

**Voluntary National Tests in Reading and Math
A Strategy to Master the Basics and Reach High Standards**

Tonight, I issue a challenge to the nation: Every state should adopt high national standards, and by 1999, every state should test every 4th grader in reading and every 8th grader in math to make sure these standards are met.

President Clinton, State of the Union Address, February 4, 1997

STRONG SCHOOLS WITH CLEAR STANDARDS OF ACHIEVEMENT AND DISCIPLINE ARE ESSENTIAL TO OUR CHILDREN AND SOCIETY. These standards are needed to help instill the skills, American values, and encouragement for hard work that our children need to succeed in school and in life. Toward that end we must establish meaningful standards for what students should be expected to learn and achieve in the basic subjects of reading and mathematics.

A CHALLENGE TO PARENTS, TEACHERS, AND SCHOOLS TO MAKE SURE THAT EVERY STUDENT MASTERS THE BASICS IN READING AND MATHEMATICS.

Reading well by grade 4 and mastering mathematics -- including the foundations of algebra and geometry -- by grade 8 are the gateways for further learning and achievement. Research shows that students who fail to learn to read English well by the end of grade 3 are at greater risk of dropping out and facing diminished success in school and life. Students who fail to master the basics of mathematics by the end of grade 8 do not have the foundation to take tough mathematics and science courses in high school which in turn prepare them for college and better jobs.

While our students have been making progress in reading and mathematics, we are not yet where we need to be as a nation. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 40 percent of our 4th grade students do not reach the "basic" achievement level. In the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), U.S. 4th graders score above average in math and science. However, our 8th graders score below the international average in mathematics, and only 5 percent of U.S. eighth grade students score in the top 10 percent internationally.

RIGOROUS VOLUNTARY NATIONAL TESTS IN 4TH GRADE READING AND 8TH GRADE MATHEMATICS. Parents need to know that students have mastered the basics no matter where they live or move in this country. And they have the right to know how well their children are doing compared with students in other schools, states, and countries. To help give parents this information, the U.S. Department of Education is offering every state and school district the opportunity to use voluntary national tests of 4th grade reading and 8th grade mathematics, beginning in 1999. These rigorous tests will provide parents, for the first time, scores for individual students, measured against widely accepted national and international standards of excellence. They will give states, local communities, teachers and parents the kind of accurate information they need to help students master basic and advanced skills and strengthen academic performance.

NATIONAL EFFORT TO IMPROVE THE ODDS FOR STUDENTS. Schools and communities are already working hard at educational improvement; they are committed to parent involvement, getting technology into the classroom, and ensuring a trained and dedicated teacher in every classroom. The federal government provides funding to states and communities to support these efforts. But these efforts cannot be fully effective unless parents, schools and communities are aiming at clear, high standards of achievement. That is why these national tests are already spurring a renewed nation-wide effort to support school improvement and strengthen student achievement in these core subjects. Reading and literacy groups are coming together to improve reading. The mathematics and science community, engineers and business leaders are working to improve mathematics teaching and learning. To assist parents, teachers, principals and communities in using the tests effectively, the U.S. Department of Education, the National Science Foundation and others are developing a tool chest that includes information for parents and teachers on how to prepare to meet these high standards, how to use test results to improve education, and what high standards in reading and mathematics look like. As part of this effort, every year the entire test (along with answers, scoring guides, and other materials) will be released to the public and available on the Internet so that students, parents, and teachers can know what is expected for students to reach standards of excellence.

TESTS BASED ON WIDELY RECOGNIZED NATIONAL STANDARDS. The tests will be modeled on the NAEP in 4th grade reading and 8th grade mathematics. The NAEP tests are based on widely accepted standards developed by parents, teachers, reading and mathematics specialists, curriculum specialists, and researchers. The NAEP standards reflect a national consensus of what students should know and be able to do when they reach these crucial stages of learning.

TOOLS FOR PARENTS; GUIDES FOR SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES. The current NAEP is designed to assess how well a sample of students across the entire nation and individual states perform in reading and mathematics. A very small percentage of students participate in NAEP, and no parents know how their own children do on this test. In contrast, the voluntary national tests will provide students, parents, and teachers with meaningful scores to compare individual student performance to widely accepted national and international standards and to identify students and schools that need extra help. These standard measures of excellence will help parents hold schools accountable for improved performance, help teachers and principals improve curriculum and instruction, and give students a guide for charting their own progress.

DEVELOPMENT AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE TESTS. The U.S. Department of Education will contract with independent test developers to produce the new tests, which will be available for the first time in the spring of 1999 and updated each year. Guidance for test development will come from the most successful mathematics and reading teachers, parents, governors, and local and state education, civic and business leaders. Interested test publishers, states, and local school districts will be licensed to administer the tests each year. Individual test scores will *not* be collected by the federal government; state and local school districts will decide how to use the data. Each test will require approximately 90 minutes of total testing time. States and school districts can administer the tests as part of their local testing programs.

For more information, visit our web site at <http://www.ed.gov/nationaltests>

July 7, 1997

VOLUNTARY NATIONAL TESTS IN READING AND MATHEMATICS A STRATEGY TO MASTER THE BASICS AND REACH HIGH STANDARDS

STRONG SCHOOLS WITH CLEAR STANDARDS OF ACHIEVEMENT AND DISCIPLINE ARE ESSENTIAL TO OUR CHILDREN AND SOCIETY. These standards are needed to help instill the skills and encouragement for hard work that our children need to succeed in school and in life. Toward that end we must establish meaningful standards for what students should be expected to learn and achieve in the basic subjects of reading and mathematics.

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RIGOROUS VOLUNTARY NATIONAL TESTS IN 4TH GRADE READING AND 8TH GRADE MATHEMATICS. Parents need to know that students have mastered the basics no matter where they live or move in this country. And they have the right to know how well their children are doing compared with students in other schools, states, and countries. To help give parents this information, the U.S. Department of Education is prepared to offer every state and school district the opportunity to use voluntary national tests of 4th grade reading and 8th grade mathematics, beginning in 1999. These rigorous tests will provide parents, for the first time, scores for individual students, measured against widely accepted national and international standards of excellence. They will give states, local communities, teachers and parents the kind of accurate information they need to help students master basic and advanced skills and strengthen academic performance.

TESTS BASED ON WIDELY RECOGNIZED NATIONAL STANDARDS. The tests will be modeled on the NAEP in 4th grade reading and 8th grade mathematics. The NAEP tests are based on widely accepted standards developed by parents, teachers, reading and mathematics specialists, curriculum specialists, and researchers. The NAEP standards reflect a national consensus of what students should know and be able to do when they reach these crucial stages of learning. The voluntary national tests will be linked to NAEP and, in the case of mathematics, linked to TIMSS, so that scores can be compared to national and international standards. The Department has proposed that Congress authorize the bipartisan National Assessment Governing Board to set policy for the tests as they do for NAEP.

NATIONAL EFFORT TO IMPROVE THE ODDS FOR STUDENTS. Schools and communities are already working hard at educational improvement; they are committed to parent involvement, getting technology into the classroom, and ensuring a trained and dedicated teacher in every classroom. The federal government provides funding to states and communities to support these efforts. But these efforts cannot be fully effective unless parents, schools and communities are aiming at clear, high standards of achievement. That is why these national tests are already spurring a renewed nation-wide effort to support school improvement and strengthen student achievement in these core subjects. Reading and literacy groups are coming together to improve reading. The mathematics and science community, engineers and business leaders are working to improve mathematics teaching and learning. To assist parents, teachers, principals and communities in using the tests effectively, the U.S. Department of Education, the National Science Foundation and others are developing a tool chest that includes information for parents and teachers on how to prepare to meet these high standards, how to use test results to improve education, and what high standards in reading and mathematics look like. As part of this effort, every year the entire test (along with answers, scoring guides, and other materials) will be released to the public and available on the Internet so that students, parents, and teachers can know what is expected for students to reach standards of excellence.

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DEVELOPMENT AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE TESTS. The U.S. Department of Education has contracted with educational research firms and test publishers to develop the tests which will be available for the first time in the spring of 1999 and updated each year. Guidance for test development has come from the most successful mathematics and reading teachers, parents, governors, and local and state education, civic and business leaders.

Individual test scores will *not* be collected by the federal government; state and local school districts will decide how to use the data. States and school districts will have the option to administer the tests as part of their local testing programs.

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President Bill Clinton
1997 State of the Union Address

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Department of Education, the Senate has voted to authorize the bipartisan, independent National Assessment Governing Board to set policy for the national tests as it does for NAEP, insuring the integrity of the new tests.

A NATIONAL EFFORT TO IMPROVE THE ODDS FOR STUDENTS. Schools and communities are already working hard at educational improvement; they are committed to parent involvement, getting technology into the classroom, and ensuring a trained and dedicated teacher in every classroom. The federal government provides funding to states and communities to support these efforts. But these efforts cannot be fully effective unless parents, schools and communities are aiming at clear, high standards of achievement. That is why these national tests are already spurring a renewed nation-wide effort to support school improvement and strengthen student achievement in these core subjects. Reading and literacy groups are coming together to improve reading. The mathematics and science community, engineers and business leaders are working to improve mathematics teaching and learning. To assist parents, teachers, principals and communities in using the tests effectively, the U.S. Department of Education, the National Science Foundation and others are developing a tool chest that includes information for parents and teachers on how to prepare to meet these high standards, how to use test results to improve education, and what high standards in reading and mathematics look like. As part of this effort, every year the entire test (along with answers, scoring guides, and other materials) will be released to the public and available on the Internet so that students, parents, and teachers can know what is expected for students to reach standards of excellence.

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The tests will be available for the first time in the spring of 1999 and updated each year. Individual test scores will *not* be collected by the federal government; state and local school districts will decide how to use the data. States and school districts will have the option to administer the tests as part of their local testing programs.

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NATIONAL EFFORT TO IMPROVE THE ODDS FOR STUDENTS. Schools and communities are already working hard at educational improvement; they are committed to parent involvement, getting technology into the classroom, and ensuring a trained and dedicated teacher in every classroom. The federal government provides funding to states and communities to support these efforts. But these efforts cannot be fully effective unless parents, schools and communities are aiming at clear, high standards of achievement. That is why these national tests are already spurring a renewed nation-wide effort to support school improvement and strengthen student achievement in these core subjects. Reading and literacy groups are coming together to improve reading. The mathematics and science community, engineers and business leaders are working to improve mathematics teaching and learning. To assist parents, teachers, principals and communities in using the tests effectively, the U.S. Department of Education, the National Science Foundation and others are developing a tool chest that includes information for parents and teachers on how to prepare to meet these high standards, how to use test results to improve education, and what high standards in reading and mathematics look like. As part of this effort, every year the entire test (along with answers, scoring guides, and other materials) will be released to the public and available on the Internet so that students, parents, and teachers can know what is expected for students to reach standards of excellence.

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DEVELOPMENT AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE TESTS. The voluntary national test development contract was awarded to a group led by the American Institutes for Research. Subcontracting companies include some of the most respected test publishers and research organizations in the country. The National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences will be awarded the voluntary national test evaluation contract to monitor and evaluate the development process and testing administration. Guidance for test development has come from the most successful mathematics and reading teachers, parents, and local and state education, civic and business leaders.

Individual test scores will *not* be collected by the federal government; state and local school districts will decide how to use the data. States and school districts will have the option to administer the tests as part of their local testing programs. The voluntary national tests will first be administered in the spring of 1999.

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TALKING POINTS FOR THE VOLUNTARY NATIONAL TESTS

The voluntary national tests for 4th grade reading in English and 8th grade math provide an opportunity for states and local school districts to gain valuable information about their students' academic achievement and will be a motivational tool to stimulate nationwide interest in ensuring all children master the basics.

THE TESTS ARE VOLUNTARY

- States and local school districts, as well as private schools, have the opportunity to offer the tests to their students beginning in the spring of 1999, but it is not mandatory.
- No state will be required to give these tests as a condition of receiving federal funding.

