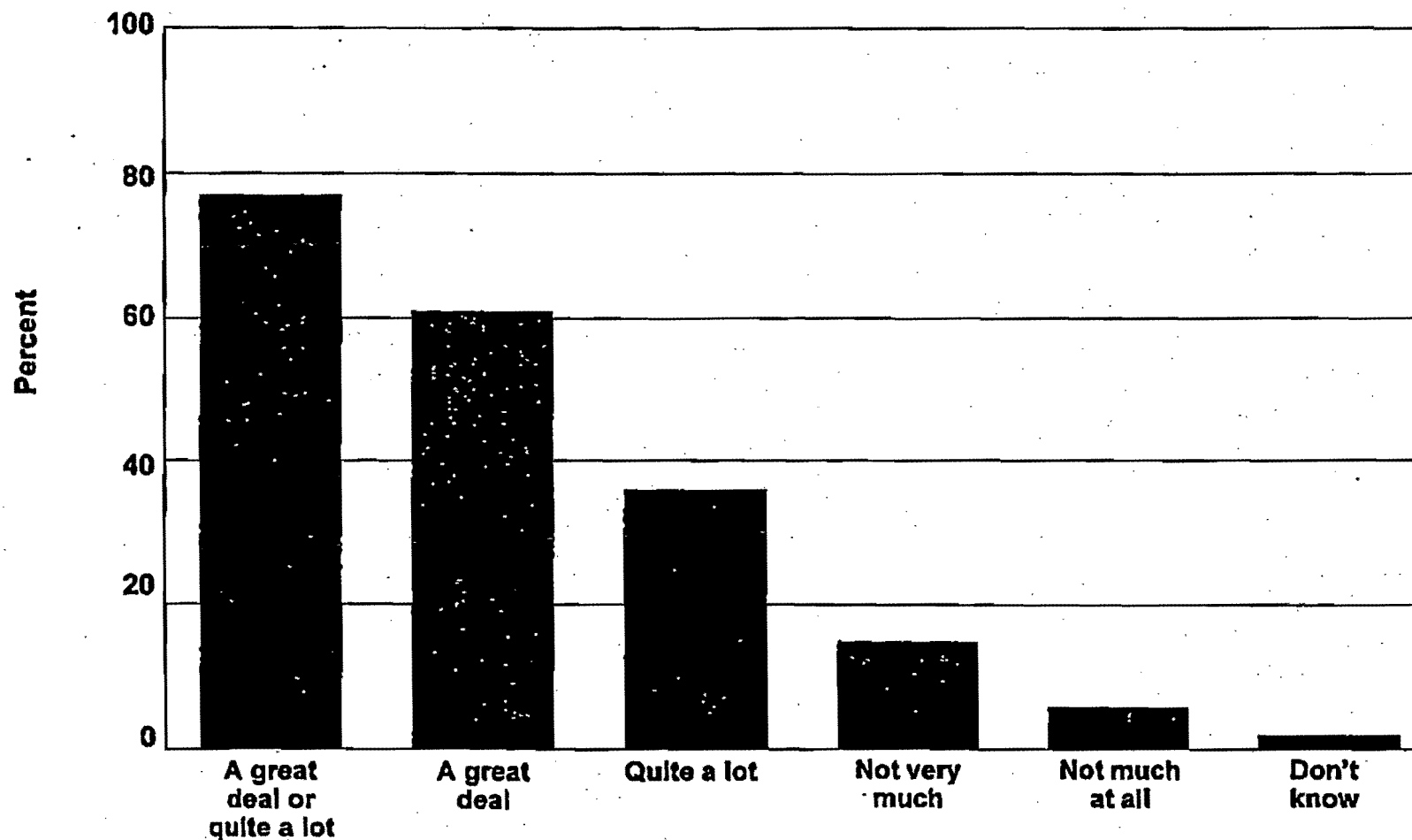


Establishing national standard for measuring the academic performance of the public schools



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

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

"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."

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

✓ 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

September 6, 1997

KIDS SPEAK OUT IN FAVOR OF VOLUNTARY NATIONAL TESTS IN READING AND MATH

CNN Newsroom and Worldview
September 8, 1997

Today, Tony Frassrand, Anchor of *CNN Newsroom*, interviewed 60 students and a teacher at T.C. Williams High School in Alexandria, VA. The following is what they had to say about the President's proposal for Voluntary National Tests in reading and mathematics:

Q: How would you feel about a test in the 4th grade to measure independent reading skills or in the 8th grade to test algebra skills?

