they do know the difference between teaching children how to add and how to subtract and going through the mental discipline

and the logic that is part of math versus not understanding that. I think that's pretty basic. Now how is testing, for example, national testing — the Department of Education, the President, everybody pushing down — how is that going to improve the teaching? I think you improve the teaching by getting the parents into it, giving them the resources and the teachers and the school

boards and letting them make the decision.

BECKEL: Chuck, Lake County, Florida — the school system was taken over by the Christian Coalition...

CHENEY: Oh, for heaven's sake.

BECKEL: ... and those kids are getting a bad education because they're being taught the Bible and not two plus two equals four.

CHENEY: You don't...

BECKEL: And they were dumped, by the way.

CHENEY: You don't have your facts straight.

BECKEL: I certainly do...

CHENEY: No, you don't.

BECKEL: ... and they were voted out, thank God.

SMITH: Senator, let me tell you how. This test is a very different test than other tests. The information from this test will be on the Web page immediately after the test is given, the questions themselves and the answers and descriptions of what the test is measuring, what domains it's measuring so you have a sense about what kids are understanding. This test alone among tests — the teacher will get back the specific items and the answers that each individual child will get and will be able to match them up against the tests and...

BECKEL: Chuck, very...

SMITH: ... describe very, very good diagnoses of what to do.

BECKEL: Senator, very fast response. We've got to get out of here. Do you have any response to that?

HAGEL: Well...

BECKEL: No? OK. Go ahead. Well, that's — what a nice guest you are. Senator Chuck Hagel of Nebraska, thank you for being here. Marshall "Mike" Smith, thank you very much, from the Department of Education. Lynne and I are going to come back and discuss this, and I think Lynne will be calm about this, but she surely feels quite strongly about it and, of course, I always admire her for that.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

CHENEY: This is such an incredibly important issue. It's getting short shrift being debated on the sidelines during an appropriations bill. What should happen is there should be a clean bill introduced. Should we have national testing? Should we not have national testing? Debate it on a clean bill and let's get all these issues out in the open.

BECKEL: I'm just — I'm amazed how passionate you are, and I'm — I think that's wonderful, but what I don't — still don't understand is — this is a voluntary test. You can take it or not. Some states have already said they would like to. Some school districts haven't. A voluntary test to check yourself against kids in the other parts of the country who you will compete with for jobs on down the road seems to me to be so noncontroversial that I just don't get it.

CHENEY: As soon as the federal government does anything, it's not voluntary because the federal government can put its hand into the Treasury and spend amounts of money that no other entity in this world can. When you've got somebody spending millions of dollars on a test, it will drive testing and instruction across the country. Curriculum and instruction.

BECKEL: I think this is — the federal government is your biggest problem with this, right? Maybe not testing.

From the left, proud to be liberal, I'm Bob Beckel. Good night from CROSSFIRE SUNDAY.

CHENEY: And from the right, and right on every issue, I'm Lynne Cheney. Join us again tomorrow night at 7:30 p.m. Eastern for another edition of CROSSFIRE. ■

But Florida Education Commissioner Frank Brogan said he had "grave concerns" that national student tests could lead to national curriculum standards that would not be rigorous or challenging enough, at a time when Florida is trying to make its own strides.

This is the first full school year for Florida's new across-the-curriculum standards for elementary, middle and high school students. It is also the first school year for the new Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, which will be administered to fourth-, eighth- and 10th-graders in January.

Palm Beach County schools are not likely to join Broward in embracing Clinton's plan "until we understand more" about them, said Marc Baron, director of research, evaluation and accountability for the district.

"It is unclear at this moment what exactly this test is going to look like," he said. "The question would be to what extent this testing program would serve to help the district understand its students better."

Teachers already have "a barrage" of tests to administer, Ludy said.

"I do get concerns from teachers: 'If so much time is taken testing, when are we supposed to teach?' "■

1. The Kansas City Star

09/14/97; Edition: METROPOLITAN; Section: NATIONAL/WORLD; Page A24

Ashcroft mixes religion, action in pitch to Christian Coalition; Senator from Missouri, pondering run in 2000, addresses convention.

By DAVID GOLDSTEIN

Washington Correspondent

ATLANTA - One minute he was fiercely outspoken, haranguing the president for his drug policy and then his own Republican Party for soft-pedaling its longstanding policy opposing abortion.

The next minute, U.S. Sen. John Ashcroft was quietly humble, asking his audience to pray for him and his wife as they weigh whether he should run for president in 2000.

"It is with a measure of trepidation that I consider my own role in the next century," Ashcroft told the Christian Coalition Saturday at its annual convention.

"So, Janet and I ask for your prayers in the months ahead that as we consider the nation's highest office it would be in the spirit of Christ."

The speech was vintage Ashcroft, a mixture of religion and action that has been the hallmark of his public career. It began slowly, then built momentum. He was interrupted several times by applause, particularly when he attacked abortion and the tax system.

The loudest came at the end, along with signs in the audience imploring him to run for president and a brief chant of "Go John, go!"

But the speech was also a mirror of the confluence of faith and politics that has characterized the Christian Coalition since it was created eight years ago.

It began from the ashes of founder Pat Robertson's unsuccessful 1988 presidential campaign. Since then, his grass-roots supporters scattered around the country have been molded and shaped into what coalition leaders said is a 1.9-million member group devoted to changing the moral and political climate of the country.

Ralph Reed, the 36-year-old former executive director and key architect of that strategy, said the coalition "awakened the sleeping giant of the American evangelical vote."

It is that vote that Ashcroft, Missouri's one-term senator with little national name recognition, is trying to harness as he looks for a route to the 2000 Republican presidential nomination.

Whether the group ends up backing him or any of the other likely GOP hopefuls, several of whom also were in Atlanta, Ashcroft was before a friendly audience. He was a hit at the group's convention two years ago when he gave an emotionally stirring speech about his father.

This time, with Saturday night's prime time speaking spot at his disposal, he called on the nearly 2,000 conventioners gathered for two days at an Atlanta Marriott hotel to elect "leadership that calls America to her highest and best, rather than accommodating her at her lowest and least."

Before a group for whom family issues - from abortion to tax cuts to educational choice - are the tangible nuts and bolts of its spiritual platform, Ashcroft was on friendly ground.

He talked about payroll tax cuts: "It's time to end the double tax on work by letting people deduct Social Security payroll taxes from their income taxes."

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He talked about education and President Clinton's push for national standards. "The president has it exactly wrong. The last thing we need is a dumbed-down battery of national tests and a one-size-fits-all national curriculum."

But Missouri's former two-term governor saved his most pointed barbs for abortion, which continues to divide the Republican Party. It caused friction last summer at the GOP convention, which nominated former Sen. Bob Dole. Some leaders were worried about the party being cast as intolerant, puncturing its image as a "big tent" encompassing many viewpoints. They also were worried about losing the women's vote.

But Ashcroft remained adamant.

"To the so-called leaders who say abortion is 'too politically divisive,' let me be clear," he told the coalition. "Confronting our cultural crises is the true test of our courage and true measure of our leadership. It is time for us to reacquire our party with the politics of principle ... We must not seek the deal, we seek the ideal."

Asked about Ashcroft, Ann Lawrence, a coalition member from Florida, said the early talk "floating" around Republican circles is that (Texas Gov.) George W. Bush is going to be the nominee. "I was a Pat Buchanan supporter last time," she said of the right-wing commentator and erstwhile Republican presidential candidate. "But Ashcroft is a good Christian man."

A few hours before his speech, the senator, in khakis and a golf shirt, was dishing ice cream into Coca-Cola cups. It

was a standard part of his campaign repertoire and a politically homier way to meet voters than buttoned up in a starched shirt and dark suit as they are herded into a hotel hospitality suite.

“We need statesmanship from our senators, from our presidents,” Doris Fowler of Powder Springs, Ga., said as Ashcroft ladled two scoops of vanilla ice cream into her cup. “I pray for you.”

Ashcroft paused. “Yes,” he said. “Pray for me.”■

1. Philadelphia Inquirer

Sept. 13, 1997

Some school districts feel nationwide tests will help reforms **They say they're willing to take the heat from critics of Clinton's plan. The majority are terrified of it.**

By Elsa C. Arnett

INQUIRER WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON — All over America, states and school districts are terrified of President Clinton's proposal for national tests in reading and math.

Developing universal tests is too complicated, the results may be too humiliating, and the federal government should not meddle in local school matters, they say.

But seven states and more than a dozen cities — including Philadelphia — are undaunted: They plan to administer the new tests and subject their school districts to the scrutiny that inevitably will follow.

So determined are these states and cities to improve their schools that they decided to participate in the tests as part of their own ongoing, ambitious reforms. And now, they say, they are willing to take any heat as the national criticism trickles down.

"This is a very conservative state," said John Langan, president of Nebraska's Omaha School Board, which decided in July to participate. "And people are probably going to go nuts about the tests. But I'm going to tell them that it's better to be in the tent talking about the tests than on the outside wondering what's happening."

Like Omaha, many of these districts and states — which also include Chicago and Seattle, and North Carolina, Massachusetts and Michigan — are considered leaders in educational reform and are used to stirring up passions.

"When we started giving out report cards on the quality of schools and taking over schools that were not performing well, it was not well-received," said Ron Peiffer, assistant state superintendent for public schools in Maryland, which was the first state to sign up for the national tests. "People thought it was draconian because they were very fearful of being held accountable. But parents want to know how their kids are doing, and these tests are another way to give them that information."

Clinton raised the idea of testing fourth graders in reading and eighth graders in math in his February State of the Union address. The tests are intended to set a high, uniform measure that can be used to compare students, schools and school districts nationwide.

Under his plan, 300 schools next year would try out the 90-minute exams. In 1999, the program would be open to all states and school districts; participation would be voluntary.

The Senate voted Thursday to support the \$27 million plan to create the tests, while the House is expected to vote against it next week. Lawmakers most likely then would try to forge a compromise.

Some groups that oppose the plan, including the conservative Family Research Council, fear that the federal government will try to impose a national curriculum on local schools. Others, such as the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, worry that the scores could be used to dump minority students into second-rate classes. Still others, such as the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, think students who do not speak English well will perform poorly.

The states participating in the tests say they are well aware of what they are embarking on.

"It's a double-edged sword," admitted Robert Grobe, who oversees testing services for California's fourth-largest school district, the Fresno Unified School District, which will take part in the pilot testing next year.

"On the good side, we want to know, and parents want to know, where their kids stand. On the bad side, we are a large district with a lot of factors that can depress achievement, and that could show up in the tests, and we could become a lightning rod for criticism," Grobe said.

Districts such as Chicago see the national tests as a way to help teachers tailor academic plans for students (each student would receive his or her score). Individualized education plans are among measures the city has adopted over the last three years to improve education. Others include tough academic standards, an expanded preschool program, and an end to grade inflation and social promotion.

"We sent 42,000 kids to summer school this year — it's been very controversial — but parents realize that's what it takes," said Cozette Buckney, chief education officer for Chicago's public schools. "I think they'll feel the same way about these tests."

But some that already have committed to the tests still are not entirely sold on them.

Los Angeles and Houston say they will administer only the math test. The school districts are dropping the reading test because it is in English, a language in which fewer than half of each city's fourth graders are proficient.

"If we gave the exam in English, we would, in effect, only be testing barely half of our students, and it wouldn't give us much of a measure of anything," said Terry Abbott, spokesman for the Houston Independent School District.

Teachers are approaching the exams with a mix of interest and anxiety. While they do not welcome another exam that

will take away from their teaching time, they are eager to get more specific performance results.

Veteran fourth-grade teacher Jennifer Smith, from Central Elementary School in rural Elizabeth, N.C., said her district may not have the computers and resources that more affluent communities do, but "we don't expect any less from our kids, and we think they are capable of it. It would be nice to see if that is true."

"Going outside of your system" with national tests, Smith said, "is the only way to find that out."■

1. Portland Oregonian

09/13/97; Edition: SUNRISE; Section: WIRE STORIES; Page A16

7 STATES, 14 COMMUNITIES WILL TEST NATIONAL TESTING

By ELSA C. ARNETT

Knight-Ridder News Service

Summary: Fourth-graders will take a standardized reading exam and eighth-graders a math exam under Clinton's proposal

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The public is divided. A national survey conducted in February by American Viewpoint, a Republican-leaning polling firm in Virginia, indicated that 86 percent of registered voters polled agreed that schools should administer standardized tests. But when asked whether the federal government should help develop a national test for reading and math, about 49 percent favored federal involvement and 47 percent opposed it.■

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1. The Washington Post

09/12/97; Edition: FINAL; Section: A Section; Page A02

Senate Backs Modified Plan For National Student Tests; Separate Action Would Shift Education Funds to Block Grants

By Rene Sanchez
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Senate yesterday expressed overwhelming support for President Clinton's plan to have students take national tests in reading and math, giving him an important political victory for a controversial proposal he wants to make a hallmark of his second term.

But the decision came during a day of tumultuous battle in Congress over the federal government's role in education that crossed party lines and left the White House worried about the fate of many of its other initiatives for schools.

In a separate vote, the Senate also decided 51 to 49 to make a radical change in how the nation's schools can use billions of dollars in federal education aid, shifting funding decisions away from the federal government to the states.

On national testing, which would be an unprecedented step in American education, the Senate decided 87 to 13 to support a modified version of Clinton's plan. It would shift control of the new tests from the Education Department, as the president originally had proposed, to an independent board.

The vote sets the stage for a showdown with the House over the issue. But White House officials said they are confident the strength of the Senate's support will salvage the tests even if, as some expect, lawmakers in the House vote to kill the tests by banning federal funding even to develop them.

Clinton said the Senate's action "will help parents to ensure that their children will master the basics of reading and math. . . . This is very, very good news."

The proposal to change how schools get federal funding, introduced by Sen. Slade Gorton (R-Wash.), would convert more than \$11 billion that the Education Department now targets explicitly for such purposes as providing poor students extra educational aid, or improving classroom technology and teacher training, into open-ended block grants that state and local school districts could spend however they choose.

Gorton said the change would give federal money directly to officials who know best how to use it in classrooms and would reduce federal meddling in schools. "This vote represents a triumph for the nation's education system," he said.

But Education Secretary Richard W. Riley warned that the Senate's action, which he called a "backdoor attempt to kill the Department of Education," also would abolish many vital programs for students, including Clinton's Goals 2000 grants for school reform.

Even as they denounced that vote, White House officials said they were overjoyed — and relieved — that the Senate decided to embrace the new national tests, which would be given on a voluntary basis by the states. In recent weeks, the future of the proposal, which has divided many educators, had seemed bleak.

But a compromise hammered out over a week of negotiation with the administration won it more than enough support in the Senate. The compromise requires that the tests be managed entirely by the National Assessment Governing Board, an independent, bipartisan agency created by Congress in 1988. As part of the deal, the makeup of the 25-member board, which oversees other tests, also will change.

Two mayors, one from each major party, will be added to the panel and so will several more representatives from business and industry. A third governor, chosen from whichever party does not control the White House, also will join the board.

Sen. Dan Coats (R-Ind.), initially a staunch opponent of the testing plan, said the administrative changes demanded by the Senate alleviated the fears that he and other lawmakers had about it.

"A voluntary national test, which states and parents may choose to participate in, will give parents another tool . . . to measure their children's academic achievement and hold local schools accountable," Coats said.

Giving students national tests is a common practice in many other nations, but in this country schools rely only on state or local tests to gauge how students are performing in class. Many educators and business leaders, however, say those tests vary too widely, lack rigor and often have no consequences for those who fail.

Clinton contends the tests would give the nation a much better picture of how schools are faring and encourage educators to demand more from students. But in recent weeks the proposal has come under attack by a politically diverse collection of critics.