THE TESTS ARE BASED ON WIDELY RECOGNIZED, RIGOROUS STANDARDS

- The tests will be based on the widely respected National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP - also known as the Nation's Report Card) which is used in 43 states.
- NAEP's content frameworks and performance standards are widely accepted and were developed with strong input from teachers, curriculum experts, and state education officials.

THE TESTS WILL GIVE PARENTS AND TEACHERS THE SAME INFORMATION THAT MEMBERS OF CONGRESS AND POLICY MAKERS NOW RECEIVE

- Every year, when the NAEP results are released, Members of Congress receive important information about how well the nation and the states are doing, to help decide how to improve our schools. Not one parent in America receives similar information about his or her own child compared to national standards of excellence.
- The voluntary national tests will be different from NAEP by providing individual student information to parents and teachers; NAEP is a sample test designed to assess how well the nation and states perform.
- These tests will empower parents by providing them with the information they need to determine if their children are on track in the basic skills. With the information provided by these tests, the conversation around the dinner table can be as well informed as the conversation in the hearing room -- and parents can act on behalf of their own children.

THE VOLUNTARY NATIONAL TESTS ARE NOT A NATIONAL CURRICULUM

- The voluntary national tests will help determine a child's academic achievement, but will not guide a national curriculum.
- The tests will provide information to parents and teachers about an individual student's performance and the local education authorities will determine how to use the results.

THE 8TH GRADE TEST COVERS BASIC MATH AS WELL AS THE FOUNDATIONS OF GEOMETRY AND ALGEBRA, NOT THE SO-CALLED "WHOLE MATH"

- The voluntary national math test will help students to master the basic skills in math.
- In addition, it will also expect that students master much more challenging material based on tough demanding standards including the foundations of algebra and geometry.
- International research shows that most other industrialized nations introduce their students to algebra and geometry much earlier than the United States.

UNDER THE FUND FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF EDUCATION, THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ALREADY HAS THE AUTHORITY TO DEVELOP THESE TESTS

- Former Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander used similar authority to develop voluntary national standards, without this kind of opposition from Congress.

PREVENTING THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION FROM FUNDING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TESTS PREVENTS PARENTS, STUDENTS, AND TEACHERS FROM GETTING VALUABLE INFORMATION

- Parents and teachers need this information to appropriately judge the progress of their students and the effectiveness of their school.
- Students all over the country will benefit from clearly defined and widely accepted national and international standards in basic skills.
- States and local school districts enrolling 20% of America's 4th and 8th grade students have already chosen to participate in the voluntary national tests; denying funding would take away their opportunity to assess individual students, as well as state and local progress in achieving high standards.

THIS SHOULD NOT BE A PARTISAN ISSUE; POLITICS SHOULD STOP AT THE SCHOOL HOUSE DOOR

- We have demonstrated that we can make real progress for our children when we work together across party lines, as we have done with the balanced budget and with IDEA. We should work together in the same spirit to support voluntary national tests in the basic skills.
- The American public strongly supports national standards and tests in the basic skills. They have the common sense to know that we need high national standards. A recent Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll indicated that 77% supported "national standards for measuring the academic performance of schools" and nearly 60% favored the plan for national achievement tests.
- This initiative has bipartisan support from states, business leaders, and education organizations (including the National Chamber of Commerce, Business Roundtable, National Alliance of Business, 240 high-tech CEO's, Council of Chief State School Officers, National School Boards Association, Council of Great City Schools, National Association of Elementary School Principals, Council for Exceptional Children, National Education Association, American Federation of Teachers, and the National Association of State Directors of Special Education).

STATES AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS THAT HAVE VOLUNTEERED TO PARTICIPATE

- Alaska, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Carolina, and West Virginia
- The large urban school districts of Atlanta, GA; Broward County (Ft. Lauderdale), FL ; Chicago, IL; Cincinnati, OH; Detroit, MI; El Paso, TX; Fresno, CA; Houston, TX; Long Beach, CA; Los Angeles, CA; New York City, NY; Omaha, NE; Philadelphia, PA; San Antonio, TX; and Seattle, WA.
- The Department of Defense schools will also participate.
- Together, these make up approximately 20 percent of all 4th and 8th grade students.

SUPPORT FOR THE VOLUNTARY NATIONAL TESTS

The American public supports high national standards

Parents deserve to know how their children are performing based on rigorous national standards no matter where they live in this country.

According to a national education survey, 84% of voters favor establishing meaningful standards for what students should be expected to learn in skills such as reading and math. 77% of those surveyed are favorable towards national reading and math tests.

A recent Gallup poll shows that 77% favor national standards for measuring the academic performance of our students and nearly 60% favor the voluntary national tests.

Support for Continued Development of the voluntary national tests from the education community

"Although there is extensive testing in our nation, there is no individual student test of reading or mathematics which enables a student to compare his or her work with students in other states and in other nations. They need test results indicating whether their achievement is competitive with other students around the world. In short, students and families want to know what level of learning is required to reach the high standards necessary as we enter the 21st century." Letter signed by the following:

American Federation of Teachers	Council for Exceptional Children
Council for Chief State School Officers	Council of the Great City Schools
National Education Association	National School Boards Association
National Association of Elementary School Principals	
National Association of State Directors of Special Education	

Support for the voluntary national tests from the business community

"The proposed standards and tests will help provide parents, students, educators and policy makers with the information they need to ensure every child has the opportunity to succeed in the 21st century world and workplace."

Edwin Lupberger, U.S. Chamber of Commerce Executive Committee

"The first step to improve education in the United States is to substantially raise academic standards and verify achievement through rigorous testing." Education Task Force of the Business Roundtable

"The Alliance believes these voluntary tests could be used by state and local school districts to measure the progress of American students in these core subjects. The Alliance recently surveyed its members on this issue and an overwhelming number supported the initiative to develop the voluntary national tests."

National Alliance of Business

more

"Every state should adopt high national standards, and by 1999, every state should test every 4th grader in reading and 8th grader in math to make sure these standards are met. President Clinton's national testing initiative offers a new opportunity to use widely accepted national benchmarks in reading and math against which states, school districts and parents can judge student performance."

Jim Barksdale, CEO and President, Netscape Communications, and
L. John Doerr, Partner in the firm of Kleiner, Perkins, Caulfield and Byers
on behalf of 240 technology industry leaders in a bipartisan call for high national
education standards in reading and math.

August 29, 1997

SUPPORT FOR THE VOLUNTARY NATIONAL TESTS

✓ **The American Public Supports High National Standards**

Parents deserve to know how their children are performing based on rigorous national standards no matter where they live in this country.

A recent Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll shows that 67% favor using standardized national tests to measure the achievement of students and 77% favor national standards for measuring the academic performance of our schools.

✓ **Educators Support Continued Development of Voluntary National Tests**

"Although there is extensive testing in our nation, there is no individual student test of reading or mathematics which enables a student to compare his or her work with students in other states and in other nations. They need test results indicating whether their achievement is competitive with other students around the world. In short, students and families want to know what level of learning is required to reach the high standards necessary as we enter the 21st century."

Letter signed by the following:

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Council for Chief State School Officers
National Education Association

Council for Exceptional Children
Council of the Great City Schools
National School Boards Association

National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of State Directors of Special Education

"For those states opting to participate in the program, it offers an unprecedented opportunity for individual students to compare their abilities with other students from across the nation...We believe the states should be afforded the opportunity to decide for themselves whether to take part in these national assessments."

Brenda Lilienthal Welburn, Executive Director of the National Association of State Boards of Education

"A voluntary national test would give teachers and parents the ability to measure their students and children against high national standards. Currently, there is no individual student test of reading or mathematics which enables a student to compare his or her work with students in other states and in other nations."

Gerald D. Morris
Director of Legislation, American Federation of Teachers

✓ **Business Community Support for the Voluntary National Tests**

"The proposed standards and tests will help provide parents, students, educators and policy makers with the information they need to ensure every child has the opportunity to succeed in the 21st century world and workplace."

Edwin Lupberger, U.S. Chamber of Commerce Executive Committee

"There is certainly a place for legitimate discussion over details...But these and other arguments should not weaken or overshadow our commitment to raising academic standards and assessing student performance. Without a national assessment, raising academic standards will be, at best, an amorphous goal."

Jim Orr, CEO, UNUM Corporation, Chairman of the National Alliance of Business

"The Alliance believes these voluntary tests could be used by state and local school districts to measure the progress of American students in these core subjects. The Alliance recently surveyed its members on this issue and an overwhelming number supported the initiative to develop the voluntary national tests."

National Alliance of Business

"As the CEO of a company that does business in every state in the union and 70 countries worldwide, voluntary national tests that give individual student scores make sense. Here's why. When prospective employees apply for a job, employers hold them to the same standard, no matter where they went to school. In our global economy where employers are competing on a worldwide basis, the quantitative and communications skills needed for a particular job are not unique to Delaware or Texas or California."

John A. Krol, Dupont President and CEO and
Chairman of the Business Roundtable Education Task Force

"President Clinton's national testing initiative offers a new opportunity to use widely accepted national benchmarks in reading and math against which states, school districts and parents can judge student performance."

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on behalf of 240 technology industry leaders

✓ Editorial Support for the Voluntary National Tests

"Yes on Tests...The results of the new tests would be available for individual students, classes, schools and school districts, rather than expressed in broad national or regional terms. The idea is that, yes, they might then become instruments for change, but not dictated from above. Rather, parents and others would use them as a standard for comparison, and for demanding improvement on the ground, at the local level...The danger is not that the federal government is going to take over the nation's schools. The danger rather is that poor performance will continue to be tolerated and obscured."

The Washington Post

"Put Schools to the Test...American children won't notice, but the public schools they return to this fall lack something important: a reliable, uniform means of assessing how well they're doing their job. Erasing that lack is what President Clinton has in mind when he call for national tests...For the sake of America's students, the political and philosophical hurdles have to be cleared. Reliable national tests won't in themselves rebuild public education, but they're an important foundation stone."

The Christian Science Monitor

RESPONSES TO CONCERNS ABOUT NATIONAL TESTS

1. We don't need another test.

- These tests provide information to students, parents and teachers that no other tests do. They will show whether individual students meet challenging, widely accepted national standards in 4th grade reading and 8th grade math. No other test provides this clear and critical information to students, parents and teachers. There is no other way for families that move from community to community or state to state to maintain consistent, high expectations in the basics.

2. Tests don't generate higher academic performance.

- Unlike many other tests, these tests will be designed so that teachers and students can prepare for them, starting when the child enters school. Teachers and parents will have materials that describe clearly what kind of work is expected -- what students must know to master the material and do well on the tests.
- In addition, the tests will tell school administrators, parents, and teachers how well students and schools are doing. They will be able to tell which schools and students need assistance and how to boost their performance.
- Research and experience show that raising standards for students lifts student achievement. These tests are tied to high academic standards, and they will generate high academic performance.

3. National tests are too controversial to implement without Congressional authorization.

- We welcome Congress as a full partner in the effort to raise standards for all students and to provide parents and students with national standards and tests in the basic skills. None of us can do this alone. We should be working together to raise standards for our students, improve teaching and learning, and give our schools the tools they need to prepare our children for the future. We want Congress to play a role in this effort.
- The Administration will submit legislation shortly to create an independent governing board to oversee and ensure the integrity of the tests. We will use the National Assessment Governing Board, a group that already exists and that oversees the widely used National Assessment of Education Progress (a sample tests that gives information on how the U.S. and over 40 states are doing, but provides no information for individual students or their teachers and families.) We ask Congress as a partner in the effort to raise standards for all students, to pass this legislation.

4. New tests can lead to inappropriate and unfair comparisons of schools and school districts.

- These tests lead to exactly the right kinds of comparisons -- they tell us how well our students and our schools do when measured against high standards of excellence that define what students should know and be able to do in the basics of reading and math. We should welcome these comparisons, not fear them.
- We should not presume that any student, no matter where he or she lives or goes to school, will do poorly on this test. We must stop perpetuating the cycle of low expectations that, in the name of compassion, actually keeps young people from achieving their full potential.
- In July, 15 major urban school districts around the country pledged to participate in these tests -- not because these districts believe they will excel the first time around, but because they know that their students, when challenged and when provided with the proper support, can perform just as well as any other students can.