- "I think it's a great idea because, in reality, it's for our own good, and if we don't pass it, then the teachers and educators can give us the help we need, so that we are literate." -Cat
- "Yes, we're testing to see if kids are ready to move on, because kids have graduated that haven't been able to read, and that's really sad. We need to be able to test to make sure kids after each year are learning appropriately, and learning what they should be learning." -Casey
- "If you have a national test, no one can slip through the cracks like they have before, and I agree with the testing theory." -Clark
- "In Alexandria, we have the Learning Passport Test, and supposedly you can't move on past 9th grade if you haven't passed it, but I know people who haven't and still moved on, so if there's going to be a test, then it needs to be enforced. I mean, they can't just let people slip through the cracks."
- "Personally, I think the tests are a good idea for something practical. However, I think that if we are going to enforce these tests, we have to get rid of some of the useless tests, which students were given today." -Adam
- "So many people are taking these tests, the Iowa test, and they're obviously not working if people are graduating without being able to read, and not knowing simple math. They're obviously not working." -Amanda

The Washington Post

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

Get On With Student Testing

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

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

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

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

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

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



U.S. Chamber of Commerce
1615 H St., NW
Washington, DC 20062-2000

Media Relations Department (202) 463-5682

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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**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.

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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.

Letters to Congress:

Coalition for Development of VNT (AFT, Council for Exceptional Children, CGCS, CCSSO, NAESP, Nat'l Assn State Dir of Special Ed, NEA, Nat'l School Boards Assn (8/27/97)
National Association of State Boards of Education (9/3/97)
AFT (9/30/97)
Business Roundtable (10/7/97)
National Alliance of Business (10/16/97)

Press Releases:

Business Roundtable: Statement by Norman A. Augustine (2/10/97)
US Technology Leaders for High ... Standards by John Doerr and Jim Barksdale (4/2/97)
US Chamber of Commerce: Chamber Supports Growing Bipartisan... (4/4/97)
National Alliance of Business: Business Leaders Endorse President... (5/21/97)
Council of the Great City Schools: 15 Major Urban School Systems (7/25/97)
Business Roundtable: Statement by John Krol (9/4/97)
CCSSO: Statement by Commissioner Wilmer S. Cody (9/25/97)

Editorials/Articles

Toward a National Test - Sacramento Bee and Fresno Bee (2/8/97 and 2/9/97)
A Yardstick for American Students by Checker Finn & Diane Ravitch - Wash Post (2/25/97)
Stumping for Standards by Chris Cross and Scott Jofus - Ed Week (4/9/97)
National Education Standards Make Sense for "United" States - Orlando Sentinel (7/30/97)
Student Achievement - Star Tribune Newspaper of the Twin Cities (8/5/97)
Get On With Student Testing - Washington Post (8/7/97)
Yes on Tests - Washington Post - (9/5/97)
Put Schools to the Test - Christian Science Monitor (9/3/97)
Test of Wills - San Francisco Examiner (9/5/97)
Worthwhile Tests - Boston Globe (9/8/97)
President's Proposal - Portland Press Herald (9/8/97)
Failing the Exam - New York Newsday (9/10/97)
A Proficient Plan - Philadelphia Inquirer (9/10/97)
National Standards - San Jose Mercury News (9/11/97)
A Test Congress Had Better Pass - Chicago Tribune (9/11/97)
National Tests Strengthen Case for Strong Schools - CNN Interactive (9/12/97)
Evaluating Pupil Performance - NYT (9/15/97)
Why Fear Nat'l Tests? - USA Today (9/15/97)
A National Test: Clinton's Assessment Program Deserves Support - Sacramento Bee (9/17/97)
A Test for the US House - Boston Globe (9/19/97)
A Benchmark for Improving Schools - Business Week (9/22/97)
Beyond Lake Wobegon by David Gergen - US News and World Report (9/22/97)
Getting Testy - The New Republic (9/29/97)
Unum Chief's Ideas Can Aid... - Portland Press Herald (10/10/97)

Other:

A Bipartisan Call from U.S. Technology Leaders (List of 240) (4/2/97)

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.

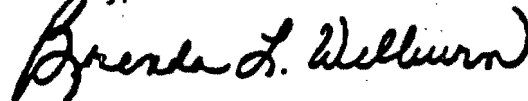
Development of these tests, which will be patterned after the widely acclaimed National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), is consistent with the Department of Education's traditional role in research and development and should not be impeded. In addition, for those states opting to participate 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
Alabama

Adrienne Ottaviani
Maryland

Central Area Directors
Betty Preston
Missouri

Norma Cook
Indiana

Midwest Area Directors
Kevia Gilmore
Kansas

Emmalou Rodriguez
New Mexico

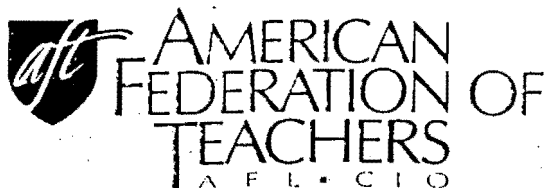
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Brenda Lilienthal Welburn
Executive Director