Some liberal lawmakers say the idea could unfairly stigmatize poor, minority students stuck in disadvantaged schools, and some conservatives fear the tests would invite too much federal intrusion into classrooms. Some educators, meanwhile, say the goals of the tests are too vague, or argue that students are already tested too much.

At this point, only seven states, including Maryland, and 15 of the nation's largest urban school systems — the District is not among them — have agreed to use the tests. Many governors remain skeptical of the idea. Persuading them to adopt the

tests may be difficult for Clinton, even with congressional backing.

The administration has been moving swiftly this summer to develop the tests; Clinton has proposed that schools begin using them in 1999. Fourth-graders would be tested in reading and eighth-graders would be tested in math under the president's plan.

Those two subjects are widely perceived to be the most vital that schools teach, and the two grade levels are considered pivotal times to assess what students know. Each test would last 90 minutes and be based on an exam known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which is highly regarded by many educators. Sample groups of students nationwide have taken that test for decades.

The House is planning to vote next week on Clinton's testing plan and lawmakers there who oppose it said they have not been dissuaded by the Senate's action. Rep. William F. Goodling (R-Pa.), chairman of the Committee on Education and the Workforce, said he still thinks national tests are a bad idea even with the changes that the Senate has made to Clinton's plan.

"Rather than spend \$100 million on more tests, House Republicans and many Democrats would rather send federal dollars directly to the classroom," he said. "We support higher academic standards, but they should be developed in states and communities — not Washington."

Staff writers Helen Dewar and John E. Yang contributed to this report.■

1. The Wall Street Journal

09/12/97

Senate Votes School Aid in Block Grant, Putting Clinton Testing Plans in Doubt

By David Rogers

Staff Reporter of The Wall Street Journal

WASHINGTON — The Senate voted to sweep billions of dollars in school aid into a single block grant that would give localities new flexibility but undercut President Clinton's education-reform initiatives.

The 51-49 roll call stunned the White House and greatly complicates its fight to save funding for Mr. Clinton's national testing initiative in math and reading. The vote came even as the Senate ratified a compromise on testing, and as the administration hoped to build a strong base from which to negotiate with the more hostile House.

In a single stroke, the block-grant amendment upends that strategy. Mr. Clinton could lose control of not only the money he wants for testing but the entire \$500 million budgeted for his Goals 2000 reform program. The White House condemned the vote as a "backdoor attempt" to do away with the Education Department, and the outcome testifies to the intense politics surrounding education going into next year's midterm elections.

Even the amendment's chief sponsor, Sen. Slade Gorton (R., Wash.), was surprised at the win and said the vote demonstrated a growing sentiment for more local control of how school-aid dollars are spent. This has been a recurring theme this week in conservative attacks on pending bills to fund the Education Department, and Mr. Gorton said this lesson can't be ignored even if his amendment is ultimately scuttled.

Mr. Gorton and his co-sponsor, Senate Budget Committee Chairman Pete Domenici (R., N.M.), are regarded as Republican Party centrists, and the pivotal vote came on a tabling motion decided by Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Ted Stevens (R., Alaska), who falls into the same camp. Mr. Stevens first voted to table the measure, forcing a 50-50 tie. But before the White House could bring Vice President Al Gore to the Capitol to break the deadlock, Mr. Stevens switched after winning the promise of concessions regarding aid for Indian school districts in his state.

The maneuvering came just minutes before final passage of the underlying bill providing about \$269 billion for the departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services for the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1. The House won't complete action on its own companion bill until next week, but House Education Committee Chairman William Goodling (R., Pa.) said yesterday that he will have more than 300 votes — or well over two-thirds of the House — voting with him against funds for testing.

The politics surrounding the education budget represent a shift from just two years ago, when Republicans were demanding deep cuts from many of the same aid programs that would be in the proposed block grant. The 1996 election forced a dramatic change in tone, and in the balanced-budget plan enacted last month, the administration won the promise of more money for education and what was loosely described as reform.

Mr. Clinton's centerpiece has been his Goals 2000 program, for which he budgeted \$620 million, a 25% increase over the past fiscal year. The Senate bill provides more than \$500 million for the same account, but the House has cut the administration request by more than a third while also experimenting with its own school-reform initiative that has enjoyed the backing of some liberal Democrats and prominent business executives active in education.

In this context, the president's testing proposal has become a lightning rod for conservatives, and the Senate compromise yesterday seeks to ensure that state participation will be voluntary and sets up a structure to give states more independence from the Education Department.

The compromise sailed through on an 87-13 vote, but if the money is diverted to the block grant, the whole testing exercise is thrown into doubt.

While the most political item, the Goals 2000 portion of the proposed block grant is a fraction of the grant. The sweeping amendment amounts to a massive one-year experiment in local control for programs totaling as much as \$11 billion to \$13 billion a year.

To win support, the sponsors agreed to a "hold harmless" provision promising each state the same amount of net assistance it receives this year. But local boards could be affected by a new funding formula that seeks to target the money more to low-income areas. ■

1. Associated Press

09-12 8:34am

Clinton gets victory, blow from Senate

By ROBERT GREENE

AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) - President Clinton's plan for national math and reading tests got a stamp of approval from a Senate that also handed him a big headache by cutting the **Education Department's** spending power.

By an 87-13 vote Thursday, the Senate gave the national tests the go-ahead but said they must be governed by an independent board instead of the department. But by a 51-49 vote, the Senate approved an amendment to convert several aid programs for schools into grants for local school districts.

"This amendment is unacceptable to the administration," said **Education Secretary Richard W. Riley**. White House spokesman Mike McCurry called the amendment "a back-door attempt to abolish the Department of Education."

And although the Senate did approve the testing plan, an expected House vote was put off until Tuesday at the earliest. An alliance of liberals and conservatives was poised to deny funding to carry out the tests.

"Rather than spend \$100 million on more tests, House Republicans and many Democrats would rather send federal dollars directly to the classroom, bolster basic academics and seek ways to increase parental involvement," said Rep. Bill Goodling, R-Pa., the lead testing opponent and chairman of the House Education and Workforce Committee.

A group of conservative Republicans opposed the testing plan in the Senate, even though a bipartisan agreement called for having the independent National Assessment Governing Board oversee the voluntary tests of fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math.

Some conservatives view the tests as leading the way to federal control of what children learn.

The existing board would be reworked to make it more bipartisan and the appointments less political.

The narrow vote on control of about \$13 billion out of \$20 billion in Education Department aid to schools from Kindergarten through grade 12 was clearly partisan. The sponsor of the amendment, Sen. Slade Gorton, R-Wash., said he was trying to save paperwork costs and put money in local classrooms.

"I am convinced that our school boards, teachers and parents do know more than the bureaucrats here in Washington, D.C.," about how to spend the money, Gorton said.

The money would be given to districts based on population and wealth. In the case of Title I, the aid to low-income areas would be based on the number of poor children. Title I accounts for \$8 billion of the \$13 billion.

The overall amount currently going to a state could not be reduced, however.

Money for special education, more than \$5 billion, would be exempt from the block-granting.

Riley said the Gorton amendment "would possibly wipe out many very important programs" because the aid could no longer be targeted to special needs.

He said bilingual education, computer technology, charter schools, vocational rehabilitation, Indian education and Goals 2000, a program to help states raise standards, could all lose money. Even money for the national tests would be eliminated.

Even Title I help could be moved from areas with the highest concentration of needy students, the department says.

Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, said the lack of controls means the money could be spent on football uniforms or swimming pools.

"There is nothing to prevent a state or town from merely reducing state support for education and spending more money for other worthy things like roads and bridges," he said. ■

1. Chicago Tribune

September 12, 1997

NATIONAL TESTS PASS 1ST HURDLE **SENATE ALSO APPROVES MAKING EDUCATION AID BLOCK GRANTS**

WASHINGTON -- The Senate gave overwhelming approval Thursday to President Clinton's plan for national reading and math tests after an agreement was reached for an independent board to run the voluntary program.

A House vote was put off until Tuesday because of slow movement on a big spending bill. The testing plan faces strong opposition in the House from an alliance of liberals and conservatives.

Even though the Senate gave Clinton a victory on testing, it voted 51-49 to strip the Education Department of control over much of its spending power by converting as much as \$13 billion of aid it administers for kindergarten-through-high school education into direct grants to states.

"That is, in effect, a back-door attempt to abolish the Department of Education," said White House spokesman Mike McCurry. "We'll have ample opportunity to reverse that decision as the legislation goes forward."

The testing proposal "took a major step forward today, and we believe it will prevail in the end," McCurry said.

Clinton savored his 88-12 victory in the Senate, where only conservative Republicans opposed him. Conservatives say the tests threaten local control of what children should learn. Liberals who oppose the tests say they will be used to further brand low-achieving pupils from impoverished school districts as inferior.

The tests, to be given first in March 1999, would measure 4th graders for their reading ability and 8th graders for their ability to do math, including some algebra and geometry.

The 90-minute tests would be based on fixed standards of what children should know and be able to do in those two core subjects. Other achievement tests commonly measure students against a shifting norm or average.

The Senate votes were on amendments to an \$80 billion spending bill for the Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services Departments that the Senate later approved.

A pending House amendment by Rep. William Goodling (R-Pa.) to block spending on the tests will be considered Tuesday when the House resumes work on its version of the spending bill. Differences between the House and Senate bills will have to be worked out, meaning the final outcome of the proposal must still be decided.

The vote to convert much of the Education Department's spending to block grants was sponsored by Sen. Slade Gorton (R-Wash.). He said the amendment would cut the heavy paperwork costs of school aid while sending money to states, based on the wealth and population of a school district. No state would get less under the amendment. Help for disabled students would be exempted.

Special aid to poor districts would be based on the number of poor children with no regard for what states spend on students.

Critics said that special formula still amounted to block granting the \$8 billion Title I program for low-income students, the biggest part of the \$13 billion.

Gorton said he was trying to save money by cutting the paperwork attached to those federal dollars. "I am convinced that our school boards, teachers and parents do know more than the bureaucrats here in Washington, D.C.," about how to spend the money.

Opponents said the measure would give local districts too much leeway, allowing programs such as bilingual education and charter schools to be gutted. An Education Department analysis said the action would prevent funding of the testing plan.

The Senate agreement on standardized tests hands control of testing to the National Assessment Governing Board, an independent board created by Congress to run existing tests known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Those tests measure trends, not individual achievement.

The 25-member board would be made more bipartisan by adding a governor, two mayors and two representatives of business and industry. ■

1. Baltimore Sun

September 12, 1997

Senate OKs national program to test reading, math skills **Independent panel set up to run voluntary program**

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The Senate gave overwhelming approval yesterday to President Clinton's plan for national reading and math tests after an agreement was reached for an independent board to run the voluntary program.

But a House vote was put off until Tuesday because of slow movement on a massive spending bill. The testing plan faced strong opposition there from an alliance of liberals and conservatives.

And even though the Senate gave Clinton a victory on testing, it voted 51-49 to strip the Education Department of control over much of its spending power by converting as much as \$13 billion of aid it administers for kindergarten through high school education into direct grants to school districts.

"That is, in effect, a back-door attempt to abolish the Department of Education," said White House spokesman Mike McCurry. "We'll have ample opportunity to reverse that decision as the legislation goes forward."

The testing proposal "took a major step forward today, and we believe it will prevail in the end," McCurry said.

Clinton savored his 87-13 victory in the Senate, where only conservative Republicans opposed him.

They say the tests threaten local control of what children should learn. Liberals who oppose the tests say they will be used to further brand low-achieving students from impoverished school districts as inferior.

The tests, to be given first in March 1999, would measure fourth-graders for their reading ability and eighth-graders for their math skills, including some algebra and geometry.

The 90-minute tests would be based on fixed standards of what children should know and be able to do in those two core subjects. Other achievement tests commonly measure students against a shifting norm, or average.

"The measure they have embraced will help parents ensure their children have mastered the basics of reading and math," Clinton said after the Senate vote. "This is another example of what can happen when people of good will of both parties look to the future and not to the past."

The Senate votes were on amendments to an \$80 billion spending bill for the Education, Labor and Health and Human Services departments, which the Senate later approved.

A pending House amendment would withhold funds for the test program. ■

1. Philadelphia Inquirer

September 12, 1997 Page One

Senate backs proposal for national tests

It is Clinton's education priority. In the House, opposition is stronger.

By David Hess

INQUIRER WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON — With former Education Secretary William J. Bennett smoothing the way, the Senate voted overwhelmingly yesterday to back President Clinton's plan for national testing of fourth graders in reading and eighth graders in mathematics.

The 87-13 vote came after Bennett helped broker a compromise that calls for an independent board — and not the federal government — to develop and administer the tests. States and localities would have the option of requiring students to take them.

The Senate action represented a breakthrough on Clinton's plan, his top education objective, but the proposal still faces roadblocks.

Opposition is stronger in the House, where conservatives have said the tests would be an unnecessary federal intrusion in local schools, and members there are expected to vote Tuesday to deny funding. House and Senate negotiators then would see if a compromise were possible.

The Senate vote drew praise from the White House, where spokesman Michael McCurry said that national testing "took a major step forward, and we believe it will prevail in the end."

The outlook for education funding was muddled later in the day when the Senate passed a separate amendment by 51-49 that would convert most spending under the 32-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act into largely unfettered block grants to the states. The education act forms the foundation for the federal government's aid-to-education effort.

McCurry called it "a backdoor attempt to abolish the Department of Education [by] the far-right wing of the Republican caucus . . . and it's too bad that sentiment prevailed. But we'll have ample opportunity to reverse that decision as the legislation goes forward."

Some senators also predicted that the amendment would not survive, and acknowledged that they had not read its fine print before its adoption. Included in the fine print: a cutoff of all funding for the same national testing plan senators had endorsed just hours before.

The votes were on amendments to an \$80 billion spending bill for the Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services Departments, which the Senate later approved.

The Senate had fretted for days over the testing issue as the White House pressed for adoption of Clinton's plan.

A standard national test, advocates argued, would identify shortcomings in the reading and math capabilities of children in specific schools as a prelude to developing remedial programs. Most major business groups support the concept as a means of improving the basic educational skills of youngsters who will enter the workforce in the next century.

"Every kid would be reading to the same standard," said Sen. Tom Harkin (D., Iowa). "And parents all over the country would be able to know how their children are performing compared to kids in other schools."

But opponents insisted that a new national test would duplicate existing tests, divert money that should be funneled into other education programs, and stigmatize certain racial or ethnic groups whose schools have failed to measure up to standards. Some conservatives said they also felt that a national test would intrude on the autonomy of states and local school boards, and lead to the gradual insertion of federally mandated "values" in local schools' curricula.

In the House, Rep. Bill Goodling (R., Pa.), chairman of the Education and the Workforce Committee, has been leading the fight against national testing as "a total waste of money" that would tell parents and educators what they already know from other kinds of performance tests.

Sen. Judd Gregg (R., N.H.) credited Bennett — a prominent conservative who served as Ronald Reagan's secretary of education — with clearing the way for the agreement.

"Bennett was the go-between on this with the White House, and essentially drafted the language that both sides could live with," said Gregg, who pushed the plan in the Senate. "I'm satisfied with it because it divorces the Department of Education and the National Education Association from any role in setting up and administering the test."

Under the compromise, the National Assessment Governing Board — an independent advisory group composed of state, city and congressional officials — would develop the tests and rules for implementing them.

It then would be up to individual school boards whether to use the tests.

Seven states — Alaska, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Carolina and West Virginia — have pledged to participate in national testing, and 15 others have expressed interest in the idea, according to Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D., N.M.), a proponent.