5. New national tests can lead to a national curriculum.

- Providing a voluntary reading test in 4th grade and a voluntary math test in 8th grade will not create a national curriculum. These tests are based on accepted standards that reflect widespread agreement on what students should know and be able to do. States and local communities will continue to determine their curriculum, and will use the national tests to focus attention on how to improve student achievement in the basic skills.

6. Instead of another test, more resources should be sent into the classroom.

- We agree that more resources should be sent into the classroom. That is why the Administration has supported record investments in education to help states and communities raise standards, train teachers, improve basic skills, and promote the effective use of technology in the classroom. The national tests will aid us in better understanding where those resources are needed and how they can be wisely spent. They are an integral part of a comprehensive strategy to raise standards and improve education.

7. The federal government is already spending over \$500 million just to test students.

- This figure is totally incorrect. Approximately 90% of these funds is for the Goals 2000 program, which improves teaching and learning in local classrooms by helping states and school districts raise standards, train teachers, promote the effective use of technology and increase parental and community involvement. A very small part of this money goes to tests.

Why Voluntary National Tests in Reading and Mathematics

1. Why voluntary national tests?

Today's students will be entering a highly competitive workforce that will demand greater knowledge and skills. Key to gaining the needed knowledge and skills is to have a sound foundation in reading and mathematics. The voluntary national tests will focus sustained national attention on the need to improve basic and advanced skills in reading and mathematics.

The tests will be catalyst for mobilizing the efforts of parents, teachers, businesses, and communities to help all students achieve to higher academic standards. The tests will provide measures of a student's achievement against rigorous national and international standards. After the test is given, all of the items on the test will be made publicly available on the Internet so that parents, teachers, students, and the public can see what is being asked of students and where we need to improve. We hope that these items will be published widely and discussed around the kitchen tables across the country. All students will have their tests returned so parents, teachers and students can see and review their performance.

2. Why 4th grade reading and 8th grade mathematics?

These are two critical points in a child's learning. By 4th grade, students need to have mastered basic reading skills in order to begin to learn other subjects. Reading is an essential skill in learning geography, history, science and mathematics. Students who are not able to read independently by the end of third grade have difficulty learning other subjects and are very likely to have academic difficulties. By 8th grade, students need to have mastered challenging mathematics to be prepared to take advanced mathematics courses necessary to be admitted to college and to be successful in the workplace.

3. What is the relationship of the voluntary national tests to NAEP?

NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) monitors the academic performance of students in the nation and has existed for over twenty-five years. The NAEP test is given to a national sample of students in a range of academic subjects (mathematics, reading, science, geography, history). The voluntary national tests will be individual student tests with results given to the student and the student's parents and teacher. The voluntary national tests are designed from the frameworks of the NAEP assessments in 4th grade reading and 8th grade mathematics. These frameworks have been developed through a broad national consensus process. The voluntary national tests will provide a measure of student performance against national standards in reading and mathematics as well as against international standards in mathematics.

4. Will funding be tied to state use of the national tests?

No state will be required to use these tests as a condition of receiving federal funding.

5. Does the Department have the authority to develop voluntary national tests?

The Department has the authority to develop voluntary national tests but is asking Congress to give the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), which oversees NAEP, the authority to set policy for the voluntary national tests to assure the independence of the tests. NAGB is a bipartisan group established by Congress to independently set policy for NAEP.

6. Is there public interest in the voluntary national tests?

Public opinion polls show that almost two-thirds of the public support voluntary national tests. The voluntary national tests have been endorsed by many leading education groups including teachers, principals, state school officials and school boards. States and school districts with over 20 percent of the fourth and eighth graders in the nation have already committed to using the voluntary national tests.

7. Will these tests lead to inappropriate and unfair comparisons?

The national tests will provide results of student performance in reading and mathematics against rigorous national standards. These are the kinds of test results that allow for meaningful comparisons. The results of the national tests will go to parents, teachers and students to help them understand how students are performing against rigorous national standards. We must stop perpetuating the cycle of low expectations that keeps so many young people from achieving their full potential. We should not be willing to tolerate low standards for any group of students. If we can break free from the tyranny of low expectations, we can help all students reach higher standards of performance. We should not presume that any student, no matter where he or she lives or goes to school, will do well or poorly on these tests. The tests can give all students a chance to measure themselves against demanding standards and then focus on the areas that need improvement.

8. Will the voluntary national tests lead to a national curriculum?

The President and Secretary of Education are opposed to a national curriculum. As a former Governor, the President believes that education is a state responsibility and a local function.

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More resources need to be sent into the classroom, and this test will aid teachers and principals in better understanding where resources are needed and how they can be wisely spent. The Administration has supported increased investment in helping states and communities raise standards, train teachers, improve basic skills, and promote the effective use of technology in the classroom.

10. Doesn't the federal government spend over \$540 million to test students?

This figure is incorrect. Approximately 90 percent of that figure is money from GOALS 2000 that goes to states and local districts to use in improving education as they choose. The testing sponsored by the federal government, such as NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) and TIMSS (Third International Mathematics and Science Study), is conducted on a sample of students to learn how the nation's students are performing or how well they compare to students in other countries. The voluntary national tests will provide similar information on the performance of an individual student.

11. How will the voluntary national tests improve the academic performance of students?

We test students in order to learn how they are doing and what we need to do to improve their performance. The national tests are part of a national campaign to energize local efforts for improving teaching and learning in reading and mathematics. This effort includes support from businesses, volunteer organizations, parent groups, community organizations, and educators. The test results can motivate students, teachers, and parents to examine what they can do better to help a child be able to read independently by 3rd grade or learn challenging mathematics in 8th grade. The voluntary national tests can encourage teachers, parents, and principals to raise the standard of instruction for all students.

12. What is being done to assure that the test is free of ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, cultural or regional bias?

Item development will follow a rigorous process of item writing, internal review, fairness panel review, and pilot testing to produce high quality items which are free of ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, cultural, or regional bias.

The following steps will be taken to avoid items that would disadvantage a group because of differences in culture or familiarity: 1) item writers will follow specific guidelines for avoiding various types of item bias, after which the items will undergo internal review by the test publishers; 2) an external fairness committee will review items. Members of this committee will represent diverse geographic, ethnic, and gender groups. Edits and revisions of items will be made following the fairness panel review; and 3) items will be pilot tested, or tried out, with a diverse sample of students. After pilot testing, statistical analyses will be performed to further determine whether items are biased.

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11. Why is a bilingual version of the math test being offered, but the reading test is only being given in English?

The math test will be offered as a bilingual test (English on one page and Spanish on the other) because the purpose of the test is to assess students' math skills, not their English skills. There are many children at the 8th grade level who have limited English proficiency but who can learn advanced math and should be asked to show what math they know. We are providing a bilingual math test in Spanish and English because Spanish is the most common language other than English among students. The reading test will only be given in English because developing the

ability to read in English is a basic skill that every child has to have to succeed in American schools and society. A bilingual test would not measure a student's English competency.

12. Will non-public schools and home schoolers be able to participate?

Yes. Independent and private schools will be able to participate in the same way states and districts will. Non-public schools will have to show that they comply with non-discrimination statutes in enrollment and ensure that all 4th grade students and/or 8th grade students participate.

After the tests are administered each year, they will be available on the Internet, along with scoring guides and other materials as a tool for parents and teachers. Home schoolers may choose to offer the tests to their children and will be able to see how they perform compared to national and international standards. In states and districts which offer the tests, education agencies will continue to have whatever authority they have on their state requirements for standardized tests. Parents should contact their local district or state department of education to find out if the district or state is participating in the tests.

13. May the national tests be used by the States, in part, as the assessments required under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act?

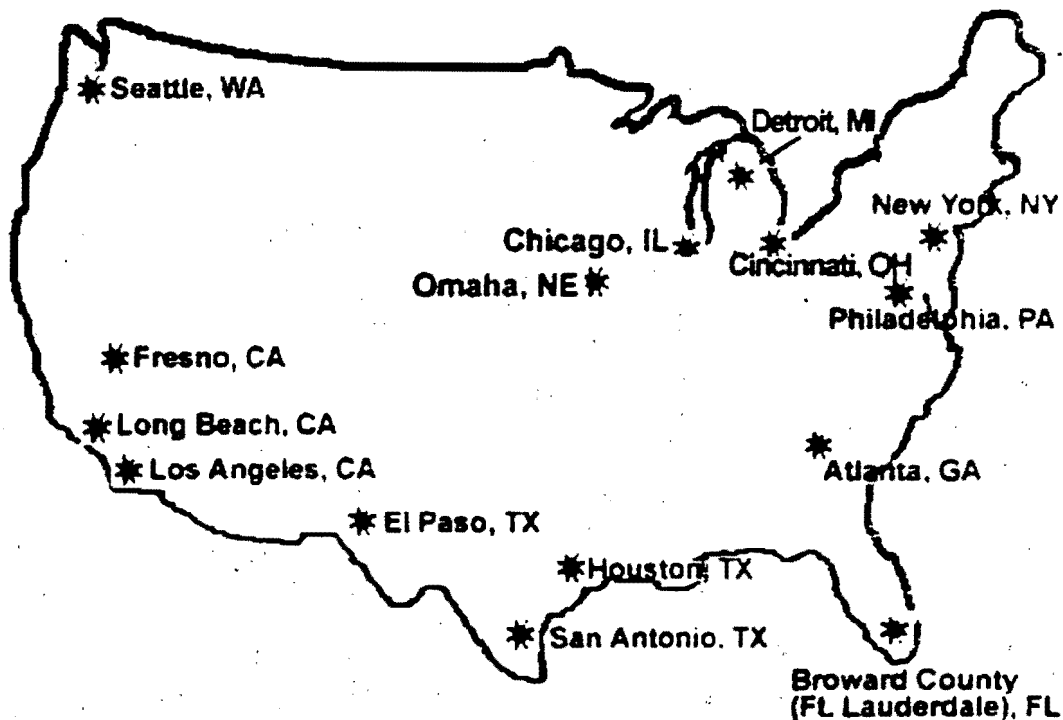
Yes. Title I requires a State to use challenging content and student performance standards developed for all students under the Goals 2000: Educate America Act or under another process or, absent such standards for all students, to develop for children served under Title I challenging content and student performance standards that reflect the State's expectations for all children. The State must also develop or adopt assessments aligned with these standards. Thus, if a State determines that the national tests are aligned with the State's standards, these tests may be used for Title I purposes. Because the national tests will be based on the content frameworks of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, they will reflect a national consensus among educators, testing experts, and other leaders on what children should know and be able to do in reading English at the 4th grade level and in mathematics at the 8th grade level. We therefore expect that the tests generally will be aligned with most, if not all, States' efforts to develop challenging content and performance standards in these subjects at the indicated grade levels. Moreover, the national tests will be developed according to the highest professional and technical standards; will be administered with accommodations for children with disabilities and limited English proficient children; will yield scores at three levels of performance; and will permit scores to be disaggregated in accordance with Title I provisions. The national tests thus can be an important resource to states in carrying out Title I's vital goal of holding students who participate in Title I to the same high standards expected of all students.