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SANDRA FELDMAN
PRESIDENT

EDWARD L. MCELROY
SECRETARY-TREASURER

1997 OCT -7 P 2:17

September 30, 1997

EDUCATION
100/0000

Conferees on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Conferee:

The American Federation of Teachers supports the development of national tests that provide students, parents and educators with valid, reliable information about individual students' achievement in reading and mathematics. As part of our push for higher academic standards, our organization began discussing the merits of national testing as early as 1990 under the leadership of Albert Shanker. We found overwhelming support on the side of national testing, both as a matter of stimulating higher student achievement overall and raising the traditionally lower standards to which our neediest students are held. AFT members' daily experiences with students and schools make them astute judges of the effectiveness of various education reform proposals, and AFT members overwhelmingly support national testing. In fact, support for national testing has been official AFT policy since 1992. AFT members' views are consistent with the overwhelming majority of American parents and citizens, across racial and other lines, all in support of national testing. The case for national testing -- and the AFT's support of it -- is more solid than ever.

I strongly urge you to reject the prohibition against voluntary national testing included in the House-passed Education Appropriations Bill and to make the provision on national testing embodied in the Senate version of the Education Appropriations Bill your starting point. The task before us should not be to debate whether states and school districts should be able to choose to participate in national testing. Rather, the task should be to ensure that the national tests meet the most rigorous standards and provide trustworthy and useful information to parents, students, educators and citizens so that, together, we can continue to go about the crucial task of improving American education.

We believe that the Senate-passed testing proposal takes a major step toward that end by establishing a firm relationship between the proposed national tests and the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB). Ensuring that the tests meet the most rigorous standards and provide accurate, reliable information to students, parents, educators and the American public, however, requires bolstering, not diminishing, NAGB's capacity. To this end, we urge some improvements in the Senate proposal.

The Senate amendment removes four seats from NAGB: two technical experts and two curriculum specialists would be eliminated. This would be a serious mistake given that NAGB is currently responsible for national and state-by-state NAEP, as it presently is, in conjunction with the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). To remove those seats while granting NAGB absolute authority over the complex technical and curricular issues involved in individual-level student testing and reporting would be a serious mistake. Given the additional responsibilities assigned to NAGB, we strongly urge restoring the two technical and two curriculum specialist seats to the Board. We also urge you to increase that number.

Depriving NAGB of the expertise it needs to make sound decisions while concurrently vesting it with exclusive control over every aspect of national testing would deprive NAGB of the checks and balances it needs to do its job properly and to command public and professional credibility. A good solution to this problem is contained in the Senate Report to accompany S.1061, which directs the Department of Education to contract with the National Academy of Sciences to conduct a study and report on the voluntary national testing initiative, including "the technical quality of the work performed under the test development contracts, the frameworks and test content, the adequacy of field tests, the reliability of the data produced by the field tests, and the degree in which the tests can be expected to provide valid and useful information to the public." If the conferees were to specify that this study be done at the same time as NAGB's work, we would have the checks and balance that would assure NAGB, the American public and America's students of the quality of NAGB's work on national testing.

I conclude as I began: with an unequivocally strong endorsement of the national testing initiative. It is the right thing to do, and it is what the American public wants us to do. We know how to do it correctly, right from the start. The challenge before the conference committee is to take this opportunity to do it right. The recommendations in this letter can help you enact the best approach to the development of a sound structure for the development of national tests.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sandra Feldman".

Sandra Feldman, President
American Federation of Teachers

SF/jf
opeiu#2aflcio



THE
BUSINESS
ROUNDTABLE

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Caterpillar

Cochairmen

Ralph S. Larsen
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Samuel L. Maury
President

Patricia Hanahan Engman
Executive Director

October 7, 1997

HAND DELIVERED

The Honorable Christopher S. Bond
United States Senate
267 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Bond:

On behalf of The Business Roundtable, I urge you to support the Senate provisions on national tests, offered by Senator Dan Coats, in your deliberations during the Conference on the FY '98 Labor/HHS/Education appropriations bill.

My company does business in every state in the union and 70 countries worldwide. Voluntary national tests make sense because they will let parents know how their own children measure up against national and international performance benchmarks in reading and math. In our global economy where employers are competing on a worldwide basis, the basic skills needed to be successful are not unique to just Delaware or California. Local communities will determine what's needed to help students achieve higher academic performance and that may vary from place to place. However, we must not shortchange students by lowering our expectations based on where they reside.

The Senate provisions give full responsibility for policy oversight and direction to an independent organization — the National Assessment Governing Board. This ensures that the national tests would be free from undue influence by the U.S. Department of Education.