In addition, several large schools districts have said they would take part: Atlanta, Broward County (Fla.), Chicago,



Cincinnati, Detroit, El Paso, Fresno, Houston, Long Beach (Calif.), Los Angeles, New York City, Omaha, Philadelphia, San Antonio and Seattle.

Altogether, these states and districts have 20 percent of the nation's fourth and eighth graders.

All Philadelphia area senators voted for the testing measure. ■

1. Washington Times

September 12, 1997

Senate's compromise keeps national tests alive

By Carol Innerst

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The U.S. Senate kept President Clinton's hopes for national student tests alive Thursday with an 88-12 supporting vote, but the compromise bill gives a bipartisan board power to rescind decisions already made by the Department of Education in its rush to bypass Congress.

All of the Senate's Democrats voted for the compromise, which pleased the White House, said to be involved in engineering the measure.

But the vote set the stage for a showdown with the House, which appears ready to ax funding for national testing when the issue comes to the floor Tuesday.

"I don't support efforts to hand over President Clinton's testing program to the National Assessment Governing Board," said Rep. Bill Goodling, Pennsylvania Republican and chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Committee. "As I have said many times before, new federal education tests won't boost the academic performance of a single American child. Instead it will boost federal involvement in our schools."

Mr. Goodling, who opposes individual national testing, has put together a coalition of conservatives and liberals, including the Congressional Black Caucus, who oppose national testing for different reasons but want to kill it.

Although Mr. Goodling wanted a roll call vote Thursday to strengthen his hand with the Senate, the vote was rescheduled for Tuesday. He did not think his amendment to cut off funding for national testing would lose steam until then, but other Capitol Hill aides felt the tide could shift.

Sen. Daniel R. Coats, Indiana Republican, offered the legislation that strengthened the National Assessment Governing Board —which sets policy for the congressionally mandated National Assessment of Educational Progress —and put restrictions on the president's proposal for voluntary national testing of fourth- and eighth-graders.

"I believe that parents, not bureaucrats, should have ultimate control," Mr. Coats said. "A voluntary national test, which states and parents may choose to participate in, will give parents another tool with which they can use to measure their children's academic achievement and hold local schools accountable."

He wanted to ensure that control over the test was not vested in the Department of Education, currently influenced by the 2.2 million-member National Education Association, said his spokesman, Tim Goeglein.

Education Secretary Richard W. Riley said he was "pleased" with the Senate vote.

The Coats legislation makes participation in national testing voluntary and the agency that controls it independent and bipartisan. It also calls for expanding the 25-member assessment governing board by adding two mayors — one from each party — and adding a third governor from the party that does not control the White House. The two governors already on the panel represent both parties. Also, two more representatives of business and industry would be added, bringing the total to three.

Because of the additions, five board employees, who are curriculum and testing experts, would not have voting power. The education chief could make appointments only from a list recommended by the board.

Those safeguards did not satisfy the Family Research Council.

"We're devastated," said spokeswoman Kristin Hansen. "We've been really fighting against the idea of federal testing for a long time. The Department of Education will maintain the authority over the test and that will lead to them influencing curriculum, which they are prohibited from doing."

The Senate compromise bore the fingerprints of three former Department of Education officials from the Reagan and Bush administrations — former Education Secretary William J. Bennett, now co-director of Empower America; and former Assistant Secretaries Chester E. Finn Jr. and Diane Ravitch, who respectively are senior fellows at Hudson Institute and the Brookings Institution. Mr. Finn is a former NAGB chairman.

All three have supported the concept of voluntary national standards and tests, but have been critical of the Clinton administration's intent to put the politically charged Department of Education in charge of the testing program.

The Department of Education has rushed to develop the tests, insisting it does not need congressional approval. Several weeks ago the department awarded a \$13 million contract to shape and develop the tests in reading and mathematics. Sample questions have been distributed for comment.

"The people who didn't help with this were Bennett, Ravitch and Finn, who developed the compromise language to reconfigure NAGB," a House aide grumbled.

The three held a news conference Wednesday where they pointed out the weaknesses of the reading and math specifications developed by the Department of Education. They said they would prefer no test if the choice was between that and Mr. Clinton's test.

"We were called upon by senators to do what we can to make this work," said Miss Ravitch, acknowledging involvement.

"This is a version of the national testing program that I think has an 85 percent chance of working out OK," Mr. Finn said. "It's a good compromise. It does provide for national testing, and if the House believes that's a bad thing, they won't be

happy.

"Given the choices of three days ago, which were doing it the administration's way, which sounded like what the Senate would do, or killing it entirely, which the House is going to do, we've at least presented a third possibility," he said.

After Mr. Bennett sent several senators "substantive suggestions" for the amendment, the trio was asked to eyeball drafts.

"We didn't write legislative language at any point and had nothing to do with the negotiations that ensued," Mr. Finn said.

"Faced with options that were essentially nothing or Bill Clinton, we thought there was a better way," Mr. Bennett said.

"Remember that NAEP proves we can have a national voluntary test that works and has real standards and that conservatives don't have to be afraid of," he said. ■

1. USA Today

September 12, 1997 Page 1

Senate Oks educational testing plan

By Tamara Henry

USA Today

WASHINGTON -- President Clinton's national educational testing plan won overwhelming approval in the Senate Thursday, but the House failed to act amid threats from an alliance of conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats.

The House vote was delayed until Tuesday.

The 88-12 Senate approval came only after a deal that the voluntary testing program -- a key Clinton proposal -- be run by an independent board not the Education Department.

"The compromise is a great victory for our children and education in this country," says Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., who brokered the deal.

Clinton, in his State of the Union address in February, called for testing all the country's fourth graders in reading and all eighth graders in math, beginning in 1999.

The tests would be based on fixed standards of what children should know and be able to do in those two core subjects.

The White House was pleased by the Senate vote, although officials admit the dissent in the House could result in a loss there.

House opponents say the tests threaten local control, brand as inferior low-achieving students from poor districts and waste money that could be spent on teacher training.

Assistant Education Secretary Marshall Smith said he hoped opposition would ease by Tuesday. "Maybe when the members go home they will hear something different (from their constituents) than what they expect to hear."

The compromises that ensured Senate approval:

-- An independent board created by Congress that now oversees the assessment program known as The Nation's Report Card will control the national testing program. But it will be changed to include more local and state officials.

-- \$13.5 billion in Education Department aid was converted into block grants to be administered by the states, including money earmarked for charter schools, vocational rehabilitation and professional development, and programs providing assistance to needy children.



1. The Daily Oklahoman

September 12, 1997

Senate Backs Testing Plan

WASHINGTON — The Senate voted 88-12 Thursday to approve President Clinton's plan for national reading and math tests after an agreement was reached for an independent board to run the voluntary program.

But a House vote was put off until next Tuesday. The testing plan faces strong opposition there from an alliance of liberals and conservatives.

And even though the Senate gave Clinton a victory on testing, it voted 51-49 to strip the Education Department of control over much of its spending power by converting as much as \$13 billion of the aid it administers for kindergarten through high school education into direct grants to school districts.■



1. Arkansas Democate-Gazette

September 12, 1997

To test or not to test

About those national skills tests

It's not as if the country doesn't have enough tests already. Some 40 states, including Arkansas, already quiz their students at regular intervals, even if not regularly enough, or without clear consequences.

Now a report just out from the American Federation of Teachers indicates that Social Promotion -- that is, passing on failures from grade to grade all the way to college -- is still rampant in American education. Why weren't these kids helped earlier? Because they became somebody else's problem next year. The kind of accountability that tests are supposed to provide was absent.

This state's Board of Education, under heavy pressure from those who confuse education with a winning football team, is about to lower the grade level required for participation in extracurricular activities. We've got to keep these kids in school, it's explained, whether they're learning or not.

So many tests, so little accountability.

Happily, the increasing demand for quality in public education seems to have raised the national consciousness about what goes on in schools, and about the quality of the product. The good news is that public interest in the schools seems higher than ever. Better indignation than resignation.

Here in Arkansas, public concern has made the Board of Education think twice about lowering standards. The board now has agreed to hold public hearings, and maybe come up with ways to help student athletes who aren't doing C work. Who knows, one day the board may require the same kind of remedial programs for all students who aren't doing well, not just the athletes.

Amid all this hubbub, the Clinton administration is pushing for still more tests, this time on a national level. A simple, fair, objective test would help the country finally get a handle on which states are doing best and which worst. The president has a point when he says the country needs to begin formulating national standards.

Bill Clinton also had a point years ago when, as a governor, he joined the Bush administration in pushing educational goals. But look what happened to those: Instead of clear, objective standards, the country got a lot of mushy state-by-state "outcomes" that tended to sound more like platitudes than challenges, a politically correct agenda instead of solid attainment.

It isn't the idea of a national test that bothers some of us, but who will draw it up. The prospect of the U.S. Education Department's having anything to do with educational standards terrifies. This is the same outfit that has just brought the entire, ill-conceived program of direct student loans, administered from Washington instead of through private lending institutions around the country, to a shuddering halt. Result: Some 134,000 loan applications are stuck in the clogged pipelines.

The Hon. Richard Riley, our secretary of education, can doubtless explain this latest snafu in his glib fashion, but what the country needs is higher standards, not slicker explanations.

So it was assuring to hear the president say he would call on an independent outfit, the National Assessment Governing Board, to draw up these new national tests. But before the country swallows another panacea like Outcome-Based Ed, the American taxpayer should ask for a sample of these proposed national tests. Let's see what they would look like before making them the law. Will they really be fair, objective, revealing? Or will they wander off on a political and social crusade of their own?

Why not authorize the necessary research and see how the tests would stack up before ordering them for the whole country? Let's look before buying. Isn't that what the educated consumer does?

Meanwhile, the loyal opposition is developing an alternative to uniform national testing: Republicans are proposing a system of vouchers that would enable students to choose their schools, and so introduce some free-market competition into the public-school system -- complete with competition, incentives, and better performance. That way, students and their families would become consumers with a choice instead of captives of the system. It's an idea to consider, however new and therefore stressful. Change always shakes up those accustomed to the old system, or anyone with a vested interest in it -- like the teachers' unions.

What would happen, one wonders, if these two ideas were combined -- national tests and vouchers? The schools with the lowest test scores would seem the ideal place to experiment with school vouchers. Instead of being trapped in poor schools, students could opt out. The result? Our guess is that the poorest performing schools would improve in a hurry because the pressure would be on to retain their students and the per-pupil support from the state that comes with those students. School vouchers wouldn't help just those who left the school but those who stayed.

Come to think, it wouldn't take national tests to begin a voucher system based on test results. The standardized tests already being given in states like Arkansas would make it clear which schools needed the competition that vouchers would bring.

Combining vouchers and tests to improve the schools would doubtless offend partisans of both innovations. But wouldn't it be nice if education were more important than partisanship?■

1. Washington Week In Review (PBS)

September 12, 1997

Upcoming educational agenda of Bill Clinton

(excerpt)

KEN BODE, host: David, one of the issues we know is on the agenda, we also know it's very high in the public agenda in this country —is the issue of education. And we also know that this is a place where we've got a lot of division between the parties here. School choice, federally standardized tests, federal control; is this shaping up as a —wh —this does look to me like it's shaping up as a fairly thoughtful but a partisan debate.

Mr. DAVID BRODER (The Washington Post): It's both. As you know, Ken, most of the decisions, most of the money that go into elementary and secondary education are made at the local and the state level. But it —it's this public concern about the quality of those schools that has made it a very important issue now in Washington.

Let me just mention quickly three fronts now that are current here. The president is trying to get authority to have national standards and national tests for reading and mathematics. By making some concessions to the Republicans about the group that would supervise these tests, he got it through the Senate this week by a very big vote. Next week it is probably going to be voted down in the House of Representatives because the Republicans there see this as the entering wedge for a real —what they regard as a threat to local control of schools.

The Republicans, on their side, are pushing a very different agenda. They talk about school choice and vouchers is the other phrase for it. Two bills that they're pushing —one that would provide scholarships to kids in the District of Columbia where the schools are in such bad shape they have not even been able to open this year; let those schools go to private, parochial schools or to suburban schools.

The second plan is one that would explain the IRAs —I-R-A's, which you can now use, set up, to pay for your kids' college costs. Let families do the same thing, but for high school or elementary school including, again, private or parochial schools. The president has said, 'If you do either of those things, I will veto it.' So the lines are drawn on that issue.

Third —and this one was the surprise this week —the Senate by a one-vote margin voted essentially to convert the biggest federal aid to education program, the one that funnels money into schools which have large numbers of kids from poor homes —change that over into a block grant. If that should become law over the president's veto —expected veto, it would mean that the federal government would lose what little leverage it now has over what's going on in those schools.

Ms. GLORIA BORGER (US News & World Report; CBS News Analyst): Why, suddenly, do you think education has become a —an issue that's front and center now?

Mr. BRODER: Well, it's that public concern that has brought it to people's heads and what's now beginning to emerge is that there are really two fundamentally different theories of how you address this problem. The Democrats allied with the teachers union say that you ought to raise the standards in the public schools and put more resources into those schools. They say that vouchers don't do anything except drain money from the public school system and leave the 90 percent of kids who are in the public schools worse off than they were before.

The Republicans say, 'We have been listening for years to your saying you're going to improve the public schools if we just vote more money. It hasn't happened.' They say that minority and poor children ought to have the same choice that Chelsea Clinton and Al Gore's children have exercised by going to private schools, and they claim that competition is the one thing that might actually improve the quality of public schools.

Ms. KAREN TUMULTY (Time Magazine): But is school choice the way they envision it? Is that —is that constitutional?

Mr. BRODER: Good question. It's been challenged and held up in the courts in Milwaukee and in Cleveland. The governor of Minnesota was in town this —this week, Arne Carlson, talking about his new wrinkle on it, which is a scheme with tax credits and tax deductions, where the family can say, 'I'm going to have an extra \$1,000 because of my tax —the changes in the tax law. I may use it for private school tuition or I can use it to get some tutoring for my child while I keep them in the public school.' Carlson argues maybe this is the way around this constitutional problem.

BODE: All right.

We're going to be back a lot of times, I think, this fall, talking about education, the standardized testing and —and —and certainly this issue of choice. Thanks, David.■

CNN Interactive September 12, 1997

National tests strengthen case for strong schools

An essay by CNN Interactive writer Emily Looney

(CNN) — Nearly everyone has clutched a No. 2 pencil in apprehension of a standardized test. But the proposal for national tests that was left in limbo by Congress this week is nothing to fear — if we're ready to cope with the results.

There appears to be little public debate about whether to set national educational standards for children. What is controversial is the idea that the tests — though voluntary — might be only the beginning of federal meddling in local school affairs.

The Senate on Thursday easily passed a modified version of President Clinton's proposal to give reading tests to fourth graders and math tests to eighth graders. But it attached an amendment the White House doesn't like that would curtail the role of the Department of Education in administering school aid. And the House, where a bipartisan alliance is bent on killing the testing plan, postponed its vote.

Politicians on both sides of the aisle like the idea of national standardized tests, and a recent Gallup Poll cited by the White House shows most other people do, too.

But the dispute over federal vs. local control has little to do with discovering if Johnny can read or add.

Skeptics are right in saying that the proposed tests would influence what's taught in what grades. But far from establishing federal control, the tests will only work with — not in spite of — local input.

Think globally, act locally

The proposed tests would give parents and educators a new tool to let them compare individual achievement, which current standardized tests do not provide in the same way.

The tests would do this, in part, by comparing test results against set standards, instead of average scores, which would allow for more accurate inter-state as well as international comparisons.

Clinton isn't interested in the details of what's taught when, or how — only that all students can read and do math at a defined level by a certain point in their schooling, said Marshall Smith, acting deputy secretary of education.