FACT SHEET ON THE VOLUNTARY NATIONAL TESTS

- **The voluntary national tests will test 4th grade reading and 8th grade math - two basic subjects at two critical times in students' academic development.**
- **The tests will be voluntary.** States and local districts will have the opportunity to participate in the tests, but the tests are not mandatory.
- **No federal funds will be withheld if a state or district does not participate.**
- **The tests will provide parents and teachers individual student scores linked to national and international standards - information they currently do not have.** Parents and teachers will directly receive a score for their child that includes national and international comparisons. Students' results will be linked to the standards set by the National Assessment of Educational Progress and results from the 8th grade math test will be linked to the Third International Mathematics and Science Study which involved students from 41 countries.
- **The tests will be based on the widely respected National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).** Also known as the "nation's report card," NAEP is used in 43 states. The tests will be different from NAEP by providing individual student information; NAEP is designed to assess how well the nation and states perform based on a small sample of students. No parents know how their own children do on the NAEP test.
- **Private schools may participate in the tests and home schoolers will have access to the tests each year.** State and local school districts' usual guidelines toward assessing home schooled students apply. Should parents want to use the tests, they will be available each year on the Internet after administration.
- **The tests will be given for the first time in the spring of 1999.**
- **The public, business leaders, and members of the education community support voluntary national tests.** A recent Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll found that 79% of Americans approved of the President's national testing plan. Also, a Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll indicated that 77% supported "national standards for measuring the academic performance of schools" and 67% favored "using standardized national tests to measure the academic achievement of students." Endorsements from business leaders and education organizations also indicate that these tests will provide something Americans value -- high standards for all students.

For more information, visit our website at <http://www.ed.gov/nationaltests/>

- **States and Cities that have volunteered to participate.** The following states have signed on to participate: Alaska, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Carolina, and West Virginia. The following large urban school districts have also signed on: Atlanta, GA; Broward County (Ft. Lauderdale), FL; Chicago, IL; Cincinnati, OH; Detroit, MI; El Paso, TX; Fresno, CA; Houston, TX; Long Beach, CA; Los Angeles, CA; New York City, NY; Omaha, NE; Philadelphia, PA; San Antonio, TX; and Seattle, WA. The Department of Defense schools will also participate. Together, these states and districts make up approximately 20 percent of the students at the 4th and 8th grade levels.



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4TH GRADE READING AND 8TH GRADE MATHEMATICS**

STATES

Alaska
Kentucky
Maryland
Massachusetts
Michigan
North Carolina
West Virginia

LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Atlanta, GA
Broward County (Ft. Lauderdale), FL
Chicago, IL
Cincinnati, OH
Detroit, MI
El Paso, TX
Fresno, CA
Houston, TX
Long Beach, CA
Los Angeles, CA
New York City, NY
Omaha, NE
Philadelphia, PA
San Antonio, TX
Seattle, WA

The Department of Defense schools will also participate.

Together, these states and school districts represent 20% of all 4th and 8th graders.

August 29, 1997

DRAFT

HOW WILL THE VOLUNTARY NATIONAL TESTS IMPROVE STUDENTS' EDUCATION?

☞ The voluntary national tests will help all schools to challenge students according to national standards in the basic subjects of 4th grade reading and 8th grade mathematics.

☞ By providing individual student scores based on national and international comparisons, parents and teachers will be more informed about what their children should know and be able to do in 4th grade reading and 8th grade mathematics.

Maria is a 3rd grade student in Chicago. We know that she is far more likely to succeed in science, mathematics, history and language arts later if she is able to read well by the end of this school year. In 4th grade, Maria will take the voluntary national test. How will the voluntary national test improve her education?

☞ The voluntary national tests' questions are being written by some of the leading test publishing companies in the country in a joint effort. This collaboration will create a cutting-edge, world class assessment that will provide detailed information to parents and teachers like never before. After each test administration, the full tests will be available on the Internet, providing a usefulness never before offered through standardized tests.

HOW WILL EDUCATORS BE ABLE TO USE THE VOLUNTARY NATIONAL TESTS TO HELP IMPROVE EDUCATION?

☞ The voluntary national tests will be released in full on the **Internet** after each administration allowing wide-spread use of the material in classrooms as well as a stronger understanding of test scoring for parents and teachers alike.

☞ When receiving the reports at the school and at home, teachers and parents will see how their students did on each individual question, and from the Internet, everyone will have access to those exact questions. This will help parents and teachers lead informed discussions about ways to improve their children's skills in reading and mathematics.

☞ **Supplemental materials and sample tests** will be available to all participating schools to give teachers ideas for incorporating challenging material into lesson plans and in preparation for students taking the voluntary national tests.

Maria's teacher will receive supplemental materials and sample test questions as resources to help the class work on some of the skills they will be tested on like understanding and interpreting content, reflecting on and responding to texts, and demonstrating a critical stance. Her 3rd grade teacher this year can also help Maria prepare by exposing her to some of the ideas and content she will

- ⇒ Unlike with other nation-wide assessments, teachers and parents will be able to receive voluntary national test scores within the same school year as when students take the tests, enabling teachers and schools to utilize the information in a variety of new ways:

- ⇒ Teachers can incorporate the actual test questions into lesson plans after the scores have been returned. Focusing on areas in which their students need further assistance, teachers can bridge the gap between questions that students answered incorrectly and those the students fully understood.

Maria's 4th grade class can review the test together after they receive their scores--a first in large-scale testing. Their teacher can use the exact test questions in lesson plans and explain the concepts students in the class tended to miss as well as those they collectively understood. At the end of the school year, 4th grade teachers can share national test information with faculty. While 3rd, 5th and even 1st and 2nd grade teachers join efforts, administrators may reevaluate resources and teacher training strategies.

- ⇒ By seeing the areas in which students need improvement while school is still in session, the teacher can utilize the test reports as part of his/her self-assessment and in preparing semester overviews for the following school year.

- ⇒ School administrators and supervisors will be able to utilize the tests' information for their schools in planning professional development for faculty of all grades.

HOW WILL THE VOLUNTARY NATIONAL TESTS IMPROVE STUDENTS' EDUCATION?

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⇒ By providing individual student scores based on national and international comparisons, parents and teachers will be more informed about what their children should know and be able to do in 4th grade reading and 8th grade mathematics.

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Martin is in 7th grade in Seattle. If he wants to continue his education beyond high school and attend college, he will be required to take challenging mathematics courses beginning in 9th grade. Martin should already be learning challenging math so that he has the opportunity to choose these courses later. In the 8th grade, he will take the voluntary national test in math. How will this test help improve his education?

HOW WILL PARENTS BE ABLE TO USE THE NATIONAL TESTS TO HELP IMPROVE THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION?

⇒ Knowing that college placement and employment competition are becoming more and more global, parents will be able to learn how their children are measuring up to rigorous national and international standards in 8th grade mathematics. With the information from their students' national test scores, they will be able to better monitor and participate in their child's education.

⇒ Before school is out, families will receive in the mail a clear and understandable report that gives their child's individual answers, the correct answers, and unlike any other test--their child's achievement based on rigorous national, and in mathematics, international standards. Both students and parents will be sent letters explaining the usefulness of the reports along with possible questions families may want to ask of their schools to assist them in participating in their students' education.

Before Martin leaves the 8th grade, he and his parents will both receive a scoring report along with a letter explaining the information, and providing ideas for making his scores useful in improving his education and ensuring he is exposed to higher level math in high school.

⇒ Soon after the voluntary national tests are administered, the full tests will be made public and placed on the Internet. This will allow parents and teachers alike to have the exact questions and the answers in the areas their students need assistance. Parents can utilize this information in their communication with the school and the child's future teachers in discussing his or her individual progress.

⇒ Unlike with other nation-wide assessments, teachers and parents will be able to receive voluntary national test scores within the same school year as when students take the tests. Parents will be able to discuss results with the teacher who just spent a year with their student and in the following year, parents will have clearer personal information and know better what to ask and expect for their children in high school.

⇒ The voluntary national tests will help motivate the community and business to rally around the education of our students. The business community, which holds itself to high international standards, strongly endorses the voluntary national tests. When businesses see clear information that helps them identify areas of need, they often respond by investing in the future--our students.

Martin may score in the 67% in his state, but on the national test, he will be able to challenge himself against national and international standards. His parents and teachers will see exactly what kind of skills all 8th graders should know and be able to do in mathematics. This information will ensure Martin has the opportunity to be exposed to the material he will need in order to choose higher level mathematics courses later.

VOLUNTARY NATIONAL TESTS IN READING AND MATHEMATICS A STRATEGY TO MASTER THE BASICS AND REACH HIGH STANDARDS

STRONG SCHOOLS WITH CLEAR STANDARDS OF ACHIEVEMENT AND DISCIPLINE ARE ESSENTIAL TO OUR CHILDREN AND SOCIETY. These standards are needed to help instill the skills and encouragement for hard work that our children need to succeed in school and in life. Toward that end we must establish meaningful standards for what students should be expected to learn and achieve in the basic subjects of reading and mathematics.

A CHALLENGE TO PARENTS, TEACHERS, AND SCHOOLS TO MAKE SURE THAT EVERY STUDENT MASTERS THE BASICS IN READING AND MATHEMATICS. Reading well by grade 4 and mastering mathematics -- including the foundations of algebra and geometry -- by grade 8 are the gateways for further learning and achievement. Research shows that students who fail to learn to read English well by the end of grade 3 are at greater risk of dropping out and facing diminished success in school and life. Students who fail to master the basics of mathematics by the end of grade 8 do not have the foundation to take tough mathematics and science courses in high school which prepare them for college and better jobs.

While our students have been making progress in reading and mathematics, we are not yet where we need to be as a nation. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 40 percent of our 4th grade students do not reach the "basic" achievement level. In the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), the U.S. 4th graders score above average in math and science. However, our 8th graders score below the international average in mathematics, and only 5 percent of U.S. 8th grade students score in the top 10 percent internationally. U.S. 12th graders outperformed only two of 21 countries in the most recent assessment.

RIGOROUS VOLUNTARY NATIONAL TESTS IN 4TH GRADE READING AND 8TH GRADE MATHEMATICS. Parents need to know that students have mastered the basics no matter where they live or move in this country. And they have the right to know how well their children are doing compared with students in other schools, states, and countries. The voluntary national tests for 4th grade reading and 8th grade math will help give parents and teachers this information by providing, for the first time, scores for individual students, measured against widely accepted national and international standards of excellence. They will give states, local communities, teachers and parents the kind of accurate information they need to help students master basic and advanced skills and strengthen academic performance.

NATIONAL EFFORT TO IMPROVE THE ODDS FOR STUDENTS. Schools and communities are already working hard at educational improvement; they are committed to parental involvement, getting technology into the classroom, and ensuring a trained and dedicated teacher in every classroom. The federal government provides funding to states and communities to support these efforts. But these efforts cannot be fully effective unless parents, schools and communities are aiming at clear, high standards of achievement. That is why these national tests are already spurring a renewed nationwide effort to support school improvement and strengthen student achievement in these core subjects. Reading and literacy groups are coming together to improve reading. The mathematics and science community, engineers and business leaders are working to improve mathematics teaching and learning. To assist parents, teachers, principals and communities in using the tests effectively, the U.S. Department of Education, the National Science Foundation and others are developing a tool chest that includes information for parents and teachers on how to prepare students to meet these high standards, how to use test results to improve education, and what high standards in reading and mathematics look like. As part of this effort, every year

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the entire test (along with answers and scoring guides) will be released to the public and available on the Internet so that students, parents, and teachers will know what is expected for students to reach standards of excellence.

TESTS BASED ON WIDELY RECOGNIZED NATIONAL STANDARDS. Under Congress' direction, the tests will be "based on the same content and performance standards as are used for NAEP" in 4th grade reading and 8th grade mathematics. The NAEP tests are based on widely accepted standards developed by parents, teachers, reading and mathematics specialists, curriculum specialists, and researchers. The NAEP standards reflect a national consensus of what students should know and be able to do when they reach these crucial stages of learning. The voluntary national tests will be linked to NAEP to the maximum extent possible, and, in the case of mathematics, linked to TIMSS, so that scores can be compared to national and international standards. The National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), an independent bipartisan board that directs NAEP, is overseeing test development and making all policy decisions related to the voluntary national tests.