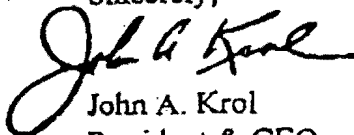
No one in business believes that testing alone will improve our schools. But you can't get what you haven't measured. Good tests that are comparable across geographic boundaries are prerequisites to the local actions needed to make dramatic improvements in our schools.

October 7, 1997

Page 2

It is in the national interest for Congress to enable parents to know how their own children's test scores measure up to expectations in other communities, states or countries. The Business Roundtable strongly supports the Senate provisions that ensure the independence that these national tests need to be a respected long-term barometer of student achievement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "John A. Krol". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" being the most prominent part.

John A. Krol
President & CEO
DuPont Company
Chairman, Education Task Force
The Business Roundtable



1776 I Street, NW, Suite 890
Washington, DC 20006
(202) 452-8200

Below are excerpts from a September 8, 1997 memorandum sent by William J. Bennett to select United States Senators.

As you know, I have been (in principle) a strong supporter of voluntary national testing. However, I have real concerns about the specifics of the current Clinton proposal -- which, in my opinion, would do more harm than having no test at all. Let me state in the strongest possible terms that the current National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) proposal made by the White House is inadequate to prevent mischief in these tests and the Congress should not delay in fixing it. Waiting until 1998 and the "regular" National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reauthorization cycle will allow seriously flawed national tests to go forward without needed correction from a strengthened NAGB.

It is my strong impression that the Administration is willing to go quite a distance this week to accommodate a Congressional initiative concerning "governance" of the testing program. Indeed, I am told that the White House is awaiting a counter-proposal from Republicans and reform-minded Democrats. *Now is the time to make a solid counter-proposal* (it is also a chance to strengthen NAGB's independence vis-à-vis NAEP itself).

Where does the situation now stand? Apparently the Senate leadership has already agreed to accept an amendment from Senator Harkin which is, from my perspective, quite problematic (the Harkin amendment is simply the Administration's flawed proposal). If this agreement has, in fact, been irrevocably made, it seems to me that the best course of action is that in the forthcoming Senate-House conference committee, Republicans and reform-minded Democrats should insist that these important changes be made:

1. Give NAGB "policy direction" or "policy control" of all aspects of both NAEP and the national tests, not just policy guidance. Otherwise the Department of Education remains in control.
2. Give NAGB explicit authority to review and change the national test specifications, development contract and advisory committees that have already been launched by the Education Department. Otherwise, the bad decisions already made, and the contracts already awarded, will stay in place.

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3. Charge NAGB with ensuring that the content and standards of national tests be the same as NAEP's and that the tests be "linked" to NAEP. Otherwise the public will not know whether the test results mean the same thing as NAEP results.

4. Make several key changes in the composition of NAGB itself so that it has greater bipartisanship and independence. (At present, just two of its 25 members need to be from the party out of power. Given the huge responsibility of national testing, and the need for bipartisan consensus, the current imbalance is simply wrong.)

5. Restore NAGB's pre-1994 authority to function as its own nominating committee, i.e. constraining the Secretary's appointees to people vetted by NAGB itself. (And perhaps stipulate that NAGB must consider candidates suggested by chairmen of the pertinent Congressional committees.) Otherwise, the Secretary will have a free hand to select whomever he wants -- as he does now.

6. Restore NAGB terms to 4 years (as was the case until 1994), with re-appointment permitted. (Today they last 3 years, which is a problem because it takes new members 1-2 years to get up to speed.)

Those are the essential statutory provisions.

Hudson Institute

Statement by Chester E. Finn, Jr.,
John M. Olin Fellow, Hudson Institute

September 10, 1997

Washington Office

If there are to be national tests, the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) is the right body to be in charge of them. I served on NAGB from 1988 until 1996 and had the honor of chairing it for the first two of those years. I know it well. It's a hard-working, conscientious and sturdy bunch that isn't easily cowed. But it has some shortcomings that are a problem even without adding responsibility for something as sensitive as national testing. And the Administration's proposal to assign NAGB the task of "formulat[ing] policy guidelines" for national testing has inadequacies as well.

I will supply a little background, then itemize those two sets of shortcomings (all of which Congress could easily rectify).