Even Smith acknowledged that would influence local curriculum decisions, and he wasn't apologetic about it. But he argued that the tests would only emphasize the "very basics."

And the White House insists states will not be forced to participate. States and school districts would be free to decide whether to give the tests, which would be introduced in March 1999.

Before this week's votes, seven states and 15 cities had volunteered to take part, according to the Education Department's Web site. But once some schools began giving the tests, others no doubt could feel peer pressure to participate.

And some educators are right to worry that the results may only further stigmatize disadvantaged schools and students, without providing a remedy.

That's where the tests can really earn their multimillion-dollar keep. Their national visibility would expand our awareness of floundering, underfunded schools in a significant and unavoidable way.

It would still be the local communities that are stuck with the hands-on work of fixing the educational inequities made plain by the test results. Students would still learn one-by-one, and need supportive parents, teachers and tutors.

With such tests, there could be no more broad-based dismissal of unequal results as the product of uneven standards. Local and regional inequities would become a national concern.

Don't worry, the students can't vote yet

Letting the federal government help define and measure what we need to learn, even if it's only with the basics, would give education — already a highly politicized issue — an even higher political profile.

The tests have all the makings of election fodder. But the potential for political manipulation of the tests and their results can, with voter willpower, be checked.

Already, in an effort to shield the tests from the whims of partisan dispute and political trends, Clinton agreed in a compromise to give oversight to the National Assessment Governing Board instead of the Education Department. And the Senate measure aims to adjust the makeup of the independent board, created by Congress to oversee national tests given only on a selective basis, to allow for broader input.

It's worth the political risks. Leaving it largely to states and schools to determine what children need to know doesn't

serve the children themselves well, either in our mobile society or a global economy.

Colleges and universities, admitting students across state lines, have long recognized the need to try to even out local inequities in evaluation methods. These schools widely rely on the Scholastic Aptitude Test, an independent exam for high school students.

The fundamentals of what we want our students to learn should be defined and refined in a national debate. New ideas about education are coming along all the time, and any national tests should be revised accordingly.

And however imperfect the means, the goal remains the same: improving local education.■

1. Education Daily

September 12, 1997

SENATE TESTING COMPROMISE WOULD RECONFIGURE NAGB

President Clinton's voluntary national testing program got a new lease on life yesterday, as the Senate agreed to let it go forward under an independent oversight board.

By a vote of 88-12, the Senate passed the bipartisan deal, which would give a reconstituted National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) authority over the tests, including the right to review, change and even scrap the \$13 million contract the Education Department awarded last month to a consortium to develop the exams.

The testing amendment to the Senate's fiscal 1998 education funding bill would add five politicians and business leaders to the 25-member NAGB at the expense of testing and curriculum experts.

The Senate passed its appropriations bill for the Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services departments, S. 1061, with a final vote of 92-8.

Meanwhile, the House was still debating its version of the bill yesterday and planned to take today and Monday off.

When the House returns Tuesday, it is poised to bar any further ED spending for Clinton's tests (ED, Sept. 11).

That amendment comes from Rep. Bill Goodling, R-Pa., chairman of the Education and the Workforce Committee, who argues that individual tests of fourth-graders in reading and eighth-graders in math are unnecessary.

The fate of Clinton's testing initiative is expected to be settled when House and Senate negotiators write a final education appropriations bill for the fiscal year that starts Oct. 1.

Clinton has hinted that he will veto a bill that bars the tests, and his aides have made stronger statements (ED, Sept. 9).

More Politicians

Under the Senate plan, Education Secretary Richard Riley would receive nominations from NAGB to add: one current or former governor, bringing the board's gubernatorial total to three; two mayors; and two business representatives, for a total of three.

Three testing experts and two curriculum experts would lose their spots on the board, which already is responsible for overseeing the National Assessment of Education Progress, a snapshot of student achievement.

Terms of NAGB members would be lengthened from three to four years, and the education secretary would lose the discretion to choose new members who are not recommended by the current board.

After months of guarding ED's control over the tests, Clinton and Riley recently said they wanted to let NAGB take over the politically imperiled program (ED, Aug. 28).

The coalition of conservative and liberal opposition to the testing program was on full display on the Senate floor.

Sen. John Ashcroft, R-Mo., said national tests would dilute local control over teaching. "Nationalizing the testing process will drive [local districts] to a national curriculum."

On the other end of the political spectrum, Sen. Paul Wellstone, D-Minn., voted for the compromise plan but said, "We are investing nothing in rebuilding crumbling schools" or spending enough on Head Start. The tests "are a technical fix until we make a commitment to equal opportunity for children, and we are a long, long way from that," Wellstone argued. —Laureen Lazarovici■

1. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

September 12, 1997

Liberals and conservatives against national school test

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. Associated Press

09-12 8:34am

Clinton gets victory, blow from Senate

By ROBERT GREENE

AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) - President Clinton's plan for national math and reading tests got a stamp of approval from a Senate that also handed him a big headache by cutting the **Education Department's** spending power.

By an 87-13 vote Thursday, the Senate gave the national tests the go-ahead but said they must be governed by an independent board instead of the department. But by a 51-49 vote, the Senate approved an amendment to convert several aid programs for schools into grants for local school districts.

"This amendment is unacceptable to the administration," said **Education Secretary Richard W. Riley**. White House spokesman Mike McCurry called the amendment "a back-door attempt to abolish the Department of Education."

And although the Senate did approve the testing plan, an expected House vote was put off until Tuesday at the earliest. An alliance of liberals and conservatives was poised to deny funding to carry out the tests.

"Rather than spend \$100 million on more tests, House Republicans and many Democrats would rather send federal dollars directly to the classroom, bolster basic academics and seek ways to increase parental involvement," said Rep. Bill Goodling, R-Pa., the lead testing opponent and chairman of the House Education and Workforce Committee.

A group of conservative Republicans opposed the testing plan in the Senate, even though a bipartisan agreement called for having the independent National Assessment Governing Board oversee the voluntary tests of fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math.

Some conservatives view the tests as leading the way to federal control of what children learn.

The existing board would be reworked to make it more bipartisan and the appointments less political.

The narrow vote on control of about \$13 billion out of \$20 billion in Education Department aid to schools from Kindergarten through grade 12 was clearly partisan. The sponsor of the amendment, Sen. Slade Gorton, R-Wash., said he was trying to save paperwork costs and put money in local classrooms.

"I am convinced that our school boards, teachers and parents do know more than the bureaucrats here in Washington, D.C.," about how to spend the money, Gorton said.

The money would be given to districts based on population and wealth. In the case of Title I, the aid to low-income areas would be based on the number of poor children. Title I accounts for \$8 billion of the \$13 billion.

The overall amount currently going to a state could not be reduced, however.

Money for special education, more than \$5 billion, would be exempt from the block-granting.

Riley said the Gorton amendment "would possibly wipe out many very important programs" because the aid could no longer be targeted to special needs.

He said bilingual education, computer technology, charter schools, vocational rehabilitation, Indian education and Goals 2000, a program to help states raise standards, could all lose money. Even money for the national tests would be eliminated.

Even Title I help could be moved from areas with the highest concentration of needy students, the department says.

Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, said the lack of controls means the money could be spent on football uniforms or swimming pools.

"There is nothing to prevent a state or town from merely reducing state support for education and spending more money for other worthy things like roads and bridges," he said. ■

1. Baltimore Sun

September 12, 1997

Senate OKs national program to test reading, math skills **Independent panel set up to run voluntary program**

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The Senate gave overwhelming approval yesterday to President Clinton's plan for national reading and math tests after an agreement was reached for an independent board to run the voluntary program.

But a House vote was put off until Tuesday because of slow movement on a massive spending bill. The testing plan faced strong opposition there from an alliance of liberals and conservatives.

And even though the Senate gave Clinton a victory on testing, it voted 51-49 to strip the Education Department of control over much of its spending power by converting as much as \$13 billion of aid it administers for kindergarten through high school education into direct grants to school districts.

"That is, in effect, a back-door attempt to abolish the Department of Education," said White House spokesman Mike McCurry. "We'll have ample opportunity to reverse that decision as the legislation goes forward."

The testing proposal "took a major step forward today, and we believe it will prevail in the end," McCurry said.

Clinton savored his 87-13 victory in the Senate, where only conservative Republicans opposed him.

They say the tests threaten local control of what children should learn. Liberals who oppose the tests say they will be used to further brand low-achieving students from impoverished school districts as inferior.

The tests, to be given first in March 1999, would measure fourth-graders for their reading ability and eighth-graders for their math skills, including some algebra and geometry.

The 90-minute tests would be based on fixed standards of what children should know and be able to do in those two core subjects. Other achievement tests commonly measure students against a shifting norm, or average.

"The measure they have embraced will help parents ensure their children have mastered the basics of reading and math," Clinton said after the Senate vote. "This is another example of what can happen when people of good will of both parties look to the future and not to the past."

The Senate votes were on amendments to an \$80 billion spending bill for the Education, Labor and Health and Human Services departments, which the Senate later approved.

A pending House amendment would withhold funds for the test program.■

1. Philadelphia Inquirer

September 12, 1997 Page One

Senate backs proposal for national tests

It is Clinton's education priority. In the House, opposition is stronger.

By David Hess

INQUIRER WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON — With former Education Secretary William J. Bennett smoothing the way, the Senate voted overwhelmingly yesterday to back President Clinton's plan for national testing of fourth graders in reading and eighth graders in mathematics.

The 87-13 vote came after Bennett helped broker a compromise that calls for an independent board — and not the federal government — to develop and administer the tests. States and localities would have the option of requiring students to take them.

The Senate action represented a breakthrough on Clinton's plan, his top education objective, but the proposal still faces roadblocks.

Opposition is stronger in the House, where conservatives have said the tests would be an unnecessary federal intrusion in local schools, and members there are expected to vote Tuesday to deny funding. House and Senate negotiators then would see if a compromise were possible.

The Senate vote drew praise from the White House, where spokesman Michael McCurry said that national testing "took a major step forward, and we believe it will prevail in the end."

The outlook for education funding was muddled later in the day when the Senate passed a separate amendment by 51-49 that would convert most spending under the 32-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act into largely unfettered block grants to the states. The education act forms the foundation for the federal government's aid-to-education effort.

McCurry called it "a backdoor attempt to abolish the Department of Education [by] the far-right wing of the Republican caucus . . . and it's too bad that sentiment prevailed. But we'll have ample opportunity to reverse that decision as the legislation goes forward."

Some senators also predicted that the amendment would not survive, and acknowledged that they had not read its fine print before its adoption. Included in the fine print: a cutoff of all funding for the same national testing plan senators had endorsed just hours before.

The votes were on amendments to an \$80 billion spending bill for the Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services Departments, which the Senate later approved.

The Senate had fretted for days over the testing issue as the White House pressed for adoption of Clinton's plan.

A standard national test, advocates argued, would identify shortcomings in the reading and math capabilities of children in specific schools as a prelude to developing remedial programs. Most major business groups support the concept as a means of improving the basic educational skills of youngsters who will enter the workforce in the next century.

"Every kid would be reading to the same standard," said Sen. Tom Harkin (D., Iowa). "And parents all over the country would be able to know how their children are performing compared to kids in other schools."

But opponents insisted that a new national test would duplicate existing tests, divert money that should be funneled into other education programs, and stigmatize certain racial or ethnic groups whose schools have failed to measure up to standards. Some conservatives said they also felt that a national test would intrude on the autonomy of states and local school boards, and lead to the gradual insertion of federally mandated "values" in local schools' curricula.

In the House, Rep. Bill Goodling (R., Pa.), chairman of the Education and the Workforce Committee, has been leading the fight against national testing as "a total waste of money" that would tell parents and educators what they already know from other kinds of performance tests.

Sen. Judd Gregg (R., N.H.) credited Bennett — a prominent conservative who served as Ronald Reagan's secretary of education — with clearing the way for the agreement.

"Bennett was the go-between on this with the White House, and essentially drafted the language that both sides could live with," said Gregg, who pushed the plan in the Senate. "I'm satisfied with it because it divorces the Department of Education and the National Education Association from any role in setting up and administering the test."

Under the compromise, the National Assessment Governing Board — an independent advisory group composed of state, city and congressional officials — would develop the tests and rules for implementing them.

It then would be up to individual school boards whether to use the tests.

Seven states — Alaska, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Carolina and West Virginia — have pledged to participate in national testing, and 15 others have expressed interest in the idea, according to Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D., N.M.), a proponent.

In addition, several large schools districts have said they would take part: Atlanta, Broward County (Fla.), Chicago,



Cincinnati, Detroit, El Paso, Fresno, Houston, Long Beach (Calif.), Los Angeles, New York City, Omaha, Philadelphia, San Antonio and Seattle.

Altogether, these states and districts have 20 percent of the nation's fourth and eighth graders.

All Philadelphia area senators voted for the testing measure.■

1. U.S. Newswire

9-11

National PTA Opposes Amendment to Senate Funding Bill

To: National Desk, Education Writer Contact: Patrica A. Yoxall of the National PTA, 312-670-6782 CHICAGO, Sept. 11 /U.S. Newswire/ -- National PTA President Lois Jean White today pledged that the National PTA will work vigorously to eliminate, during conference negotiations, an amendment to Senate bill S. 1061 that affects more than \$11 billion in federal funds for education programs.

The funds are included in the Senate version of the 1998 appropriations bill for the departments of labor, health and human services and education. The amendment calls for the money to be distributed in block grants directly to local education agencies, effectively excluding the role of state agencies.

"This provision eliminates the policy and targeting objectives included in most Department of Education programs, including Title One and Goals 2000," White said, "while at the same time wiping out accountability for how the money is spent at the local level." Other programs that will be affected by the amendment are Eisenhower professional development state grants, bilingual and immigrant education, Indian education programs, Title VI innovative programs, safe and drug-free schools, and educational technology. The National PTA's special concerns include the elimination of: -- parent involvement requirements for education programs; -- limits on how much money can be spent on administrative expenses; -- requirements for evaluating local programs' effectiveness; -- language intended to ensure states spend a portion of their own budgets to support local public education programs; -- emphasis on children from low-income families.

"The National PTA supports maximum local control in school reform efforts, but local education agencies can't assume the entire burden for administration of these programs," White explained.

The National PTA, founded in 1897, encourages its 6.5 million members to be involved in key child education, health and welfare issues. The organization serves as an advocate for children and families in schools, the community and before government agencies.■

1. Detroit Free Press

September 11, 1997

Black lawmakers rap plan for national tests

Congressional caucus feisty, in a mood for confrontations

BY MELANIE EVERSLEY

Free Press Washington Staff

WASHINGTON — National tests for fifth- and eighth-graders hailed by President Bill Clinton as the key to better education got a thumbs down Wednesday from the Congressional Black Caucus.

The tests would stigmatize children from poorer, inner-city school districts and steer them toward special education and other failure tracks, Rep. Maxine Waters, caucus chairwoman, warned a crowd at the Washington Convention Center.

"One thing the CBC knows is we're not going to have a national test that will simply track our children," the California Democrat said during the opening session of the caucus' annual legislative conference.

Take, for example, educational tests given in her district, Waters said. "In Beverly Hills, they did better than in Watts. All over the country, the story is the same."

Clinton says the exams would give parents individualized information on how their child compares with other children. Now, kids are compared only across geographic areas. Detroit schools have volunteered to take pilot versions of the tests next year.

But the 39-member caucus of one black senator and 38 black House members believes black children will suffer as a result of the tests, Waters said. "We're going to continue to confront the president on this issue."

It seemed Wednesday as if confrontation would be key during this 27th annual conference, which runs through Saturday and will help members network, raise money for projects and compile an agenda for their Capitol Hill battles.