TOOLS FOR PARENTS; GUIDES FOR SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES. The current NAEP is designed to assess how well a sample of students across the entire nation and individual states perform in reading and mathematics. Only a sample of students participate in NAEP, and parents do not know how their own children do on this test. In contrast, the voluntary national tests will provide students, parents, and teachers with meaningful scores to compare individual student performance to widely accepted national and international standards and to identify students and schools that need extra help. In addition, when parents, teachers and students receive test results, they will also learn which questions the student got right and which ones were incorrect. These standard measures of excellence will help teachers and principals improve curriculum and instruction, give students a guide for charting their own progress, and help parents hold schools accountable for improved performance. Individual test scores will *not* be collected by the federal government; state and local school districts will decide how to use the data.

DEVELOPMENT AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE TESTS. The voluntary national tests are being developed under contract by the American Institutes for Research and a group of subcontractors. Subcontracting companies include some of the most respected test publishers and research organizations in the country. NAGB is basing the tests on the same content and performance standards as NAEP. Guidance for test development has come from mathematics and reading teachers, parents, and local and state education, civic and business leaders. NAGB will also make determinations required under law related to avoiding test bias; maximizing test accuracy; meeting the needs of disadvantaged, disabled and limited English proficient students; and informing parents about test content, purpose, and uses. The National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences was awarded the voluntary national test evaluation contract to monitor and evaluate the development process and testing administration. The first pilot tests are scheduled for the spring of 1999 with field tests scheduled for spring of 2000. The voluntary national tests will first be officially offered in the spring of 2001.

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES WILL CONDUCT COMPARATIVE STUDIES.

The National Academy of Sciences, in consultation with the National Governors Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures, and NAGB, will study whether tests already developed by commercial publishers and states may be used to measure individual student performance against the NAEP standards -

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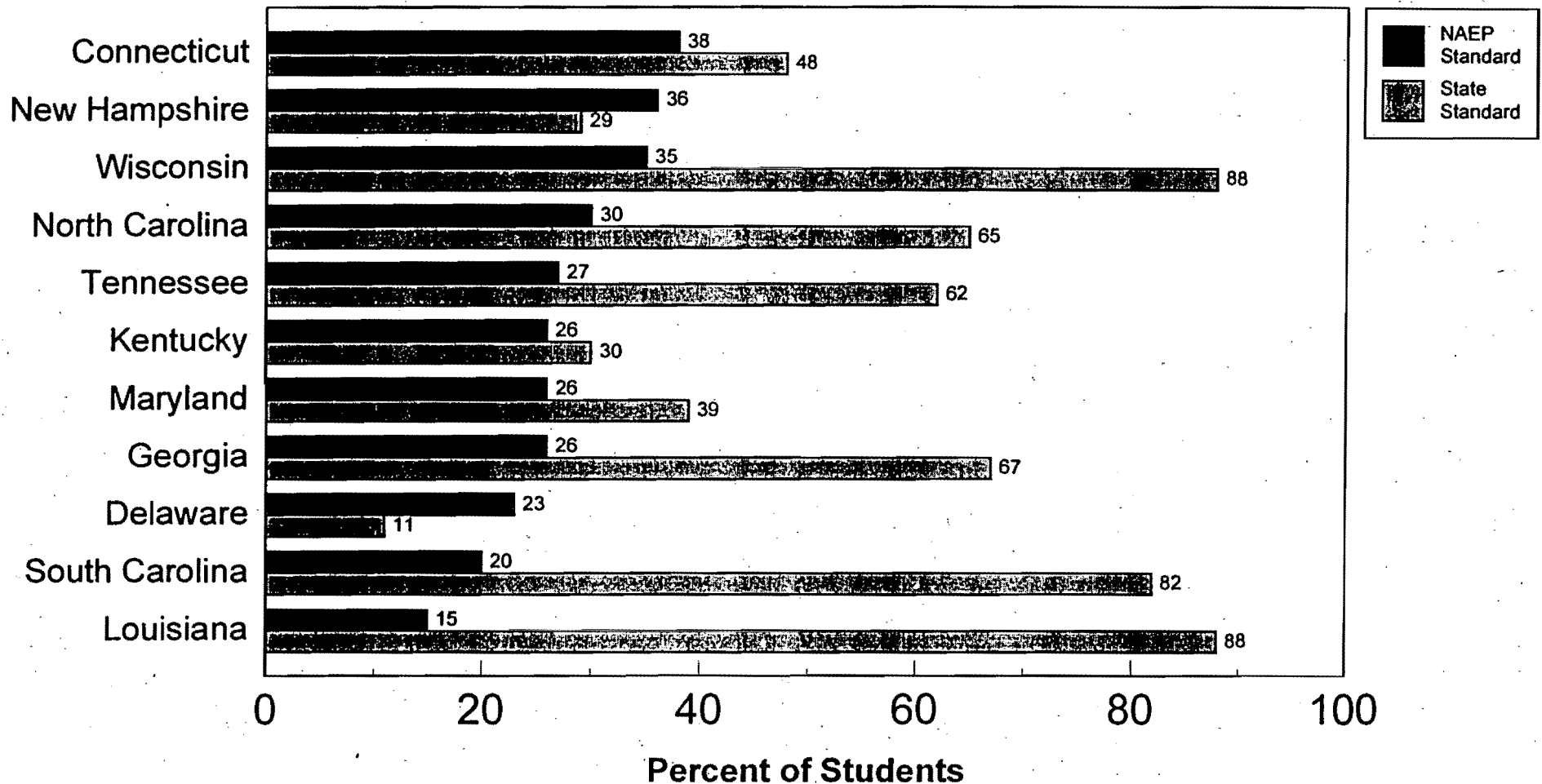
existing, challenging national content and performance standards. The study will also evaluate how existing tests can be compared against each other. In addition, the Academy will study the technical quality of the voluntary national tests and other aspects of test item development, as well as issues of test bias and test use.

For more information, visit our web site at <http://www.ed.gov/nationaltests/>

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NAEP MEASURES HIGH STANDARDS:

State NAEP Scores for 4th Grade Reading Compared to States' Own Assessments



For many States, NAEP proficiency levels are more challenging than the States' own. The percentages of students reaching the proficient level on NAEP are generally lower than those on the States' own assessments.

Source: U.S. Department of Education; State departments of education; National Education Goals Panel.

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**MYTHS AND REALITIES ABOUT
THE SENATE'S VOLUNTARY NATIONAL TEST PROPOSAL**
Senator Jeff Bingaman (October 24, 1997)

Myth: Voluntary national tests are unpopular.

Reality: The voluntary national tests are strongly supported by the education community and the general public. For example, in a recent Wall Street Journal/ NBC News poll, 79% of Americans favored national testing. Leaders of the business community, who hold themselves to high international standards, widely endorse this initiative as well. The 7 states and 15 school districts that have already signed up to participate in the new tests represent about 20% of the 4th and 8th grade students in the United States.

Myth: The voluntary national test is just another test.

Reality: The voluntary national tests in 4th grade reading and 8th grade math will provide information to students, parents and teachers that no other tests provide. For the first time, families that move from community to community or state to state will have a consistent yardstick by which to measure how well their child is doing. The tests will show how students, and their schools, compare against challenging standards in 4th grade English reading and 8th grade math; the 8th grade math test will compare student achievement to international standards, as well.

Myth: Instead of another test, all that's needed is more spending on education.

Reality: Increased investment in education remains critically important, and supporters of the voluntary national tests have led the fight for increased support for education in recent years. In contrast, many opponents of the testing proposal are those who would eliminate the Department of Education, cut successful education programs, and eliminate what little support the federal government now provides to local schools. These new tests are an important way of creating momentum to invest more in public education. Reliable and comparable information will help secure much-needed increases in education funding.

Myth: The voluntary national tests will lead to a national curriculum.

Reality: How a child is taught and what curriculum is used will still remain a local decision in communities that choose to participate in the testing program. These tests will simply measure whether a child can read well and independently by the end of the 4th grade and master challenging mathematics, including the basics of algebra and geometry by the end of 8th grade. It's common sense that a student should know how to read independently by 4th grade and grasp fundamental math concepts by 8th grade -- whether in California or Maine. But how these subjects are taught will remain up to schools and parents.

Myth: States and local education agencies that do not participate will be denied other sources of federal funding for education.

Reality: Absolutely not. No federal funding will be withheld from a state or local education agency based on its participation in the voluntary national tests. This is explicitly prohibited in the Senate-passed proposal.

Myth: Federal bureaucrats are developing these tests.

Reality: The Senate's proposal immediately transfers exclusive control over the test development to the bipartisan National Assessment Governing Board, which is made up of a representative group of community members, elected officials, and educators who would be nominated with the full input of Congressional leaders.

Myth: The voluntary national tests are just another way the federal government is trying to intrude in a local issue.

Reality: Parents want to know how their kids and schools are performing -- especially those families that move to a new community or state. The tests will provide reliable information for families all over the country. But the tests are voluntary, not mandatory. No district or state can be forced to participate. No private, parochial, or home schooled student can be required to take the test. All decisions regarding materials and teaching remain under the control of local school districts and state education agencies. These tests will not require certain teaching methods; they will measure how students are performing on high national standards.

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Myth: Tests don't generate higher academic performance.

Reality: Tests alone do not generate higher academic performance, but when teachers and students work hard to prepare for a challenging test, students learn more, and communities are engaged and empowered by this process. In fact, evidence shows that raising expectations for students lifts student achievement. These tests are tied to high academic standards, and they will help generate high academic performance through focusing the efforts of schools and communities.

Myth: This new test will lead to inappropriate and unfair comparisons of students, schools, and school districts.

Reality: These tests will lead to exactly the right kinds of comparisons parents and educators need but often don't have. With accuracy and rigor, they will tell parents and teachers how well students and schools do when measured against uniformly high standards of excellence that define what students should know and be able to do in the basics of reading and mathematics. We should not presume that any student, no matter where he or she lives or goes to school, will do poorly on these tests. When challenged and provided with the proper support, all students can perform well.

Myth: The federal government is already spending over \$500 million just to test students.

Reality: This figure totally exaggerated. Approximately 90% of the funds cited by those making this claim is actually spent on the Goals 2000 program, which improves teaching and learning in local classrooms by helping states and school districts raise standards, train teachers, promote the effective use of technology and increase community involvement. Only a very small part of this money supports state testing programs.

Myth: The voluntary national math test will be based on "fuzzy math."

Reality: The voluntary national math test will be based on tough, demanding standards which require a thorough understanding of basic and challenging math skills. The voluntary national math test will ask students to find the correct answer to each problem. Under the Senate proposal, the National Assessment Governing Board is charged with ensuring that any steps taken by the Department of Education in the early stages of developing the test are reviewed carefully before proceeding.

Myths About the Senate's Voluntary National Test Proposal

FALSE

"It's just
another test"

FALSE

"It undercuts
local control"

FALSE

"It won't do
anything"

FALSE

"We just need funds—
not tests"

FALSE

"No one likes it,
anyway"

The Truth About the Senate's Voluntary National Test Proposal

A+ VOLUNTARY

Neither states, nor school districts, nor private, parochial, or home schooled children can be forced to use the test, or penalized financially if they decline.

A+ INDEPENDENT

The tests are exclusively controlled by the independent, bipartisan, and well-respected National Assessment Governing Board.

A+ RIGOROUS

The tests will closely follow the lines of the 27-year old National Assessment of Educational Progress.

A+ WELL-DESIGNED

The content, specifications, and administration of the tests will use the most widely-established procedures and safeguards.

A+ ESSENTIAL

No other tests currently provide the specific, rigorous, and comparable information that will be available through the new voluntary tests.