Background

- Before 1988, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) had no independent policy-making body. The Education Department's NAEP contractor (ETS then as now) appointed its own "assessment policy committee", which meant the contractor controlled the "policy" group and was in turn controlled by the Department.
- A blue-ribbon panel chaired by then-Governor Lamar Alexander (and including Hillary Rodham Clinton) recommended in 1987 that this arrangement be changed and an independent governing board be created to make policy for NAEP. The Reagan administration drafted a bill and the Democratic Congress enacted it in 1988. The Secretary of Education made the initial appointments but thereafter the Board was "semi-self-perpetuating", i.e. it served as its own nominating committee, giving the Secretary a slate of (at least 3) candidates for each opening; he could reject that slate and ask for another but he could not appoint anyone unless they were nominated by the Board itself. Terms were four years and could be renewed.
- Though ultimate control was divided between NAGB and the Department's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), NAGB had considerable authority and did not hesitate to assert it. By far the most controversial thing the Board did in its early years was develop "achievement levels" (AKA standards) by which to report NAEP results: the 3 now-well-known markers called "basic", "proficient" and "advanced". (It's those standards that President Clinton proposes to use for the national tests.

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But the administration plans to use "basic" as a satisfactory standard, whereas NAGB said "proficient" is what all kids should attain.)

NAGB Weaknesses

To punish NAGB for asserting itself as it had done, curb its independence, and give the Department more control of NAEP in the future, the House of Representatives moved in 1994 to turn NAGB into a powerless advisory committee. The Senate resisted and a compromise was reached. But NAGB was still weakened in that year's I.A.S.A. legislation:

- additional "testing experts" were added to its membership, thus reducing the influence of members of the public and adding to the board the very people who are normally hired as staff and consultants;
- nominating authority was taken away, meaning that the Secretary could now appoint anyone. (Secretary Riley, himself a onetime NAGB member, has continued to invite the Board to suggest names as vacancies arose, and has taken many--though not all--of them, but there is no reason to assume that a future Secretary would do this.)
- board terms were shortened to 3 years (a problem considering that it typically takes at least a year for new members to "get up to speed" on complex NAEP issues); and
- important NAGB powers (involving the assessment design and reporting of results) were taken away and given to the Department.

Aside from its 1994 weakening, NAGB has inherent problems that are magnified when it's asked to take on something as volatile as national testing:

- under its current composition, as few as 2 of its 25 members (one governor, one legislator) could be from the party that doesn't occupy the White House. Thus it cannot truly be called a bipartisan board in any meaningful sense;
- its current composition assigns 16 slots to professional educators and other members of what some call the "education establishment" and just 9 to representatives of the "general public" such as elected officials and parents;
- in key areas, authority is blurred between NAGB and the Education Department, such that NAGB decisions may be ignored or reversed by Department officials. It's also important to note that the Department, not NAGB, writes the contracts with ETS and other organizations that actually conduct the assessment, which means those contractors view the Department, not NAGB, as their boss. With its authority so diluted and compromised, NAGB is not really an independent agency;

- the Department has other advisory committees (such as the Advisory Committee on Education Statistics) that it periodically invites to second-guess NAGB; ETS appoints still more advisory committees and expert panels that do much the same thing; and the Congress has had a propensity to assign "evaluations" of NAEP to the National Academy of Education and/or National Academy of Sciences that also have the effect of second-guessing and undermining while diverting resources and energy.

Problems in the Administration's Proposal

Even if NAGB had all the authority it needed with respect to NAEP, the Administration's proposal to assign the board partial responsibility for the new national tests is flawed in important particulars:

- The amendment drafted by the Administration invites NAGB to "formulate policy guidelines" for the tests, but does not give the board clear policy control. Given current language the Education Department would remain in charge of the tests themselves.
- The amendment does not empower NAGB to review and, as needed, rewrite the "test specifications" already drafted for the national tests, or to review and alter the large test development contract already awarded by the Education Department. (Many who have reviewed those specifications have serious reservations about them and they differ in important particulars from the NAEP assessments.)
- The amendment does not state that NAGB is expected to ensure that the standards used for the national tests will be the same as those used for reporting NAEP results. (The draft specifications indicate that the "basic" standard will be deemed "passing" rather than the "proficient" standard.)
- The amendment does not empower NAGB to decide whether the national tests will be given in languages other than English. (The draft specifications assume that the 8th grade math test will also be given in Spanish.)

Throw These Tests Out of School

By CHESTER E. FINN JR.

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

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

All the Stops

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

The reason the testing plan is now one of the hotter issues in Washington is not, alas, because Republicans in Congress took the lead but because outside opposition finally surfaced. On the left, groups such as FairTest (which has never seen a test it deems fair) and the Congressional

Black Caucus are opposed on grounds that test scores may harm minorities and more dollars should instead be pumped into school programs. Conservative groups, such as the Christian Coalition and Concerned Women for America, protest this new federal intrusion into education. One influential congressman, Rep. Bill Goodling (R., Pa.), himself a former school superintendent, opposes national testing in principle. In his view, more tests wouldn't tell us anything we don't already know about what's wrong with U.S. schools, and comparisons among schools are invidious.

Many fellow Republicans think Mr.

The Clinton administration has mangled a promising idea to the point that the GOP Congress should either make major repairs or scrap it altogether.