Shaking a fist from a podium, Waters lobbed harsh words at anyone who opposed caucus goals.

Like Congress.

"Legislators today preach rather than teach and exclude rather than include."

And the president.

"In this budget," she said of an early version of the bill Clinton signed last month, "the president put a measly \$5 billion into rehabilitating our schools.

"But in the back rooms," in discussions with Republicans, "that got dropped," she scolded.

While Waters' outspokenness is legendary in Washington, the harsh words may have been more related to the caucus' precarious position.

The all-Democratic group is in a beleaguered state, advocating for minority and liberal interests within a Republican-controlled Congress.

This year's schedule includes more than 80 forums focusing on everything from Caribbean policy to black farmers' concerns. John Hope Franklin, chair of Clinton's race advisory board, will join psychologist Julia Hare and Harvard University educator Cornel West this morning for a town hall meeting.

Staff writer Melanie Eversley can be reached at 1-202-383-6036.

Join the discussion in the education forum.■

1. The Wall Street Journal

09/11/97

House Cuts Clinton's Education Budget, Jeopardizing Plan for National Testing

By David Rogers

Staff Reporter of The Wall Street Journal

WASHINGTON — President Clinton's education-reform budget suffered new cuts in the House yesterday, as Democrats abandoned any hope of salvaging funds at this stage for his ambitious national testing plan for schoolchildren.

The new reductions leave less than \$400 million for Mr. Clinton's Goals 2000 budget, more than one-third less than he requested for the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1.

A vote on the testing issue was put off until today, but the administration already is preparing to make its stand in the Senate and in subsequent negotiations between the two houses.

This week, both chambers are debating companion \$269 billion spending bills funding the Education Department as well as the departments of Labor and Health and Human Services. Younger conservatives have forced repeated votes to delay action in the House and win concessions from the Appropriations leadership; yesterday's agreement to cut an additional \$55 million from Goals 2000 was part of this political struggle.

While conservatives claimed victory, the more important player was House Education Committee Chairman William Goodling (R., Pa.), who served as a broker of sorts and thereby enhanced his position going into talks with the Senate.

Mr. Goodling helped to work out a compromise saving a new block grant for school reform backed by senior Democrats and major corporations. But he is also the leading critic of Mr. Clinton's testing plan, and his increased standing could work against the White House. ■

1. San Diego Union Tribune

September 11, 1997

National test may be dead in House **Compromise plan pushed in Senate**

By Robert Greene
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — President Clinton's proposal for the federal government to offer national reading and math tests to anyone who would take them appeared yesterday to be headed for defeat in the House.

The tests of fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math were the top item in Clinton's 10-point plan for education announced in his State of the Union address in February.

The administration said the tests would let parents know how their children and schools perform when measured against a uniform standard that could be compared internationally.

But despite an agreement reached yesterday between Senate and White House negotiators, the testing plan fell victim in the House to a mix of opponents, including conservatives who want to curb the federal role in education and liberals who feared the tests would be wrongly used to pass or fail students or compare rich and poor school districts.

House Republican leaders are pushing a competing education agenda based on vouchers and other taxpayer support for alternatives to public schools.

An amendment by Rep. Bill Goodling, R-Pa., chairman of the House Education and Workforce Committee, would bar the Education Department from spending money to develop the tests, planned to be first given in March 1999.

A vote was expected today, but even Democrats said the Clinton proposal was dead in the House for now.

The amendment was attached to an \$80 billion spending bill for the Labor, Education and Health and Human Services departments.

Rep. David Obey, D-Wis., the senior Democrat on the Appropriations Committee, said he agreed with national testing but believed the Goodling amendment "represents the will of the House."

The Education Department has already approved a \$13 million contract to develop the tests, but the overall program is expected to cost \$100 million.

Goodling, a former teacher, principal and guidance counselor, labeled the expenditure a waste of money, arguing that tests have already identified the poor-performing schools. The money should go to classrooms and teacher training, he says.

Liberals such as Rep. Major R. Owens, D-N.Y., agreed, arguing that tests are the easy way for the administration to say it is helping schools.

A number of Republicans who support national testing also began to withdraw support because they felt development of the tests had become too politicized. Specifications for the tests were developed by committees reporting directly to the Education Department.

They complained that the tests were in danger of becoming dumbed-down and politically correct, favoring teaching approaches that ignore basic mathematical computations, phonics and an understanding of the parts of speech.

"This test, if developed, will give a bad name to testing," said William J. Bennett, a Republican former education secretary. He and others were pushing a Senate compromise.

The Education Department denied that characterization, saying the tests would be rigorous. Clinton had offered to remedy the political complaint by handing oversight to the National Assessment Governing Board, an independent agency created by Congress.

The board already oversees development of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, tests that measure educational progress in a number of subjects.

But the complete tests aren't given to all students and don't give individual scores.■

1. USA Today

September 11, 1997, Page 6A

Clinton education plan seems doomed in House

President Clinton's proposal for voluntary national tests of fourth-grade read and eighth-grade math skills appeared doomed in the House on Wednesday. Opponents include conservatives who want to curb further federal intrusion into local schools and liberals who fear the tests would be used to compare rich and poor school districts or even pass or fail students. Rep. David Obey, D-Wis., the senior Democrat on the Appropriations Committee, said he favors the testing but conceded the House will bar the Education Department from spending the money to develop the tests. The Senate still is working on a possible compromise testing plan. House Republican leaders, meanwhile, are pushing an education agenda based on vouchers and other taxpayer support for alternatives to public schools.

1. Los Angeles Times

* 09/11/97; Edition: Home Edition; Section: National Desk; Page A-4

Voluntary Testing Plan Clears Hurdle

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Senate negotiators reached agreement Wednesday night on President Clinton's proposal for voluntary national math and reading tests, Democrats said, but prospects for the bill remained dim in the House.

Two Democratic aides said Wednesday night that a compromise in the Senate was fashioned from Clinton's offer to hand oversight of the tests to the National Assessment Governing Board, an independent agency created by Congress.

Under the compromise, two mayors, one from each party, would be added to the 26-member assessment board. And in addition to the Republican and Democratic governor already on the panel, a third governor would be included from whatever party does not control the White House.

House Republican leaders are pushing a competing education agenda based on vouchers and other taxpayer support for alternatives to public schools. ■

1. Associated Press

09-11 1:14a

State officials skeptical of national testing idea

By PEGGY FIKAC

Associated Press Writer

AUSTIN (AP) - President Clinton's proposal for voluntary national testing of fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math skills is getting a cold shoulder from Texas leaders.

"I am very skeptical about the federal government becoming involved in a state and local matter, and as importantly, I'm skeptical about a national test which the federal government could use to promote a feel-good curriculum or mushy curriculum," Gov. George W. Bush said in an interview.

Texas already has "a very good accountability system" for public schools, Bush said.

In the state system, schools are ranked based on student performance on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, dropout rates and attendance.

House Public Education Committee Chairman Paul Sadler, D-Henderson, said he has been concerned about the Clinton proposal.

"We do a very thorough job of testing our Texas students, and I don't want to see, particularly, a national test on top of what we're already doing," Sadler said.

"I would hope that if Congress decides to do something like that, there's some way at least we can utilize our existing testing scheme to fit into their program. I frankly am a little skeptical of national testing standards," he said.

U.S. Senate Democrats have worked to try to save the proposal in Congress from a Republican amendment that would prevent the **U.S. Education Department** from going forward with the tests. They are scheduled to be introduced in 1999.

Clinton said the proposed tests would be voluntary on the part of states and school districts.

"I'm not sure a voluntary program is a meaningful program. I think it makes great press," Sadler said.

Sadler said the more appropriate role for the federal government would be to encourage states to develop their own accountability systems, as Texas has.

State Board of Education member Robert Offutt of San Antonio said Texas' assessment could best be done through a national standardized exam with a long track record, such as the Iowa basic skills test, which would show where Texas students rank in comparison to the rest of the nation.

Offutt said that would be preferable to the current state TAAS and the Clinton proposal.

"I find it analogous to the state of Texas needing to buy vehicles for the Department of Transportation. Do we look to the federal government to produce those vehicles for us, or does the state of Texas decide we're going to produce those vehicles ... or do we look to private contractors, like General Motors and the Ford Motor Co.," Offutt said.

Offutt, a Republican board member backed by Christian conservatives who has expressed concern about federal involvement in education, said he would be leery even if the national test were voluntary.

"There will be a great deal of impetus, financial or otherwise, to participate. In reality, it will not be voluntary," he said.

State Board of Education Chairman Jack Christie, a Republican from Houston, said: "I would be somewhat concerned about who writes the standards, and I would be concerned about political interference with the process."

Christie said he was concerned that rather focusing on education, it will be "a conservative vs. liberal, Democrat vs. Republican, President vs. Congress" debate.

Senate Education Committee Chairman Teel Bivins, R-Amarillo, said, "We have an accountability system that's working well in Texas. I don't think we need an additional layer of testing for our students.

"I think all parents - I have children in high school, middle school and

elementary school - we all feel that our kids are being tested enough."■

1. Portland Press Herald

September 11, 1997

Maine may participate in student testing

By Andrew Garber
Staff Writer

Maine is strongly considering joining seven other states that support a controversial, national student-testing program backed by President Clinton.

Clinton's call for the voluntary national achievement tests has caused a stir in Congress, where Republicans view the idea as another example of a Washington bureaucracy that is meddling in state and local issues.

However, Maine Education Commissioner J. Duke Albanese said this week that the proposed testing program has merit.

"It could give more information about how youngsters in Maine are doing compared to others," he said.

Albanese said he and Gov. Angus King likely will decide within the next two weeks whether to participate in the voluntary program. King could not be reached for comment.

So far in Maine, the idea has received a lukewarm reception from the Maine Education Association, the teachers union. And a University of Maine professor warns that the tests, although worthwhile, could be misused.

The proposed tests would be given to students in the fourth and eighth grades. Students for the first time would be able to compare their individual performances to others across the nation and, to a certain extent, internationally, Albanese said.

Students and school district officials in Maine already can compare their scores statewide, using the Maine Educational Assessment. That test is given to students in the fourth, eighth and 11th grades. But the scores cannot be compared to students taking different tests in other states.

Alaska, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Carolina and West Virginia have agreed to participate in the national program, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

Albanese said he doesn't understand the national controversy attached to Clinton's proposal, considering that no one is being forced to use the tests.

Even if the Maine Department of Education agrees to participate in the national program, it will not force school districts to use the tests, Albanese said.

"It is voluntary for every school system," he said.

Jennifer Davis, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Department of Education, said some states may be hesitant to participate because of concerns their students would not compare well to other states.

In Maine, that scenario appears unlikely. Maine is among the nation's leaders in assessments that looked at statewide student performance.

The new national tests would be given for the first time in March 1999. Fourth graders would be given a reading test. Eighth graders would be given a mathematics test. Only the eighth-grade math test would have results that could be compared to students internationally.

Start-up costs would be paid by the federal government, under the proposal. The program is expected to cost about \$47 million to develop.

Tim Humphrey, president of the Maine Education Association, said his group hasn't decided whether to endorse Clinton's national-testing program.

The MEA would support such tests only if they were used to "improve instruction for students," Humphrey said.

He said his group would oppose the tests if the state wanted to use them to judge the performance of school districts and tie funding to test results.

"We don't believe in high-stakes tests for decision-making," Humphrey said.

Michael Higgins, a top aide to the state education commissioner, said the tests are not intended to punish districts that score poorly.

Even if the state did not use the tests to judge the performance of schools and teachers, there is nothing to stop school districts from doing so, said Ted Coladarci, an

assistant professor of education at the University of Maine and an expert in designing tests.

Because test results would be available down to the student level, school districts could use the information to judge the performance of classrooms and schools, he said.

It would be wrong to do so, he said. It is difficult to figure out whether a student's performance in school is tied to the quality of instruction, or to other factors including parental attention at home, he said.

"Good tests can be used in foolish ways," he said.

Overall, Coladareci said the proposed national tests are a good idea, if used responsibly. The tests, he said, could "force us to ask good questions about what we are doing."

Mary Jane McCalmon, superintendent of Portland's schools, said she'd consider using the tests if the state endorsed the idea.

But McCalmon also said the proposed program seems like a waste of tax money.

A better option would be for the federal government to design a national test that states could model their own tests after, McCalmon said.

That way, Maine and other states could change their existing tests to conform to a national standard, she said.■

1. Education Daily

September 11, 1997

HOUSE STRIKES FUNDING DEAL THAT STYMIES NATIONAL TESTS

House appropriations leaders announced a bipartisan deal yesterday that could kill President Clinton's voluntary national testing program.

The House is expected to finish voting by today on a four-part plan that includes a measure by Rep. Bill Goodling, R-Pa., chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, to bar federal funding for the tests.

Rep. David Obey of Wisconsin, ranking Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee, recommended the testing amendment to his colleagues, even though he opposes it.

"All these matters will have to be worked out between the administration and Congress," Obey said. The White House already has been working with the Senate on a plan that would shift oversight of the exams from the Education Department to an independent, bipartisan board.

Clinton has issued veiled threats to veto the massive spending bill if the legislation would block the tests, which he wants to field test in spring. His spokesman has gone further, saying the president "won't sign the unsignable" (ED, Sept. 9).

The bill, H.R. 2264, would fund for education, labor and health programs for the fiscal year starting Oct. 1.

Something For Everyone

The House began voting yesterday afternoon on the bipartisan education amendments to its fiscal 1998 funding bill.

By voice vote, the representatives agreed to clarify the intent of Obey's \$205 million "whole school reform" plan to say it will be comprehensive, research-based school reform focused on basic skills, state standards and parental involvement. That should head off attempts to move that money to Title I basic grants (ED, Sept. 5).

At press time, the House had not taken action on the testing amendment or on.

* Moving \$55 million from Goals 2000 to special education state grants, last in a series of shifts out of the school reform fund that Republicans despise but that is one of Clinton's high priorities; and

* Prohibiting the Education Department from investigating a state—or imposing any penalty on it—for not providing special education to disabled students older than 18 who are convicted and incarcerated as adults (ED, Aug. 29). That has been a priority for the chairman of the House K-12 subcommittee since Congress rewrote special education law this summer.

Strike Three For Goals 2000

During yesterday's debate, the House agreed by voice vote to shift \$20 million from Goals 2000 to vocational education state grants.

Rep. John Peterson, R-Pa., the amendment's sponsor, said the additional funds would be especially significant if the House's vetoed reauthorization bill, H.R. 1853, becomes law because it would drive 90 percent of the state grants to localities (ED, July 24).

Obey reluctantly supported the amendment, pointing out that it was the second cut to Goals 2000 since the House began considering the education appropriations bill last week.

"I hope we can get away from using this program as a punching bag," Obey said, without mentioning that he sponsored the first blow, which shifted \$12.8 million to a child-abuse prevention fund (ED, Sept. 8).

Factoring in the third cut in the testing deal, the House proposal for Goals 2000 would stand at \$387 million. It received \$491 million this fiscal year, and Clinton requested \$620 million. The Senate proposal would give Goals 2000 \$530 million.

The House also debated a proposal to double a \$40 million fund in Title I for neglected, delinquent and high-risk students by raiding Goals 2000.

A vote on the amendment was scheduled for late Wednesday, but it appeared doomed because it did not garner the support of Rep. John Porter, R-Ill., chairman of the

House education funding subcommittee.

Charters Up, Technology Down

Following the lead of a bipartisan pair of moderate congressmen, the House yesterday shifted \$25 million to charter schools from the Technology Literacy Challenge Fund, which provides formula grants to states for computer hardware, software, Internet access and teacher technology training.