PURPOSES FOR VOLUNTARY NATIONAL TESTS

- ✓ **Improve the odds of success for all students**
 - Providing voluntary national tests arms parents and educators with the knowledge of their students' individual achievement in comparison to widely respected national and international standards.
- ✓ **Focus national attention on the need to improve basic and advanced skills in reading and mathematics**
 - Individually reported tests will highlight the importance of reading independently by the 4th grade, raising awareness that learning to read enables students' to read to learn in all subjects.
 - If students don't learn challenging mathematics by 8th grade, they are less likely to take the math courses required for college admission and success in the workplace.
- ✓ **Help standards come to life by providing teachers, parents, and students with examples of the kind of work expected of students in fourth grade reading and eighth grade mathematics**
 - By giving parents and teachers individual student scores in comparison to national and international standards, these tests will help school reform permeate to the classroom and home.
- ✓ **Help energize local efforts to improve teaching and learning in reading and mathematics to high standards**
 - Good indicators like the voluntary national tests contribute to raising the standard of instruction and curriculum for all students.
 - This effort will stimulate greater use of high-quality materials to help teachers and parents prepare students.
- ✓ **Provide students, parents, and teachers with accurate and reliable information about student performance measured against national standards. Parents have a right to know how well their children are doing.**
 - Congress already receives this information at the national and state levels, but parents and teachers should have access to students' levels of achievement on national standards. These tests will give families and schools information on exactly what items their students answered correctly, and what areas need improvement for each student.

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SUPPORT FOR THE VOLUNTARY NATIONAL TESTS

✓ **The American public supports high national standards**

Parents deserve to know how their children are performing based on rigorous national standards no matter where they live in this country.

A recent Gallup poll shows that 67% favor using standardized national tests to measure the achievement of students and 77% favor national standards for measuring the academic performance of our schools.

✓ **Endorsements for the voluntary national tests from the education community**

"Although there is extensive testing in our nation, there is no individual student test of reading or mathematics which enables a student to compare his or her work with students in other states and in other nations. They need test results indicating whether their achievement is competitive with other students around the world. In short, students and families want to know what level of learning is required to reach the high standards necessary as we enter the 21st century."

Letter signed by the following:

American Federation of Teachers
Council for Chief State School Officers
National Education Association

Council for Exceptional Children
Council of the Great City Schools
National School Boards Association

National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of State Directors of Special Education

✓ **Endorsements for the voluntary national tests from the business community**

"The proposed standards and tests will help provide parents, students, educators and policy makers with the information they need to ensure every child has the opportunity to succeed in the 21st century world and workplace."

Edwin Lupberger, U.S. Chamber of Commerce Executive Committee

"The first step to improve education in the United States is to substantially raise academic standards and verify achievement through rigorous testing."

Education Task Force of the Business Roundtable

"The Alliance believes these voluntary tests could be used by state and local school districts to measure the progress of American students in these core subjects. The Alliance recently surveyed its members on this issue and an overwhelming number supported the initiative to develop the voluntary national tests."

National Alliance of Business

more

"Every state should adopt high national standards, and by 1999, every state should test every 4th

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grader in reading and 8th grader in math to make sure these standards are met. President Clinton's national testing initiative offers a new opportunity to use widely accepted national benchmarks in reading and math against which states, school districts and parents can judge student performance."

Jim Barksdale, CEO and President, Netscape Communications, and
L. John Doerr, Partner in the firm of Kleiner, Perkins, Caulfield and Byers
on behalf of 240 technology industry leaders in a bipartisan call for high national
education standards in reading and math.

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RESPONSES TO CONCERNS ABOUT NATIONAL TESTS

1. We don't need another test.

- These tests provide information to students, parents and teachers that no other tests do. They will show whether individual students meet challenging, widely accepted national standards in 4th grade reading and 8th grade math. And the 8th grade math test shows whether students meet international standards as well. No other test provides this clear and critical information to students, parents and teachers. There is no other way for families that move from community to community or state to state to maintain consistent, high expectations in the basics.

2. Tests don't generate higher academic performance.

- Unlike many other tests, these tests will be designed so that teachers and students can prepare for them, starting when the child enters school. Teachers and parents will have materials that describe clearly what kind of work is expected -- what students must know to master the material and do well on the tests.
- In addition, the tests will tell school administrators, parents, and teachers how well students and schools are doing. They will be able to tell which schools and students need assistance and how to boost their performance.
- Research and experience show that raising standards for students lifts student achievement. These tests are tied to high academic standards, and they will generate high academic performance.

3. National tests are too controversial to implement without Congressional authorization.

- We welcome Congress as a full partner in the effort to raise standards for all students and to provide parents and students with national standards and tests in the basic skills. None of us can do this alone. We should be working together to raise standards for our students, improve teaching and learning, and give our schools the tools they need to prepare our children for the future. We want Congress to play a role in this effort.
- The Administration will submit legislation shortly to create an independent governing board to oversee and ensure the integrity of the tests. We will use the National Assessment Governing Board, a group that already exists and that oversees the widely used National Assessment of Education Progress (a sample tests that gives information on how the U.S. and over 40 states are doing, but provides no information for individual students or their teachers and families.) We ask Congress as a partner in the effort to raise standards for all students, to pass this legislation.

4. **New tests can lead to inappropriate and unfair comparisons of schools and school districts.**
 - These tests lead to exactly the right kinds of comparisons -- they tell us how well our students and our schools do when measured against high standards of excellence that define what students should know and be able to do in the basics of reading and math. We should welcome these comparisons, not fear them.
 - We should not presume that any student, no matter where he or she lives or goes to school, will do poorly on this test. We must stop perpetuating the cycle of low expectations that, in the name of compassion, actually keeps many young people from achieving their full potential.
 - In July, 15 major urban school districts around the country pledged to participate in these tests -- not because these districts believe they will excel the first time around, but because they know that their students, when challenged and when provided with the proper support, can perform just as well as any other students can.
5. **New national tests can lead to a national curriculum.**
 - Providing a voluntary reading test in 4th grade and a voluntary math test in 8th grade will not create a national curriculum. These tests are based on accepted standards that reflect widespread agreement on what students should know and be able to do. States and local communities will continue to determine their curriculum, and will use the national tests to focus attention on how to improve student achievement in the basic skills.
6. **Instead of another test, more resources should be sent into the classroom.**
 - We agree that more resources should be sent into the classroom. That is why the Administration has supported record investments in education to help states and communities raise standards, train teachers, improve basic skills, and promote the effective use of technology in the classroom. The national tests will aid us in better understanding where those resources are needed and how they can be wisely spent. They are an integral part of a comprehensive strategy to raise standards and improve education.
7. **Some Members of Congress say the federal government is already spending over \$500 million just to test students.**
 - This figure is totally incorrect. Approximately 90% of the funds cited by Members is for the Goals 2000 program, which improves teaching and learning in local classrooms by helping states and school districts raise standards, train teachers, promote the effective use of technology and increase parental and community involvement. A very small part of this money goes to tests.

September 2, 1997

**CURRENT PARTICIPANTS IN THE VOLUNTARY NATIONAL TESTS IN
4TH GRADE READING AND 8TH GRADE MATHEMATICS**

STATES

Alaska
Kentucky
Maryland
Massachusetts
Michigan
North Carolina
West Virginia

LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

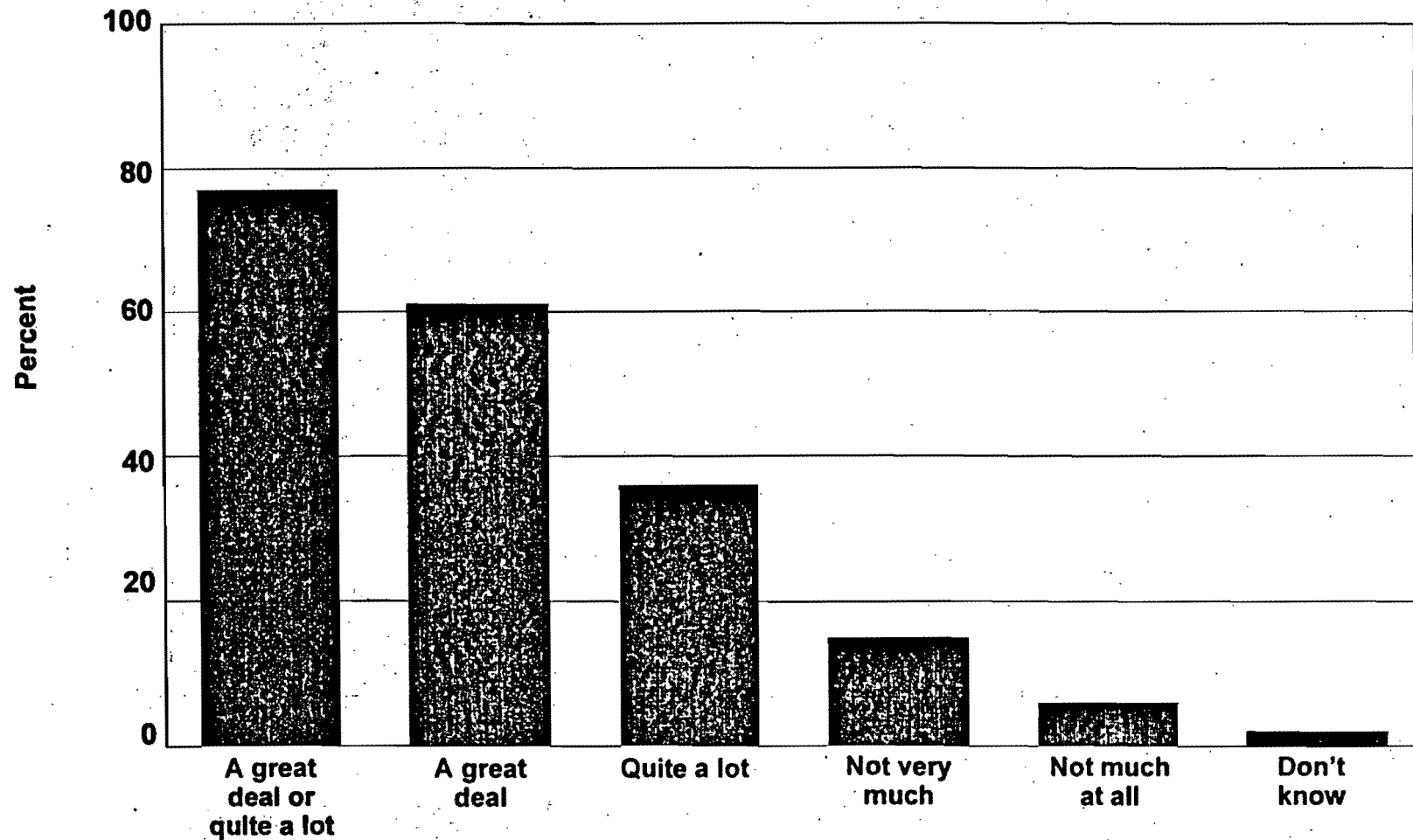
Atlanta, GA
Broward County (Ft. Lauderdale), FL
Chicago, IL
Cincinnati, OH
Detroit, MI
El Paso, TX
Fresno, CA
Houston, TX
Long Beach, CA
Los Angeles, CA
New York City, NY
Omaha, NE
Philadelphia, PA
San Antonio, TX
Seattle, WA

The Department of Defense schools will also participate.

Together, these states and school districts represent 20% of all 4th and 8th graders.