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

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

This subversion of national testing re-

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

Once the plan encountered opposition,

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

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

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

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

Bad Advice

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

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

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



In Brief...

August 26, 1997

National Tests: A Good Idea Going Wrong

By Diane Ravitch

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

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

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

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

This opinion piece was published in The Washington Post on August 26, 1997 and written by Diane Ravitch, nonresident senior fellow in the Brookings Economic Studies program.

The views expressed in this piece are those of the author and should not be ascribed to the trustees, officers, or other staff members of the Brookings Institution.

For More Information: Office of Public Affairs 202/797-6105

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

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

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

able to impose new programs unilaterally.

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

Worse, the administration is establishing a dangerous precedent. If the party in power gets to control the national test, to pick the contractor without an open competition, to select the committees that will write the tests and to control the reporting of the results, imagine what will happen when the other party comes to power. The next Republican secretary of education (Lynne Cheney? Phyllis Schlafly?) will revise the national tests, choose congenial experts to write the reading and math tests, and make the

changes that seem right to the party in power. And all of this can happen without congressional authorization, because the Clinton administration demonstrated that it was not necessary!

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

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

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



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STATEMENT BY DIANE RAVITCH

SENIOR FELLOW, BROOKINGS INSTITUTIONS

September 10, 1997

I support the President's plan to allow schools, districts and states to give a national test of fourth grade reading and eighth grade mathematics. Good information is the beginning of good policy. Parents, educators, and policymakers will benefit by having valid measures of student performance.

Critics say that there are already too many tests, and they are right. Unfortunately, most of the tests now in use establish what are called norms, but they don't reveal whether the norm is good enough or too low. Usually, the "norm" is just an average score. That is not a standard. A standard represents what students should know. The new national tests should incorporate meaningful standards; they should provide real benchmarks based on what students should know and be able to do in 4th and 8th grades.

I applaud the President's decision to turn management of the new tests over to the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB). Having taken this step, however, it is important to strengthen NAGB and make it far more independent from political control and far more bipartisan than it now is.

NAGB was designed to manage the relatively non-controversial National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP). It has served this function exceptionally well. But the advent of national testing for individual students creates a level of responsibility for which the current NAGB was not designed. The current NAGB is not sufficiently bipartisan: Only two of 25 members must be chosen from the party out of power. The current NAGB is not sufficiently independent from political appointees; its independence was substantially curtailed by Congress in 1994.

The President's plan for national testing requires the oversight of a truly bipartisan, authentically independent board that can command the trust and respect of its fellow citizens. It must not be an instrument of the party in power. The board that is responsible for the national tests must represent the public interest, not the interest of any administration or party.

Congress and the President must agree to reconstitute NAGB so that the public can feel confidence in its judgments and can be assured that the content and the standards of the national tests will not be affected by the election returns.

Congress should not wait until 1998 to reauthorize NAGB. If the board's responsibilities are to expand now to include supervision of the national tests, then it should be reconstituted now to secure its independence, its stature, and its bipartisanship.



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BACKGROUND DATA ON DIANE RAVITCH

Diane Ravitch is a Senior Research Scholar at New York University and Nonresident Senior Fellow in the Economic Studies program at Brookings. Ravitch, a distinguished educator and historian, is one of the nation's leading experts on American education.

Prior to joining Brookings, Ravitch was the Assistant Secretary for Educational Research and Improvement and Counselor to the Secretary at the U.S. Department of Education. She has authored numerous books on American education, including *National Standards in American Education: A Citizen's Guide*; *What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know?*, written with Chester E. Finn Jr.; *The Schools We Deserve*; *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945-1980*; *The Revisionists Revised*; and *The Great School Wars: New York City, 1805-1973*.

In 1989, she became an advisor to Teachers Solidarity and the Ministry of Education in Poland. She has lectured in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and the former Soviet Union, Japan, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Germany, Nicaragua, and throughout the United States. She was chair of the Educational Excellence Network in Washington, chair of the American Federation of Teachers' Education for Democracy Project, and co-chair of the National Academy of Education's Task Force on the Future of Educational Research Priorities.

Ravitch is a member of PEN International, an honorary life trustee of the New York Public Library, and a former Guggenheim Fellow. She was elected to membership in the National Academy of Education (1979), the Society of American Historians (1984), and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (1985). She was selected as a Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar in 1984-85, the first person to be chosen from the field of educational studies. She was awarded the Henry Allen Moe prize in the humanities by the American Philosophical Society in 1986, and a medal of distinction from the Polish government in 1991. For her work on the California K-12 history-science curriculum, she was made an honorary citizen of California by the Rules Committee of the State Senate. She was honored as a Literary Lion by the New York Public Library. She also received an honorary degree, Doctor of Humane Letters, from Williams College, Reed College, Amherst College, the State University of New York, Ramapo College, and St. Joseph's College of New York.