That move brings the House's charter school proposal up to \$100 million, the same as Clinton's request. The Senate plan would level- fund the program at \$51 million.

Meanwhile, the House's recommendation for the technology fund would drop from \$460 million to \$435 million, which is still more than Clinton's request of \$425 million and more than twice as much as this year's appropriation. The Senate would meet Clinton's request.

The amendment by Reps. Frank Riggs, R-Calif., chairman of the K-12 education policy subcommittee, and Tim Roemer, D- Ind., passed by voice vote.

On the other side of the Capitol yesterday, Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., chairman of the education funding subcommittee, said negotiators were "reasonably close" to a compromise on Clinton's tests for fourth-graders in reading and eighth-graders in math.

He said the Senate might vote on its education funding bill, S. 1061, late last night after voting on the unspecified testing compromise, as well amendments that would shift funds to Head Start and would send most K-12 funding to states as block grants (ED, Sept. 10).

Both bills would provide about \$34 billion to ED in fiscal 1998, though the Senate bill is more generous to special education while the House bill would give more money to Title I. —Laureen Lazarovici■

USA Today September 11, 1997

Tests allow government to set school standards

President Clinton and Education Secretary Richard Riley say we must cease "silly" arguments about government intrusion, abandon our love of local control and accept expanded federal tests issued by the government that will yield results on individual students ("Schools cheat on math," Our View, Debate, Sept. 2).

In pursuit of higher standards in education, Americans should not be asked to throw out our standards of freedom, the highest the world over. The federal government's abysmal showing in the development of national standards ought to give Americans pause about permitting its involvement in student tests.

Though Clinton admits the standards were a failure, the setback hasn't stopped him from pushing federal tests. Tests, after all, are a two-for-one deal: Their contents set standards. The U.S. Education Department, however, is prohibited from influencing curriculum. Apparently such legal technicalities are inconsequential to the Clinton administration. Clinton Education official Marshall Smith admitted in February that to "do well on the national test, curriculum and instruction would have to change."

After garnering only six states' support in as many months of stumping for his tests, Clinton recently conceded to letting the federally appointed National Assessment Government Board (NAGB), which oversees the National Assessment of Educational Progress, be in charge of the tests. This is an unacceptable, grasping attempt by Clinton to give legitimacy to his faltering testing scheme. Now that the Education Department has already decided on specifications and awarded the \$13 million contract for the test, letting the NAGB have "oversight" will mean very little, as NAGB Chairman William Randall noted. No federal department, agency or appointed board should be involved in federal tests. The temptation to manipulate is simply too great. America did not attain educational preeminence through federal tests and a centrally driven curriculum. Freedom, not systemization, set us apart. Jennifer A. Marshall Washington, D.C.

The writer is education policy analyst at the Family Research Council.

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1. Education Department News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 11, 1997

Contacts: Melinda Kitchell Malico (202) 401-1008
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STATEMENT BY U. S. SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

RICHARD W. RILEY

On the Senate Vote on the Labor-HHS Appropriations Bill

I am pleased that the Senate has adopted by an overwhelming majority (88 to 12) legislation to proceed with the voluntary national tests in reading and math and authorized an independent, bipartisan commission -- the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) -- to oversee the development of these tests. These tests will give millions of parents the direct information they need to make clear decisions about their children's education. State standards are improving, which is very positive, but they are very uneven. Too many parents are discovering that their "A" student is really getting a "C" education. This is why the American people support national standards of excellence.

Unfortunately, the Senate has also hastily adopted (51 to 49) the Gorton Amendment which was not well thought out and would possibly wipe out many very important programs. This amendment is unacceptable to the Administration.

This effort is not about Washington vs. local control as some suggest. The hasty decision by the Senate to vote for the Gorton Amendment would eliminate many of the key education initiatives for which President Clinton has worked so hard to help improve American education.

Some of the President's most promising initiatives -- getting computers into every classroom, helping the charter school movement grow, raising standards through Goals 2000, and increasing funding so that many more immigrant children learn English -- are all on the chopping block.

In addition, the under-served populations that historically have received federal support would no longer be guaranteed the protections they have received. Overall, there is little logic to the broad-brush attack of the Gorton Amendment. In the space of two hours, for example, the Senate voted to support the development of the voluntary national tests in reading and math and then voted to eliminate the funding for this purpose.

* 421 charter schools now receive start-up funding, a number that would double under the President's budget. The Gorton Amendment could choke off funding for all of these schools and give it to school districts that do not even have a charter school.

* Special funding for 3 million children in bilingual education classes would be placed in jeopardy.

Further, the amendment would allocate funds without regard to distribution of immigrant and LEP children. A school district like Los Angeles with a large number of immigrant children would be severely affected. In addition, all federal funding to train bilingual and English-as-a-second-language teachers would be cut. California alone reports a shortage of more than 20,000 such teachers.

* In 1997, the Department made 1,222 formula grants to public school districts with large numbers of Native American children. Under the Gorton Amendment the targeting of these high enrollment districts would be eliminated in favor of giving every school district in the state some funding.

* Goals 2000, a perennial political target, currently helps parents and teachers raise academic standards in about 6,000 school districts. If the Gorton amendment became law, Goals 2000 funding would no longer be focused on districts committed to raising academic standards.

* 1.2 million disabled Americans are in the vocational rehabilitation system, and many state VR agencies are unable to meet current demand. Over 600,000 disabled Americans would no longer know if they would get the help they need to find employment and become self-sufficient if the Gorton Amendment's provisions become law.

* The technology literacy challenge grant which has fostered some of the most creative and comprehensive partnerships between businesses, schools and universities would no longer exist. In 1996, 586 groups applied to receive one of the 24 grants. These challenge grants have leveraged millions of dollars from private and non-profit entities.



I am also concerned that this broad-brush approach de-emphasizes education, and once again makes the Department of Education a target. The education of America's children should be above politics. I worry that the bipartisan spirit of cooperation that led to the budget agreement is starting to erode. This is not what the American people want when it comes to the education of their children. The American people have made education a national priority and they support President Clinton when it comes to moving American education forward.

1. Associated Press

09-11 11:52a

Senate today overwhelmingly approves modified version of President Clinton's student testing program

By ROBERT GREENE
AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) - The Senate today overwhelmingly approved a modified version of President Clinton's student testing program, but required that assessments be put under a politically balanced national board instead of the Education Department.

The proposal to offer math and reading tests still had dim prospects in the House, where there was opposition from both parties. A House vote was expected later today.

By a 88-12 vote, the Senate agreed to the compromise as an amendment to an \$80 billion spending bill for the Labor, Education and Health and Human Services departments. The no votes came from conservative Republicans, who say the tests will lead to federal control of what children learn.

Republican supporters of national tests say they will be voluntary and enable parents to evaluate their local schools.

"These tests are simply another tools for parents to use in holding local schools and local systems accountable," said Sen. Dan Coats, R-Ind., who took part in negotiations after first planning to challenge the tests.

The reading tests for fourth graders and math tests for eighth graders were the top item in Clinton's 10-point plan for education announced in his State of the Union address in February. States and school districts would be free to decide whether to give the tests, which would be given first in March 1999.

The administration said the exams would let parents know how their children and schools perform when measured against a uniform standard that could be compared internationally. Most standard tests now rate students in comparison with the norm, or average score on the test.

But the testing plan has fallen victim in the House to a mix of opponents, including conservatives who want to curb the federal role in education and liberals who feared misuse of the tests.

Black and Hispanic members were particularly concerned, because many minority group members attend poorly funded schools where achievement is low. Low test results would brand those students as inferior, civil rights advocates worry. The Education Department has also said it would not give the reading test in Spanish.

"The administration has a good deal of work to do in reaching an understanding on the testing issue with both the majority party and significant elements within the Democratic Caucus as well," said Rep. David Obey of Wisconsin, senior Democrat on the Appropriations Committee and a supporter of testing.

He had said before the Senate agreement that the votes weren't there to save the plan in the House, but added, "I don't think it's dead in the long run."

The Senate compromise was fashioned from Clinton's offer to hand oversight of the tests to the National Assessment Governing Board, an independent agency created by Congress.

Republicans don't want the Education Department to control the program. Many would-be supporters worried that such political control would lead to weak standards relying on educational fads rather than basic skills.

"These changes are critical to ensuring that national testing is under the supervision of an independent bipartisan agency and not the federal Department of Education," said Coats, in announcing the agreement.

Under the compromise, two mayors - one from each party - would be added to the 25-member assessment board. In addition to the Republican and Democratic

governor already on the panel, a third governor would be included - this one from whatever party does not control the White House.

Moreover, two more representatives of business and industry would be added, bringing the total to three. To make up for the additions, five board employees, who are curriculum and testing experts, would not have voting power.

In another change, the Education Secretary could only make appointments from a list recommended by the board.

Although a contract has already been let to develop the tests, the board will have three months to review the specifications.

The board already oversees development of the National Assessment of Educational Progress tests that measure educational progress in a number of subjects. But the current tests aren't given to all students and don't give individual scores.

The administration wants to base the national tests on the NAEP.

Obey said he believes the administration can save the testing plan in eventual negotiations over the spending bills and by working with the House Education and Workforce Committee.

The chairman of that committee, Rep. William Goodling of Pennsylvania, led the Republican fight against tests. He said they would waste millions of dollars while giving no further information on the performance of schools.

But Rep. Frank Riggs, R-Calif. and chairman of the early childhood, youth and families subcommittee, said the committee was prepared to consider legislation later this year authorizing the tests.

"I am in favor of the concept," he said.■

1. The New York Times

09/11/97; Edition: Late Edition - Final; Section: Section A; National Desk; Page 26, Column 5

Senate and House on 2 Paths On Plan for National Testing

By JERRY GRAY

WASHINGTON, Sept. 10 — The White House reached agreement with Senate negotiators tonight on President Clinton's proposal for national math and reading tests, although Mr. Clinton's plan appeared to have little chance of passing the House, White House officials said.

Both the Senate and the House were expected to vote on Thursday on the proposal, with House Democrats conceding that they could not muster support for the President's voluntary reading and math tests.

Clinton aides said a compromise with Senate Republicans involved altering the makeup of the National Assessment Governing Board, an independent agency created by Congress. Republicans do not want the Education Department in control of the program. An additional governor would be appointed to the 26-member board, so that at least two of the three governors were not members of the President's political party.

The Clinton plan still faces stiff opposition in the House, where leaders of both parties agreed informally today to block Federal money from being used to develop President Clinton's proposals. The deal was one of several concessions that persuaded conservative junior Republicans to end a slowdown on debates over spending bills.

The younger Republicans had stalled discussions on labor and education spending bills by offering up scores of amendments, in what they said was a protest over this summer's balanced budget agreement and tax cuts. But after the Republican leadership and Democrats agreed to accept four of those amendments to the legislation, the younger Republicans eased off on their protest.

"We are very pleased with this arrangement. I think it was a significant victory," said Representative David M. McIntosh of Indiana, a Republican sophomore and one of those who tried to force the House to accept changes in the spending bill. "It wasn't everything we wanted going into it. But in a larger philosophical sense, it's a shift in the conservative direction in this bill and that's what our goal has been from the beginning."

Mr. McIntosh and other sophomore Republicans were also involved on Tuesday in a push to try to force their leadership to support a major new tax cut, elimination of the so-called marriage penalty tax. Some of the same young members have been among the most unhappy with parts of the balanced budget agreement and had slowed debate on the \$279 billion appropriations bill for Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education by offering more than 100 amendments to the measure.

But they agreed to end their delaying tactics this afternoon after the Republican leaders and Democrats said they were willing to give in on some of the issues that the junior Republicans considered most important.

Key among them was an amendment offered by Representative Bill Goodling of Pennsylvania that would prohibit appropriated money from being used to develop national mathematics tests for fourth graders and national reading tests for eighth graders.

Even though an agreement was reached on Mr. Goodling's amendment, a roll-call vote on the measure was postponed until Thursday.

Opposition to the President's program for voluntary national testing has been growing on both sides of the political spectrum. Some conservatives believe the plan would be another intrusion by the Federal Government into local issues, and would be the first step toward a national curriculum. On the other side, liberals object because they fear that poor or minority students will not perform well on national tests.

Another amendment struck at another of Mr. Clinton's pet education projects, Goals 2000. The appropriations bill allocated \$458 million for the program. But an amendment sponsored by Representative Lindsey Graham of South Carolina would divert \$55 million of it to state grants for the Individuals with Disabilities in Education

program.

The other amendment that the junior Republicans prevailed on would transfer the entire \$200 million that had been set aside for the Whole School Reform program to other education programs.

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San Jose Mercury News

Article Date:

SEP 11 1997

FROM the redwood forests to the Gulf Stream waters, two plus two equals four. But we have no way of knowing whether Carlos in California can do math as well as Mary in Mississippi.

President Clinton's proposed national assessment — a reading test for fourth-graders, a math exam for eighth-graders — is facing heavy opposition in Congress for a variety of reasons, most of them specious. Clinton has vowed to veto the education, labor and health spending bill if it passes with an amendment banning national testing.

This is a fight Clinton should win. While most states, like California, are working on their own standards, we need a national benchmark to show whether young Americans are learning the skills they need to succeed.

Critics on the right say the federal education bureaucrats will use a national test to meddle in local decisions. Some fear the exam will favor "whole language" over phonics, or "fuzzy math" over computation.

The answer to that is that the program is voluntary. So far, only six states and 15 big-city school districts have pledged to use the tests, starting in March 1999. If the national tests are based on poorly devised standards or don't measure achievement credibly, then they won't be used or heeded.

Critics on the left fear that black and Hispanic kids will earn low scores, and be shunted into low-level classes or stigmatized when they try to get into college or get jobs.

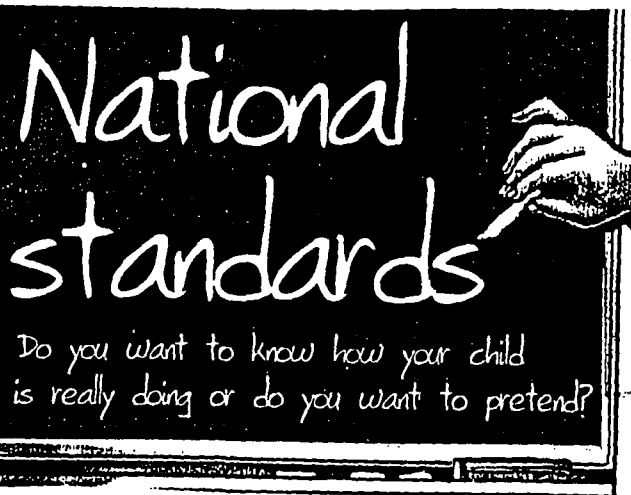
Many kids will do poorly. But a fourth-grade or eighth-grade test is meant to diagnose problems or discover success, not to decide a student's fate. The tests will give students the chance to improve their skills before they find out they can't read a college textbook or a job application.

A cellular phone user is at least as impaired as a drinker. Why should the laws be any different?

— Letter writer Ron Hall

The alternative is to lie to parents about how their kids are doing, hand out "student of the month" stickers like condoms, and graduate students with phony diplomas.

Hispanic groups oppose the reading exam because it will be



given in English only, handicapping students who aren't yet proficient in English. Los Angeles Unified backed out of the reading test for that reason. (Meanwhile, conservatives are upset that the math test will be given in Spanish as well as English.)

Again, the question is: Do you want to know how well students are learning, or would you rather play pretend? Reading in English is the goal for all students.

Let's find out how rapidly students from immigrant families are moving toward that goal.

California exemplifies the importance of national testing: When students earned abysmal scores on the National Assessment

for Educational Progress, the failure of the state's "whole language" reading program was exposed.