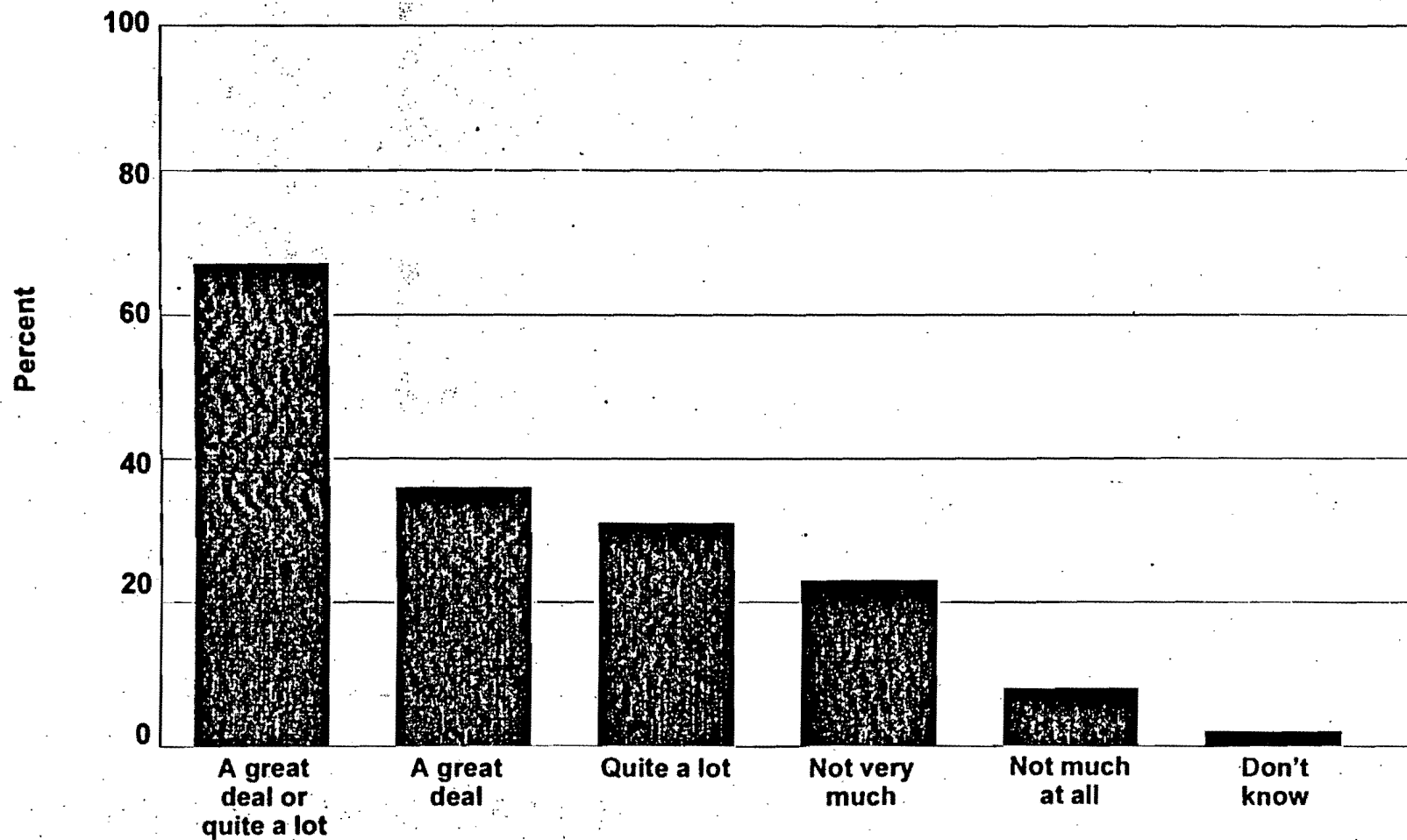
August 29, 1997

Establishing national standard for measuring the academic performance of the public schools



Source: Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll
August 26, 1997

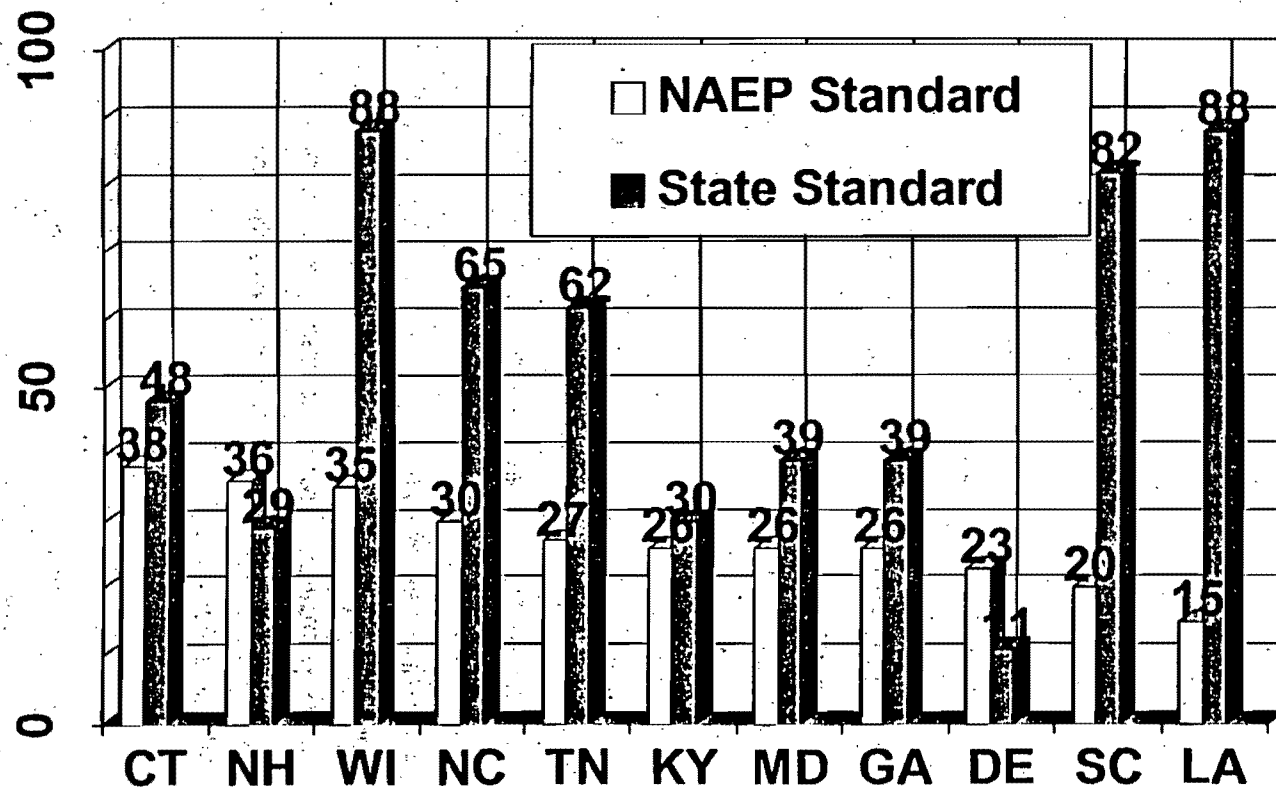
Using standardized national tests to measure the academic achievement of students



Source: Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll
August 26, 1997

NAEP MEASURES HIGH STANDARDS:

State NAEP Scores for 4th Grade Reading Compared to States' Own Assessments



Source: US Department of Education, State departments of education, National Education Goals Panel



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NEWS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE Contact: (202) 463-5682 Frank Coleman/Thomas Love
Friday, April 4, 1997 (888) 249-NEWS (press@uschamber.com)

U.S. CHAMBER SUPPORTS GROWING BIPARTISAN CALL FOR VOLUNTARY EDUCATION STANDARDS AND TESTS

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Chamber of Commerce – the world's largest business federation representing an underlying membership of more than three million businesses and organizations of every size, sector and region – today threw its support behind the growing bipartisan call for voluntary education standards and tests.

"Wednesday's endorsement by leading business executives of proposed national reading and math tests -- announced at the White House -- supports our long-held belief that all children need and deserve a world-class education," said Edwin Lupberger, chairman of the U.S. Chamber's Executive Committee and chairman and president of Entergy Corporation.

The U.S. Chamber also called on all proponents to back yesterday's endorsement with an action plan to support voluntary world-class academic standards. *The Common Agenda*, developed by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Alliance of Business and The Business Roundtable, calls on U.S. companies to consider state and local education standards in making location decisions, to examine student transcripts before hiring, and to target corporate education philanthropy to initiatives and communities promoting high-level voluntary academic standards.

"U.S. businesses have learned the hard way that being competitive begins with identifying and setting competitive standards" Lupberger said. "The proposed standards and tests will help provide parents, students, educators and policymakers with the information they need to ensure every child has the opportunity to succeed in the 21st century world and workplace."

The U.S. Chamber looks forward to working with committed partners on how best to develop appropriate standards and implement assessments that are voluntary, based on consensus, locally implemented and part of a comprehensive strategy to upgrade and reform local, state and national education and training systems.

[For further information on the U.S. Chamber's education and training strategy and programs, contact the Center for Workforce Preparation, the U.S. Chamber's not-for-profit education and training affiliate at (202) 463-5525.]

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97-48

**NATIONAL ALLIANCE
OF BUSINESS**

NEWS RELEASE

For Release: Immediate

Contact: Milt Goldberg
202/289-2944

**Business leaders endorse President Clinton's
initiative to develop voluntary national tests**

Washington, DC (May 21, 1997) - James F. Orr III, chairman and CEO of UNUM Corporation and chairman of the National Alliance of Business (NAB), today announced the endorsement of the Alliance for efforts supporting the initiative to develop voluntary national tests, originally proposed by President Clinton in his 1997 State of the Union address, to measure student reading skills in the 4th grade and mathematics skills in the 8th grade. The Alliance believes these voluntary tests could be used by state and local school districts to measure the progress of American students in these core subjects.

The Alliance recently surveyed its members on this issue and an overwhelming number supported the initiative to develop the voluntary national tests.

The Alliance works cooperatively with over 300 state and local business/education coalitions in partnership with school leaders, parents, and teachers to improve the quality of American education.

###

The National Alliance of Business is a nonprofit, business-led organization dedicated to building a quality workforce by improving American education, forging a smooth transition from school to work, expanding life-long learning opportunities for incumbent workers and fostering strategies that simultaneously address worker security and employer flexibility. The Alliance is chaired by James F. Orr III, chairman and CEO of UNUM Corporation.



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
FEBRUARY 10, 1997

Contact: Johanna Schneider
(202) 872-1260

**STATEMENT BY NORMAN R. AUGUSTINE, CHAIRMAN AND CEO
LOCKHEED MARTIN CORPORATION AND
CHAIRMAN, EDUCATION TASK FORCE OF
THE BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE
ON PRESIDENT CLINTON'S CALL FOR NATIONAL TESTS IN
READING AND MATHEMATICS**

Washington, DC--The Business Roundtable applauds the President's continued efforts to make achievement of high academic standards a top priority--a goal the Roundtable itself has been pursuing. The Roundtable supports voluntary national tests in 4th grade reading and 8th grade mathematics. These tests will provide a national benchmark in reading and an international benchmark in mathematics that parents and educators can use to learn how their own children and students are performing.

The first step to improve education in the United States is to substantially raise academic standards and verify achievement through rigorous testing. In many local communities, parents are uncertain about whether their children are being adequately prepared to succeed. They do not know whether their child's grades or test scores measure up to expectations in other communities, states or countries. Parents who move frequently are surprised to discover that the rigor of what their children learn in school varies from place to place. Yet, when young people apply for a job, employers hold them to the same standard, no matter where they went to school, because employers must themselves compete on a worldwide basis.

The Business Roundtable urges states and local communities to continue to adopt standards in these basic subjects and in other core academic disciplines. Successful schools, like successful businesses, use data to improve their performance. The availability of a national benchmark in 4th grade reading and an international benchmark in 8th grade math should help drive the improvements that are needed to help students meet world-class academic standards.

The Business Roundtable is an association of more than 200 chief executives of leading U.S. corporations, employing over 10 million people. The CEOs examine public policy issues that affect the economy and develop positions which seek to reflect sound economic and social principles.