A native of Houston, Ravitch received a B.A. from Wellesley College in 1960 and earned a Ph.D. in history from Columbia University in 1975.

(June 1997)

The Washington Post

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

Get On With Student Testing

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

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

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

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

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

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



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SANDRA FELDMAN
PRESIDENT

EDWARD J. MCELROY
SECRETARY-TREASURER

September 30, 1997

Conferees on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Conferee:

The American Federation of Teachers supports the development of national tests that provide students, parents and educators with valid, reliable information about individual students' achievement in reading and mathematics. As part of our push for higher academic standards, our organization began discussing the merits of national testing as early as 1990 under the leadership of Albert Shanker. We found overwhelming support on the side of national testing, both as a matter of stimulating higher student achievement overall and raising the traditionally lower standards to which our neediest students are held. AFT members' daily experiences with students and schools make them astute judges of the effectiveness of various education reform proposals, and AFT members overwhelmingly support national testing. In fact, support for national testing has been official AFT policy since 1992. AFT members' views are consistent with the overwhelming majority of American parents and citizens, across racial and other lines, all in support of national testing. The case for national testing -- and the AFT's support of it -- is more solid than ever.

I strongly urge you to reject the prohibition against voluntary national testing included in the House-passed Education Appropriations Bill and to make the provision on national testing embodied in the Senate version of the Education Appropriations Bill your starting point. The task before us should not be to debate whether states and school districts should be able to choose to participate in national testing. Rather, the task should be to ensure that the national tests meet the most rigorous standards and provide trustworthy and useful information to parents, students, educators and citizens so that, together, we can continue to go about the crucial task of improving American education.

We believe that the Senate-passed testing proposal takes a major step toward that end by establishing a firm relationship between the proposed national tests and the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB). Ensuring that the tests meet the most rigorous standards and provide accurate, reliable information to students, parents, educators and the American public, however, requires bolstering, not diminishing, NAGB's capacity. To this end, we urge some improvements in the Senate proposal.

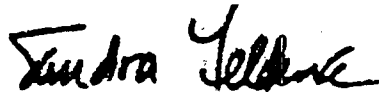
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The Senate amendment removes four seats from NAGB: two technical experts and two curriculum specialists would be eliminated. This would be a serious mistake given that NAGB is currently responsible for national and state-by-state NAEP, as it presently is, in conjunction with the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). To remove those seats while granting NAGB absolute authority over the complex technical and curricular issues involved in individual-level student testing and reporting would be a serious mistake. Given the additional responsibilities assigned to NAGB, we strongly urge restoring the two technical and two curriculum specialist seats to the Board. We also urge you to increase that number.

Depriving NAGB of the expertise it needs to make sound decisions while concurrently vesting it with exclusive control over every aspect of national testing would deprive NAGB of the checks and balances it needs to do its job properly and to command public and professional credibility. A good solution to this problem is contained in the Senate Report to accompany S.1061, which directs the Department of Education to contract with the National Academy of Sciences to conduct a study and report on the voluntary national testing initiative, including "the technical quality of the work performed under the test development contracts, the frameworks and test content, the adequacy of field tests, the reliability of the data produced by the field tests, and the degree in which the tests can be expected to provide valid and useful information to the public." If the conferees were to specify that this study be done at the same time as NAGB's work, we would have the checks and balance that would assure NAGB, the American public and America's students of the quality of NAGB's work on national testing.

I conclude as I began: with an unequivocally strong endorsement of the national testing initiative. It is the right thing to do, and it is what the American public wants us to do. We know how to do it correctly, right from the start. The challenge before the conference committee is to take this opportunity to do it right. The recommendations in this letter can help you enact the best approach to the development of a sound structure for the development of national tests.

Sincerely,



Sandra Feldman, President
American Federation of Teachers

SF/jf
opeiu#2aficio



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
RALEIGH 27603-8001

September 9, 1997

JAMES B. HUNT JR.
GOVERNOR

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Your Voluntary National Tests in Reading and Mathematics proposal is an excellent strategy to help build strong schools with clear standards of achievement that are essential to our children and society. Following your address to the North Carolina General Assembly in which you outlined your testing proposal, the North Carolina State Board of Education passed a resolution acknowledging our participation, and I have enclosed a copy for your information.

I am proud of the progress made in reading and mathematics by North Carolina's students and others like them throughout the states, but we are not yet where America needs to be. Parents need to know that students have mastered the basics regardless of where they reside in this country, and they have a right to know how well their children are doing compared with other students across the nation and in other countries. The National Voluntary Tests in Reading and Mathematics will serve this purpose, and I commend you for taking such a bold step to improve the quality of education for all children in America.