NABP tests sample students to create state rankings. Clinton's test also would produce scores for individual students, schools or school districts.

It should be possible to develop a test that measures adequate, good and excellent fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math. If we can't agree on national benchmarks for the two fundamental subjects, we might as well give up hope of reaching world-class standards in education.

1. Education Week

Sept. 10, 1997

Clinton Team Pulls Out the Stops For Test Plan

By David J. Hoff

Washington

President Clinton and his team last week marshaled their resources to halt a pending effort to shut down their national testing plan.

The president interrupted his vacation to speak out for the program, and Vice President Al Gore recruited support in a conference call with business leaders.

On Capitol Hill, Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley lobbied House Democrats at a meeting called to garner their support, and senior Democrats in both the House and Senate sought backing for the plan to test the reading abilities of 4th graders and the math knowledge of 8th graders, starting in 1999.

The administration's senior advisers even threatened to recommend that Mr. Clinton veto a pending fiscal 1998 education spending bill if it included a clause prohibiting the Department of Education from spending money on test development.

Late last week, it was uncertain whether the spending bill would include such language. The Senate postponed its vote until this week. At press time, it was unclear whether the House would vote late Friday or this week.

But the assessment of some observers was that the administration was fighting an uphill battle.

"The White House has a lot of work to do," Rep. Dale E. Kildee, D-Mich., said last Thursday, shortly after Mr. Riley met with Democratic House members. Many Democrats have long questioned the use of testing in school reform, and several factions—specifically black and Hispanic members of Congress—are opposed to it, Mr. Kildee added.

Counting the Votes

But administration officials remained confident that they would prevail. Republican leaders would be gun-shy about challenging the White House on education after losing confrontations on the issue during the past two years, said Michael Cohen, the president's education adviser.

The lobbying barrage started in July after Rep. Bill Goodling, R-Pa., introduced an amendment to stop the Education Department from continuing its work on the national tests. Sens. Judd Gregg, R-N.H., and Daniel R. Coats, R-Ind., unveiled a similar amendment in the Senate on Sept. 3.

Last month, the department awarded a contract to a coalition of test publishers to design the assessments. ("Riley Offers Test Control Concession," Sept. 3, 1997.)

Seven states and 15 urban areas have promised to participate in the first year of the exams. Alaska late last month became the most recent state to say it would use the tests.

Mr. Goodling has said that he is confident his amendment will pass as long as the president doesn't put too much pressure on Democrats.

"If people vote their conscience, we'll win," he said last week. "If they say, 'I'm supporting my leader,' we'll lose."

While Mr. Goodling could win with the unanimous support of the GOP, he said he was not counting on that. Some members may vote against him, he said, to avoid a presidential veto of the larger appropriations bill.

But it appeared some Democrats would not support Mr. Clinton out of loyalty. Rep. Xavier Becerra, D-Calif., said all but one or two of the 14 members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus would vote with Mr. Goodling. Their chief concern is that the 4th grade reading test would not be offered in languages other than English.

"The intent is good," Mr. Becerra said in an interview. "It's the implementation that's always been a concern."

Rep. Major R. Owens, D-N.Y., a co-sponsor of the Goodling amendment, said a "considerable number" of his colleagues in the 32-member Congressional Black Caucus would vote with him to block the tests. "We'd like to put testing on hold and move forward with opportunity-to-learn" standards, he said. "You can't do one without the other. It's unfair to the kids."

The three most senior Democrats on the House Education and the Workforce Committee, meanwhile, urged their Democratic colleagues to support the president. Reps. William L. Clay, an African-American who represents a St. Louis district, Matthew G. Martinez, who is Hispanic and from Los Angeles, and George Miller, a liberal from northern California are backing the testing plan.

Senate Uncertainty

On the Senate side, the voting patterns have not been as clear. Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., the chairman of the subcommittee that funds education programs, hastily arranged a hearing last Thursday to discuss the testing plan after his GOP colleagues introduced their amendment on Wednesday afternoon.

Mr. Riley and Mr. Goodling appeared separately before the panel, repeating the positions outlined in an Aug. 25 broadcast of the CBS public-affairs program "Face the Nation."

At the end of the 90-minute session, Mr. Specter did not say how he would vote. Sen. James M. Jeffords, R-Vt., the chairman of the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee, said he would vote to let the testing process proceed. ■



1. The New York Times

09/10/97; Edition: Late Edition - Final; Section: Section A; Metropolitan Desk; Page 2, Column 6

QUOTATION OF THE DAY

"It may not be possible to do national testing in America under government sponsorship. There may just be too many fault lines in our politics and our educational systems."

-- CHESTER FINN, an education expert at the Hudson Institute. (A21)

06:12 EDT September 10, 1997■



1. The New York Times

09/10/97; Edition: Late Edition - Final; Section: Section A; National Desk; Page 20, Column 1

Students Hear Clinton Tell Of Priorities For the Fall

By JAMES BENNETT

WASHINGTON, Sept. 9 — Declaring the economic and political drag of budget deficits to be a thing of the past, President Clinton moved on today to a broad agenda for the rest of the year, trying to summon support for a grab bag of causes from expanding trade to tightening pollution controls to passing wide-reaching laws to restrict tobacco.

Speaking to his second audience of students in two days, Mr. Clinton again called on Congress to support his plan for new national tests measured against voluntary standards in reading and math.

Mr. Clinton also threatened today to direct "the full glare of public light" toward any senators who try to block legislation to tighten campaign finance laws. But even as he spoke this afternoon about the peril of money in politics and a Senate committee sharply questioned a former top Democratic official about fund-raising, Mr. Clinton planned to attend two dinners tonight to raise \$550,000 for the Democratic National Committee.

Addressing the students and faculty of American University here, Mr. Clinton invoked John F. Kennedy's vision of a world free from the cold war, articulated 34 years ago at the same university.

"It is up to you and to me and to our fellow Americans to imagine what the 21st century will be, and then to do what is necessary to make that vision a reality for all our people," he said.

Mr. Clinton addressed topics as open-ended as whether the rush of technology could leave citizens "each with our own Web page, but linked by few human bonds of community." But he also raised more specific matters, urging for the first time in weeks that his nominee for Ambassador to Mexico, William F. Weld, receive a hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Mr. Clinton assured his college audience that Social Security would survive to benefit them, and pledged in the next three months to appoint members of a new commission to study Medicare. He also called on Congress to take this "historic opportunity" to pass "sweeping legislation that focuses first and foremost on reducing smoking among young people."

The President was raucously received by some 4,000 students and faculty members packed into a basketball gymnasium, and flashbulbs pulsed from the bleachers throughout his 41-minute address. Like most of the President's other major addresses this year, the speech today divided into the triad of "opportunity, responsibility, community," familiar from his 1996 campaign.

One senior aide billed the address, which Mr. Clinton worked on in the last two weeks of his vacation, as a "back to work, back to school, America's back" speech. And Mr. Clinton provided a remarkably upbeat assessment of the nation's health, pointing to low inflation and unemployment as the products of an economy so robust that "many of our poorest urban and rural communities are in a springtime of renewal."

He lavishly praised the recent agreement to balance the budget by 2002.

"Now, after years in which the deficit dominated our politics and dampened our economy, America finally has lifted that burden from the next generation," Mr. Clinton said. "After years in which the two parties seemed often as tired and trapped as punch-drunk fighters in a ring getting smaller and smaller, finally we found a way for Democrats and Republicans to work together for the national interest."

After he turned to foreign policy, however, Mr. Clinton sounded slightly defensive as he described his plans to meet here later this fall with President Jiang Zemin of China. He called the meeting "a chance for us to address candidly and face-to-face our differences on issues like human rights and religious freedom."

He said that "sitting down together across the table is far more likely to produce progress than pointing fingers across the Pacific."

Linking free trade with the growth of democracy, Mr. Clinton called for expanded trade with Asia and other parts of the world. On Wednesday he plans to announce a campaign to persuade Congress to increase his powers to negotiate trade agreements.

For the first time since his address to the United Nations on June 26, Mr. Clinton returned to the subject of global climate change. He is trying to build public support for reducing emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases before a summit on climate change in December in Japan.

Mr. Clinton warned that, if it is not checked, climate change could cause flooding in southern Florida and Louisiana over the next 50 years, and he said Americans could take cost-free steps to cut emissions of gases that contribute to climatic warming.

"We could reduce them 20 percent tomorrow with technology that is already available at no cost if we just changed the way we do things," Mr. Clinton said, but offering no specific suggestions.

His aides said today that they could not determine the source of his 20 percent figure, but that he was referring to measures like much more widespread use of refrigerators and light bulbs that require less electricity.

While the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee continued today to investigate the price of access to politicians, including the President, Mr. Clinton turned that subject around, saying the primary cause of the mounting cost of campaigns was "the cost of access to you, the voters." He called for free or reduced advertising time for politicians.

Mr. Clinton repeated his support for campaign finance legislation sponsored by Senator John McCain, Republican of Arizona, and Senator Russell D. Feingold, Democrat of Wisconsin, saying, "Every year I have been President, I have supported a good campaign finance reform bill."

Under the McCain-Feingold bill, much of the money Mr. Clinton planned to raise at the events tonight — the unlimited donations to parties classified as "soft money" — would be illegal. Michael D. McCurry, the White House press secretary, wearily repeated today that the Democrats would not "unilaterally disarm" by abandoning soft money.

"We'll continue to try to change the rules even as we try to compete effectively under the rules," Mr. McCurry said.

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1. New York Newsday

September 10, 1997

Clinton's Wide Agenda

By Glenn Kessler

WASHINGTON BUREAU

Washington - In a campaign-style speech, President Bill Clinton yesterday laid out a wide-ranging - if unfocused - fall agenda that is sure to spark confrontations with the Republican-controlled Congress on issues such as nationwide education standards, tougher environmental regulations and campaign finance reform.

He also put in a rare public plug for his embattled nominee to be ambassador to Mexico, former Massachusetts Gov. William Weld. One issue Clinton cited, new presidential authority to negotiate free trade deals, commands the support of most Republicans. Yet, even though Clinton plans to push for the authority in a White House ceremony today, the president hasn't yet won over many members of his own party. Officials said the actual text of the legislation granting "fast-track" authority may not be ready in time for the ceremony.

The president used soaring rhetoric at times during his speech before an enthusiastic crowd at American University. But, in contrast to the issues that consumed the White House earlier this year - a balanced-budget agreement and expansion of the NATO military alliance - the overall impression suggested that the next few months will be a mopping-up operation, with no grand theme uniting a disparate collection of initiatives.

One of the first things Clinton mentioned, for instance, was the need to win approval for elements of the balanced budget - such as increased money for Pell grants for higher education - in the annual spending bills that must be passed by Congress. New negotiating authority for trade agreements, meanwhile, has been on hold for months as Clinton dealt with other, more pressing issues.

Clinton once again demanded passage of a bipartisan campaign finance reform bill sponsored by Sens. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Russell Feingold (D-Wis.), saying if politicians try to block it, "we intend to see that it happens in the full glare of public light." But Clinton earlier challenged Congress to pass the bill by July 4, to little effect.

After the speech, in fact, White House spokesman Mike McCurry seemed to downplay Clinton's apparent threat to focus attention on senators who vote to block campaign finance reform. Clinton last night attended a pair of fund-raising dinners expected to raise about \$500,000 for the Democratic Party.

The president made no attempt to prioritize his goals. In fact, he even seemed to get lost in his 45-minute address, referring to the "third thing we have to do" when he was already on his seventh or eighth action item.

The president became most impassioned when he touched on his yearlong race initiative and challenged the students in the audience to help a nation growing more racially diverse to avoid succumbing to new racial fears. "The very forces of progress that are propelling us forward could also pull us apart, threatening to isolate us - each with our own Web page, but linked by few human bonds of community," he said.

Clinton said he would push forward with his plans to set national education standards, despite Republican efforts to block them. He defended his effort to reduce greenhouse emissions in the atmosphere, rejecting Republican arguments that it would doom the economy. "We can grow this economy and do right by the environment," he said.

Clinton also called for "passing sweeping legislation" to reduce smoking among teenagers. Clinton is expected to announce next week what changes he will seek in the landmark tobacco deal between states and the industry. ■

1. Philadelphia Inquirer

September 10, 1997

Clinton exhorts youth to tackle global warming, race relations

By Robert A. Rankin

INQUIRER WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON — President Clinton challenged America's young people yesterday to take the lead in showing their fellow citizens how to cope with a changing global climate and an increasingly multiracial democracy.

Speaking to an enthusiastic audience of about 3,000 students at American University here, Clinton laid out his agenda for the rest of this year in a context of preparing America for the 21st century that young people will inherit.

Along the way, Clinton also challenged the Senate to grant a hearing to William Weld, his embattled nominee for ambassador to Mexico; gave his strongest hint yet that he will push Congress to approve an omnibus tobacco settlement; and renewed his appeals for federal education programs and free-trade negotiating authority.

His strongest message was his call for help from the young.

Warning that global warming may wreak worldwide devastation in the next century unless steps are taken soon to modify the trend, Clinton asked them to help him rally the nation to act.

"We need the young people of America, particularly the university students who are in a position to study this issue, to make this a gripping national issue," he declared. He noted that a panel of 2,500 scientists concluded two years ago that modern industrial gas emissions were slowly heating the Earth's surface.

Turning to one of his favorite themes — "I have asked the nation to join me in a great national conversation about race" — the President noted that American University's 11,285 students include people from more than 140 racial and ethnic groups.

"You can be America's laboratory. You figure it out and let us know," he said to applause, which swelled in spirit when he observed that within a few decades, America's population will be so diverse that the nation will have no majority race.

Clinton also delivered his sharpest public comment yet on the refusal of Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jesse Helms (R., N.C.) to grant Mexican Ambassador-designate Weld a hearing.

"I believe when a president nominates someone for a job, that person is entitled to a hearing before the Foreign Relations Committee, and I think he ought to get it," he said.

Helms refused again yesterday to hold a hearing on Weld, rejecting an appeal by Sen. Richard Lugar (R., Ind.) to let Weld appear before the committee.

Also yesterday, Clinton, in reciting his wish list for congressional action by year's end, hinted that he would push for enactment of a broad tobacco settlement.

Clinton is expected to announce next week what changes he wants in the deal struck in June by major tobacco manufacturers and 40 state attorneys general. He is expected to insist that the Food and Drug Administration have stronger regulatory authority over cigarettes than the deal outlined.■

1. Dallas Morning News

September 10, 1997

Clinton outlines goals, puts in word for Weld **Agenda includes education tests, campaign reform**

By Susan Feeney

The Dallas Morning News

WASHINGTON - President Clinton on Tuesday spelled out his priorities for the coming months and into next year, saying that despite the robust economy and new balanced-budget plan, "there is, in fact, a lot more to do."

The president also used his address before students at American University to push for Senate consideration of Republican William Weld to be U.S. ambassador to Mexico.

"I believe when a president nominates someone for a job, that person is entitled to a hearing before the Foreign Relations Committee. And I think he ought to get it," Mr. Clinton said of the former Massachusetts governor.

Mr. Clinton's agenda included funding of education standards testing, passing bipartisan campaign finance reform, forging stronger U.S. ties with China, reforming entitlements, expanding free trade and raising awareness about global warming.

Many of the items are not embraced by the Republican-controlled Congress, including Mr. Weld's nomination.

Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., the chairman of the committee, opposes Mr. Weld's nomination and has refused to schedule a hearing or even meet with him. Late Tuesday, Mr. Helms scheduled a special meeting of the committee for Friday but announced that Mr. Weld's nomination would not be on the agenda and that there would be no witnesses.