A BIPARTISAN CALL FROM U.S. TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY LEADERS FOR HIGH NATIONAL EDUCATION STANDARDS IN READING AND MATH

Gale Aguillar
Paul Allaire
Joseph Ambrosio
Dr. Gilbert Amelio
Marc Andreessen
Vincenzo Anido, Jr.
Sherry —
Eric Archambeau
Howard Asher
Mel Badgen
Naren Bakshi
Jim Barksdale
Carol Bartz
Gary Beach
George Bell
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Charles Berger
Philip Berman
Jeff Bezos
David Binkley
Philip J. Biola
Jalech Bisharat
Julie Blanchard
Charles Bosenberg
Shelby Bonnie
Jerry Brenholtz
John Seeley Brown
Neill H. Brownstein
George H. Bruns, Jr.
Brett Bullington
Pat Burt
Brook H. Byers
Gordon Campbell
William Campbell
Douglas Carlson
Steve Case
Daniel H. Case III
John Castello
John Chambers
Kumar Chansrasakaran
Robert Chess
Sanjeev Chitre
Ronald Chwang
Gregory R. Clarke
Mark Clotek
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President & Co-CEO
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COALITION FOR DEVELOPMENT OF VOLUNTARY NATIONAL TESTS

August 27, 1997

Members of the United States Senate

Dear Senator:

**Subject: Support for funds in the FY 1998 Education Appropriations (S.1061)
to Develop National Tests in Mathematics and Reading**

The organizations listed below urge your support for the Appropriations Committee provisions in the Fiscal Year 1998 Labor/HHS/Education Bill (S.1061) which enable development of new voluntary national tests for individual students in mathematics and reading. We urge, also, your opposition to any amendments which would prohibit funding for development of the tests or otherwise impede their preparation.

Why develop voluntary national tests?

Our students must be able to benchmark their education progress now in ways never done before so they may prepare for their future. Although there is extensive testing in our nation, there is no individual student test of reading or mathematics which enables a student to compare his or her work with students in other states and in other nations. Our highly mobile students and their families need test results indicating their performance as they move among school districts and states. Our children will also compete for jobs across communities, states, and nations. They need test results indicating whether their achievement is competitive with other students around the world. In short, students and families want to know what level of learning is required to reach the high standards necessary as we enter the 21st Century.

The proposal for developing national tests in reading and mathematics is designed to provide that information at two critical points — 4th grade in reading and 8th grade in mathematics. The selection of 4th grade reading is made because at that stage to succeed in all subjects in school, students must have proficiency in reading English. The selection of 8th grade mathematics is key, because that is the pivotal year for a student to determine what level of mathematics she or he will pursue in high school. This choice, in turn, heavily influences whether or not the student will advance to postsecondary education.

Design of the tests

The proposal for developing the tests included in the Appropriations Committee's bill takes maximum advantage of tests already in use. It enables students and families to have the achievement information they want in an efficient and timely way.

The new tests are built on the widely accepted testing done under the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). NAEP enjoys strong, bipartisan support as a measure of national student samples and samples in more than 40 states of student achievement in mathematics and

reading. By basing the new individual student tests on content tested under NAEP, the new test is the most efficient way to link scores nationally to NAEP and internationally to the Third International Mathematics and Science Study. As a result, a long-standing hope will be realized by 2000: an individual student anywhere in the United States will be able to compare his or her academic achievement to that of students in other states and in more than 40 other countries.

Safeguards in test development

The Senate Appropriations Committee, with the agreement of the Administration, has provided clear safeguards for development of the tests. The development and field trials of the new tests will be reviewed by the National Academy of Sciences with a favorable report required in advance of any use of the tests. The process of Academy review is comparable to the quality controls required by Congress in the development of the NAEP, in that case, by the National Academy of Education. The Congress, the states and localities, and students and parents will have the advantage of a thorough technical and professional review before the national tests are actually administered.

Urgency for test development in 1997

The members of our organizations urge that development of the national tests moves forward in 1997. States and localities are now addressing significant choices regarding their future testing systems. The option of using the national tests in reading and mathematics is an extremely important one. We need to have that option, but final decisions require test availability by 1999 and design and field testing in 1997 and 1998. No state is required to participate, and no state should be denied the option by halting test development. This use of federal funds for test development is as cost-effective an investment in state, national and international reading and mathematics comparisons as could be made with public or private funds.

We urge the Senate to give the green light for developing voluntary national tests in reading and mathematics, thereby enabling our students and their families to genuinely benchmark their individual efforts and results to their counterparts throughout the United States and around the world.

Thank you for your consideration of our recommendation.

Respectfully submitted,

American Federation of Teachers
Council for Exceptional Children
Council of Great City Schools
Council of Chief State School Officers
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Education Association
National School Boards Association

September 3, 1997

Dear Representative:

The National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) urges you to oppose any amendments offered to the FY 98 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill, H.R. 2264, that would prevent the Department of Education from further development of the national assessments in reading and math.

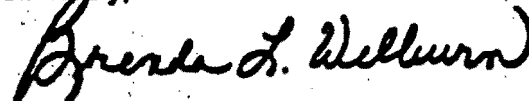
Development of these tests, which will be patterned after the widely acclaimed National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), is consistent with the Department of Education's traditional role in research and development and should not be impeded. In addition, for those states opting to participate in the program, it offers an unprecedented opportunity for individual students to compare their abilities with other students from across the nation. Currently, no assessment system of this scope exists.

State participation in the testing program is strictly voluntary. Because this initiative is only six months old, many states have just begun to consider whether they should participate or not. Still, six states have already given their commitment to administer the tests beginning in the spring of 1999: Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Carolina, and West Virginia.

Furthermore, H.R. 2264 requires a rigorous evaluation process at the federal level as well. The proposed legislation directs the National Academy of Sciences to study the national assessments' preliminary field results and submit a report to Congress by next summer. It is at that time, after the majority of states have weighed in on the issue and the Academy's review is complete, that Congress should and will be able to conduct an informed debate over the merits of the tests.

We believe the states should be afforded the opportunity to decide for themselves whether to take part in these national assessments. These discussions among state education policymakers can only continue if the development of such tests proceeds. Again, we request that you oppose any amendments to H.R. 2264 regarding national assessments.

Sincerely,



Brenda Lilienthal Welburn
Executive Director

President
Thomas Davis
Missouri

Past President
Patricia Hayes
Colorado

Secretary-Treasurer
Barbara Roberts Mason
Michigan

Northeastern Area Directors
Beverly Greenberg
Connecticut

James C. Dawson
New York

Southern Area Directors
Ethel Hall
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Brenda Lilienthal Welburn
Executive Director

The Washington Post

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

Measuring Success in School

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

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

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

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

As former governors, President Clinton and I strongly support the

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

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

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

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

RICHARD W. RILEY
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
Washington

Revised version--Wednesday 1p.m.

NATIONAL TESTS: A GOOD IDEA THAT'S BEING DONE RIGHT

By Richard W. Riley

U. S. Secretary of Education

How long should it take to prepare a 4th-grade reading test or an 8th-grade math test? Should it take more than two years?

tone down
Diane Ravitch seems to think so (op-ed, August 26.) She chides the Clinton Administration for "hurriedly" preparing voluntary national tests in these subjects. Yet the tests are scheduled for the spring of 1999, about 2-1/3 years after President Clinton proposed them. Only in Washington could that be considered "hurrying."

The fact is, it takes about two years to prepare high-quality tests, evaluate them, and then actually administer them. We are moving deliberately enough to do the job right, but fast enough to get these tests into schools as soon as possible. The tests will help children to learn the basics, and our kids shouldn't have to wait for that.

Ms. Ravitch and I do agree on one thing, though -- the entity overseeing the tests should be independent and bipartisan. That is why I went on national television two days before Ms. Ravitch's article appeared to say that the Administration will ask the Congress to expand the authority of the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) to include setting test policy. NAGB is by far the best way to assure independence and to make sure the tests will earn the confidence of parents, teachers, communities, states, and school districts. I hope the Congress will pass the legislation without delay.

Of course, we have been actively pursuing bipartisan support for the tests all along. The process that we have used duplicates the process that NAGB uses to develop the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests, which are now used in almost every state. The voluntary national tests will use the

same frameworks and performance standards as NAEP. For those who aren't familiar with such jargon, that means that the voluntary national tests will be challenging and hold students to high standards of learning. And just as NAGB does when it develops NAEP (sorry about the acronym overload), we asked the Chief State School Officers to appoint nonpartisan committees of teachers and other experts to design the test specifications.

In addition, our process has been inclusive and open. We have held many public hearings and put the transcripts on the Internet for all the world to see. I have also have testified before Congress at least four times, and other officials of the U. S. Department of Education have also testified. We have answered every question put to us, and we continue to reach out to state education leaders as well. Recently, representatives from 47 states attended a meeting on the tests which was covered by C-SPAN and other press represenatives.

Process is important, but we should never lose sight of what's most important, and that's making sure that students are well grounded in reading and math. That will improve the odds of success for all children, and that's really what the President's proposal is all about. The tests will inform parents, teachers, and students themselves about what it takes to reach national and even international standards of achievement no matter where they live -- something no other tests currently do.

The American people support the President's call for voluntary national standards. The Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll, released on Tuesday, showed that two out of three Americans believe national tests will improve student achievement "a great deal or quite a lot."

With that kind of public support, it would be tragic if the Congress moved to delay or kill national testing, as some members of Congress want to do. They would deny many states and school districts the right to even consider the option,

thwarting the principle of local control.

It would be wrong to allow a good idea that can help our children learn to languish. It is time to move. I am pleased that the contract to develop the tests has been awarded to an alliance that includes the nation's most respected test publishers and a bipartisan council on basic skills.

We're on the right track, and we welcome the involvement of every American in this effort. Let's work together and keep our eye on the prize.

####

Voluntary National Testing: It's a No Brainer

By

Michael Casserly*

When Congress returns for its Fall session, members will take up one of the most defining education issues they have faced in some time: voluntary national tests for 4th grade reading and 8th grade math.

President Clinton proposed the tests to spur the flagging standards movement. He was right to do so. The drive to heighten educational standards is losing steam. The standards and assessments now being developed by the states are spotty at best, and many have begun to question whether all the work is worth it. The national tests could provide direction to these disparate efforts and breathe some much-needed life into the standards movement.

The question before Congress, posed by Education and Economic Opportunity Committee Chair Bill Goodling (R-PA), is whether the legislature should prevent the Clinton Administration from using federal funds to develop and administer the new assessments. The vote is, of course, a proxy on the tests themselves. But Congress—Republican and Democrats—should support the tests for a number of reasons.

First, Republicans should remember that these tests are direct descendents of the ones proposed by President Bush in "America 2000". The White House and Congressional Republicans, at the time, pushed tests to spur excellence in public education. Clinton never strayed far from the original blueprint in proposing "Goals 2000" then or Voluntary National Tests now. The tests have spanned the administrations of both parties and encompass an idea around which a national and bipartisan consensus is now clear.

Second, the 106th Congress—beginning in 1999—will reauthorize the main engine of federal involvement in schools, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and will want answers to tough questions that national test results could help answer.

Third, some Democrats fear that test results could reflect badly on minority children. Many worry about the use of the tests to label or exclude them. It is a concern worthy of vigilance. Advocates argue, correctly, that testing is not teaching, and that the challenge is to provide opportunity for achievement, not just the measurement of it. The sorry truth, however, is that we are never going to get to issues of opportunity until the debates on standards are more settled. The nation should be able to walk and chew gum at the same time as it pursues both ends of the educational reform process, but apparently it cannot—or will not. The national tests will give liberals a better data base from which to advocate greater opportunity for poor kids.

There are many issues that remain to be solved, including problems of duplicate testing, accommodations for students who are disabled or do not speak English, and costs. The Administration has just resolved one by placing control of the exams under an independent board, and is working to solve the others.

Urban public school systems in 15 major cities, for their part, announced recently that they would take the exams, a move Clinton called historic and astonishing. But they stepped forward not to surprise people or to tweak the states over their sluggish pace. They volunteered because high standards have more significance to urban communities from which so little is expected than they have almost anywhere else. And they volunteered to say clearly to the nation that urban school children could compete with any kids anywhere if they are given an opportunity to learn. That should be a no brainer for conservatives and liberals alike.

The initial test results, particularly out of urban schools, may—in fact—be low. That should catch few by surprise. It may astound more people that some city schools will do well and that many wealthier districts are not as good as their public relations firms advertise. Few people have noticed yet that America's urban public school systems are coming back. This new ascendance has a lot to do with the attention big city schools are paying to their bottom line: student achievement. Nothing sharpens one's attention better than test results. And while not all urban schools will want to take the Voluntary National Tests, they sure would like the opportunity to decide. Now that's local control.

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