The president seized upon the onset of fall, a season he said signifies both back to school and back to work, to try to give shape to his second term, now that big matters such as the balanced budget and changes in the welfare system are largely settled.

"The news is good today. And in the face of good news the easiest thing to do is to rest, to take a vacation, to believe our work is done and to be satisfied that our challenges are met," Mr. Clinton said.

"But complacency is not an option and vacations have to remain short in a time still full of challenge and change."

Some audience members audibly chuckled at the president's reference to short vacations. On Sunday, he ended a three-week respite in Martha's Vineyard, the longest vacation of his presidency.

At different points in his remarks, the president called on the students, the Congress or the American people to help him in his endeavors.

Lawmakers must authorize the spending agreed upon in the historic balanced budget plan each year, he said. But opposition in Congress from the political left and right is imperiling his plan for national testing of fourth-graders in reading and eighth-graders in math.

Without the tests, "We are robbing them of the future you are here to claim," he told the college audience. "And I hope you will support our efforts."

He also asked students to help make global warming "a gripping national issue."

The United States will take part in an international summit in Kyoto, Japan, in December on the subject that the president called "a very large challenge" and "very controversial."

Mr. Clinton has not yet made a concrete pledge for reducing the nation's production of greenhouse gases - which some scientists say are causing the Earth's temperature to rise. Still, he vowed, "We can grow this economy and do right by the environment."

On China, Mr. Clinton appealed to the public. He stressed the strategic and economic importance of his meeting with President Jiang Zemin next month in Washington.

"I hope the American people will welcome him," the president said.

"China will choose its own destiny; but if we engage China, instead of isolating ourselves from her, we can help to influence the path it takes," he added.

Mr. Clinton urged Congress to pass the campaign reform bill written by Sens. John McCain, an Arizona Republican, and Russ Feingold, a Wisconsin Democrat.

Mr. Clinton - who had two campaign fund-raisers scheduled Tuesday night - has never made reform an all-out crusade. His 1996 presidential campaign and the Democratic Party are under investigation by Congress and the Justice Department for allegations of campaign finance irregularities. Still, Mr. Clinton criticized the Senate, saying it had bottled up campaign finance reform bills every year.

"Now, the people who don't want it this year say they're going to do it all over again," he said. "They may do it, but if they do it this year, we intend to see that it happens in the full glare of public light."

Mr. Clinton is beginning to consider candidates for a bipartisan panel that will study ways to keep the Medicare system solvent. Likewise, White House aides said they are beginning to explore ways for preserving the long-term financial health of Social Security once the baby boom generation begins to retire.

"I know a lot of you don't think it's going to be there," Mr. Clinton told students regarding Social Security. "But it is."

The president previewed a White House event set for Wednesday when he urged Congress to renew his power to negotiate trade

agreements on a "fast track." Under the procedure, lawmakers would be required to vote up or down on future trade pacts, without amendments.

Many Democrats want any legislation to have safeguards for the environment and labor, but House Majority Leader Dick Armey, R-Irving, warned that those provisions would stymie progress.

"If we get a clean bill, it can move quickly through the process," Mr. Armey said. "There is no way we can move it with any dispatch unless it's clean."

Mr. Clinton stressed his interest in passing legislation on tobacco that focuses on reducing teen smoking. Aides said that he could offer his assessment as early as next week on the \$368.5 billion settlement between the states and the tobacco industry.

Mr. Clinton reiterated at length his commitment to a yearlong national discussion on race and equality of opportunity in America. He called it "a question of imagination, of vision, of heart. And it is also very important to be hard-headed about it."

Staff writer Catalina Camia contributed to this report.■

1. Washington Times

September 10, 1997 Category: Editorial

Clinton outlines priorities for fall, future

By Warren P. Strobel

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Sounding at times like he is thinking as much about his legacy as about the legislative season, President Clinton yesterday began a campaign for his broad fall agenda while acknowledging that the nation lacks a sense of urgency that would help him push it through.

With the balanced-budget deal passed and the economy in good shape, "the easiest thing to do is to rest, to take a vacation, to believe our work is done and to be satisfied that our challenges are met," Mr. Clinton said.

"But complacency is not an option," he said. "There is, in fact, a lot more to do."

In a speech at American University, the president presented a to-do list of virtually every priority he has for the next few months. They range from securing a hearing for his nominee as ambassador to Mexico, William F. Weld, to pushing initiatives on race and global warming.

He also urged expansion of global trade, previewing the case he will make today when he holds a White House ceremony to make public his proposal for "fast track" trade-negotiating authority.

"There will always be new jobs being created and some going away," he said to critics of his trade policy. "But on balance we have benefited for 60 years by leading the way to integrate the world's economies."

The president, whose party and administration have been under fire for months for campaign-finance abuses, pledged again to push for reform. But there seems little chance Congress will act before members head for the exits next month.

And hours after he spoke, Mr. Clinton was back on the fund-raising circuit, helping bring in an estimated \$550,000 for the Democratic National Committee at back-to-back fund-raisers at the District's Carlton Hotel.

Mr. Clinton's appeal for the Weld nomination was one of the few times he has spoken out on the matter. "I believe when a president nominates someone for a job, that person's entitled to a hearing before the Foreign Relations Committee," he said.

Committee Chairman Jesse Helms, North Carolina Republican, told colleagues in a letter yesterday that the Weld nomination will not be on the agenda of a special hearing called for Friday.

Mr. Clinton's hopscotchlike survey of his priorities — he also cited education, NATO expansion and tobacco — seemed to indicate he has not resolved the competition among his advisers over which of 13 or 14 issues to move to the top of the agenda.

"He hasn't settled on a clear, central core of objectives," said American University political science professor James Thurber, who was in the audience.

"He went into absolutely every initiative they had at this point. I don't think that's wise if you're trying to get the attention of the American people," he said.

Terry Sullivan, a political scientist at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, said that in recent months Mr. Clinton appears to have spent increasing time focusing on the issues he hopes to be remembered for.

"He's been thinking long and hard about the issue of legacy," Mr. Sullivan said. "He can see the end, and it's coming rapidly toward him."

While some, such as his initiative on race, depend on Mr. Clinton using his bully pulpit to shape national attitudes, others are bound to spark partisan fights.

Congressional Republicans are threatening to block Mr. Clinton from spending funds on national education tests and to cut funding for some of his other education initiatives.

Mr. Thurber predicted that on these disputes and others involving the 13 appropriations bills Congress must pass by Oct. 1, Mr. Clinton will "get much, if not all, of the major items" he wants.

While Mr. Clinton announced no new initiatives, he omitted an old one: He made no mention of his May pledge to start a crusade for an AIDS vaccine.■

The New York Times

09/10/97; Edition: Late Edition - Final; Section: Section A; National Desk; Page 21, Column 1

Union Chief Criticizes Pupil Promotion Policy

By ETHAN BRONNER

WASHINGTON, Sept. 9 — Seeking to sharpen the debate over national educational testing, Sandra Feldman, the new president of the American Federation of Teachers, assailed today what she called the "rampant" policy of promoting unprepared pupils to the next grade.

Speaking to the National Press Club in what was effectively her Washington political debut, Ms. Feldman presented the results of the union's survey of policies in 85 school districts nationwide, including the 40 largest ones. The study contends that while none of the districts have an official policy of "social promotion," the practice is common.

"Almost all districts say that holding students back must be the option of last resort, which is a clear message to promote socially, and many of them also put explicit limits on retaining students, which is another clear message to promote socially," she said.

Adding her support to President Clinton's campaign for voluntary national tests for fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math skills, Ms. Feldman said the real reason youngsters can be pushed through a school system without acquiring basic skills is that "there are no agreed-upon standards defining what students should know and be able to do at various grade levels."

Conservative Republican lawmakers, led by Speaker Newt Gingrich, oppose the proposed tests, dismissing them as the meddling of Washington bureaucrats who fail to respect local control of schools and districts.

The Senate and the House could vote soon on spending bills that would include money to develop the tests proposed by President Clinton.

Ms. Feldman challenged such critics, saying: "What are they afraid of? Why are we afraid to take a look across the states at our districts and see how our kids are doing?"

The survey "Passing on Failure: District Promotion Policies and Practices," presented by Ms. Feldman, found that not only was social promotion common but most districts had no remedial policy for students who were failing.

"Only about 15 percent mention tutoring and only about 13 percent mention alternative programs and strategies, such as transitional classes, extended instructional time, customized instructional programs or other supportive services," she said, referring to the districts' written policies.

Ms. Feldman was also critical of those districts that simply hold students back without taking additional steps to help them succeed. She said the survey found that 15 percent to 19 percent of students nationwide repeated a grade annually. The school districts surveyed serve more than a third of public school students.

She congratulated some school districts, including the Chicago district, that have officially ended social promotion. But she said that for other schools, promoting and holding students back do not address the problem of how to insure they acquire basic skills.

"The fact is, neither social promotion nor retention is the answer, if the answer we're seeking is getting kids to achieve," she said. "In fact, throughout the 20th century, we've swung like a pendulum between these two policy approaches to student progression and neither policy has done the job."

She urged that a policy of "intensive care" for at-risk students be used to intervene long before the school must choose whether to hold back or promote students. She pointed to school districts, notably those of Cincinnati, Albuquerque, N.M., and Corpus Christi, Tex., which attempt to identify problem students early and offer them special classes.

Ms. Feldman is also president of New York City's United Federation of Teachers, a post she has held since 1986. Last May, she succeeded her mentor, Albert Shanker, as president of the American Federation of Teachers, which with 940,000 members is the second-largest teachers' union after the National Education Association, with 2.2 million members.

The two unions have been in painstaking negotiations over a proposed merger, which Ms. Feldman has said she favors, so that "teachers stop fighting each other." She acknowledged that joining two enormous organizations, despite much common ground, was complicated.

Ms. Feldman referred today, as she does often, to her own years in public school in Coney Island, the daughter of a milkman and a bakery clerk. She grew impassioned today about the poor, saying, "Not only was I one of them, but I've spent my entire adult life among them."

She also said that well-educated, well-trained teachers were needed nationwide and should be placed in every classroom, "but especially in the classrooms of our neediest and most vulnerable children."



Those who thought only young untrained college graduates were needed to teach reading were wrong, Ms. Feldman said.

"It's as dumb and cruel to expect someone, even a brilliant, young Americorps type, to go in and do that with at-risk kids without proper training," she said, "as it would be to think one of us could take out another's appendix, armed only with good will, a workshop and the advice of a few books." ■

1. Los Angeles Times

* 09/10/97; Edition: Home Edition; Section: National Desk; Page A-5

Clinton Begins Push on Trade Power Agenda:

'Fast-track' bill is among priorities for remainder of term, he says. Some congressional Democrats are opposed.

By JONATHAN PETERSON
TIMES STAFF WRITER

WASHINGTON — Unveiling his top priorities for the rest of this year and beyond, President Clinton appealed Tuesday for broadly expanded powers to make trade deals overseas and outlined an agenda that is likely to spark conflict as he strives to make a mark in the remainder of his second term.

"We do not need to be afraid to trade with the rest of the world," Clinton told an audience at American University here, even as Democratic leaders, organized labor and environmental advocates joined in opposition to the trade goals he plans to underline today in a White House address.

Although Clinton's own commitment to campaign-finance reform has been questioned, the president on Tuesday sounded unusually tough on the subject, threatening to expose those who would sabotage a key bill to "the full glare of public light."

He also pledged to help shore up Social Security for the long haul and argued that his choice for ambassador to Mexico, former Massachusetts Gov. William F. Weld, deserves a hearing with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Clinton also reiterated his support for "high, clear, uniform academic standards" backed by national testing, a plan that is under assault in Congress.

Unstated by the president on Tuesday was the emerging sense that he has limited time to accomplish all his aims, with the first year of his final term drawing to a close. Congressional leaders want to adjourn by mid-November, if not sooner. Moreover, the congressional elections of 1998 and the presidential election campaign in 2000 will whittle away at the time he has left to accomplish his goals.

In "the face of good news, the easiest thing to do is to rest, to take a vacation, to believe our work is done and to be satisfied that our challenges are met," the president said in remarks that were at times philosophical, at others challenging. "But complacency is not an option, and vacations have to remain short."

Among the more contentious of his aims is the goal of expanded trade powers, particularly at a time when public opinion polls have shown widespread skepticism about the benefits of the North American Free Trade Agreement. The authority Clinton seeks, dubbed "fast track," would enable him to negotiate trade deals that Congress could not amend. The law that granted such authority to his predecessors in the Oval Office has expired.

But as a condition of renewing it, some Democrats, including House Minority Leader Richard A. Gephardt (D-Mo.), would require U.S. trading partners to guarantee certain wage levels and environmental protections in their own countries. Others in Congress, including many Republicans, view such requirements as inappropriate.

In his speech, Clinton—who pushed NAFTA through Congress despite heated opposition from within his own party—sounded evangelical about the benefits of broadened trade in an increasingly global economy.

It "will promote peace; it will promote freedom; it will promote stability; it will raise the level of living standards in other parts of the world even as it maintains America as the world's most prosperous nation," he declared.

Democrats in Congress remain skeptical about the potential effect of such new authority on American workers, and urged the administration to include in the legislation sufficient provisions protecting labor and the environment.

As of late Tuesday, administration officials were still struggling to find compromise language that might capture a majority of votes on Capitol Hill.

The matter of expanded presidential powers over trade was not the only inflammatory issue Clinton discussed Tuesday. Speaking to the university audience, he also said that "we have a responsibility to improve the way our political system works," and reiterated his call for passage of a campaign-finance reform bill sponsored by Sens. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Russell D. Feingold (D-Wis.) that would ban the unlimited contributions known as "soft money" and impose other restrictions.

Every year, Clinton lamented, we "have seen the bills blocked by a filibuster in the United States Senate—every single year. Now the people who don't want it this year say they're going to do it all over again. They may do it, but if they do it this year we intend to see that it happens in the full glare of the public light."

The president also sought to step up pressure on Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, who has refused to grant a confirmation hearing to Weld, a Republican who is Clinton's choice for ambassador to Mexico. "I believe still that he is the best person to be ambassador to Mexico," Clinton said of the nominee, whom Helms considers too liberal on a range of social issues.

Clinton added: "I believe when a president nominates someone for a job, that person is entitled to a hearing."

But Helms refused to put Weld's nomination on the agenda of a special committee meeting this Friday. In a letter to Sen. Richard G. Lugar (R-Ind.) and others who requested the meeting, Helms on Tuesday said he alone has authority to set the agenda of the session.

Of the various topics he touched on, Clinton seemed to draw some of the most enthusiastic audience responses on matters of education, the environment and Social Security.

The balanced-budget bill, he said, now must be followed up with a series of appropriations bills to pay for college loans, classroom computers and other initiatives. In addition, Clinton said his push for national testing to reinforce education standards did not amount to a "federal power grab" because such tests would be voluntary.

"We have to do better," he said of academic achievement levels, noting that U.S. eighth-graders scored below the world average, in contrast to above-average performance by fourth-graders, in math and science.

He predicted that a global summit later this year on greenhouse gas emissions will spark a "very controversial debate" in this country about the cost of reducing such emissions, but he maintained that "we can grow this economy and do right by the environment."

And Clinton drew applause when he followed up on a comment by the university's student body president that many young people are skeptical that Social Security will be there when they need it.

"I know a lot of you don't think it's going to be there, but it is," Clinton said, describing the preservation of Medicare and Social Security over the long haul as one of our "most serious" responsibilities. "It is going to be there."

Looking at the ethnically and racially diverse crowd, Clinton described America's diversity as a godsend and a "huge gift" in a global economy. "You can be America's laboratory," he said. ■