The State Board of Education and I look forward to working with you on this important initiative, and I am confident that our students here in North Carolina and all across this country will benefit greatly as a result of your strong leadership.

My warmest personal regards.

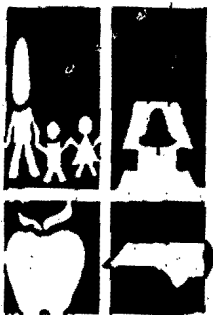
Sincerely,



James B. Hunt Jr.

JBH:ma

Enclosure



Public Schools of North Carolina

State Board of Education

301 N. Wilmington Street
Raleigh, North Carolina 27601-2825

RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF VOLUNTARY NATIONAL TESTS

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Chairman
Wilmington

Presell R. Robinson
Vice Chairman
Raleigh

Kenneth A. Harris
Chairman Emeritus
Charlotte

Barbara M. Tapscott
Chairman Emeritus
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Evelyn B. Monroe
Pinhurst

Lowell Thomas
Blowing Rock

Robert R. Douglas
Asheville

Jane P. Norwood
Charlotte

Eddie Davis, III
Durham

WHEREAS, the State Board of Education supports high standards for student performance, particularly in basic subjects; and

WHEREAS, the State Board of Education believes that one way to monitor the achievement of high standards is to compare the performance of North Carolina's students with the performance of students in other States and other countries; and

WHEREAS, one of the ways to measure the achievement of high standards is to use high quality tests; and

WHEREAS, the President recently came to North Carolina and proposed a voluntary national testing program which includes an annual reading test at grade 4 and an annual math test at grade 8; and

WHEREAS, such national tests will provide parents and other members of the public with important information about the performance of their public schools; and

WHEREAS, such a national testing program has the potential for providing state-by-state comparisons which are more accurate than certain other tests which are often used inappropriately for this purpose; now

THEREFORE, the North Carolina State Board of Education expresses its desire to have North Carolina public schools participate in a fair, reasonable and challenging system of national tests, pending the availability of funds necessary for such an activity.


Chairman of the State Board
of Education

5/2/97
Date

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

COALITION FOR DEVELOPMENT OF VOLUNTARY NATIONAL TESTS

August 27, 1997

Members of the United States House of Representatives

Dear Representative:

**Subject: Support for funds in the FY 1998 Education Appropriations (H.R. 2264)
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 (H.R. 2264) 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.

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The House 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.

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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 House of Representatives 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 Chief State School Officers
Council of Great City Schools
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Education Association
National School Boards Association

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

April 2, 1997

More than two hundred of America's technology industry leaders have joined today in a bipartisan call for national education standards – not federal government standards, but national standards. These should represent what all our students must know to succeed in the new knowledge economy of the 21st century. Every state and school must shape the curriculum to reflect these standards, and train teachers to lift students up to them.

To help schools meet the standards and measure their progress, we need an effort over the next two years to develop national tests of student achievement in reading and math. 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. The states have responsibility for setting challenging academic standards and for measuring student progress toward these standards. President Clinton's national testing initiative offers a new opportunity to use widely accepted national benchmarks in reading and math against which states, schools districts and parents can judge student performance.

Raising standards will not be easy, and some of our children will not be able to meet them at first. The point is not to put our children down, but to lift them up. Good tests will show us who needs help, what changes in teaching to make, and which schools need to improve. They can help us to end social promotion. For no child should move from grade school to junior high, or junior high to high school until he or she is ready.

Jim Barksdale
CEO & President
Netscape Communications

L. John Doerr
Partner
Kleiner, Perkins, Caufield & Byers

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

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Paul Allaire	CEO	Xerox
Joseph Ambrosio	General Partner	Pirene Partners
Dr. Gilbert Amelio	CEO, Chairman	Apple Computer
Marc Andreessen	Co-Founder, Vice President of Technology	Netscape Communications
Vincente Anido, Jr.	President and CEO	Combichem, Inc.
Sherry Annes	VP, Investor Relations & Corporate Communications	Arris Pharmaceuticals
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Howard Asher	President & CEO	Advanced Bioreserach Associates
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Theodore Roth	Executive Vice President	Alliance Pharmaceuticals
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Larry Samuels	CEO	Electronic Communities
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W. J. Sanders	Chairman & CEO	Advanced Micro Devices, Inc.
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Fernand Sarrat	CEO	Cylink

Mark Saul	CEO	IChat
Eric Schmidt	CEO	Novell
Stratton Solavos	President & CEO	VertSign
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John Seidl	President & CEO	CellNet Data Systems
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Jo Ann Weiss	CEO	Academic Systems
Steven Westly	Vice President, Business Development	WhoWhere
Don Wexler	CEO	Automated Test Engineering, Inc.
Thad Whalen	Partner	Aspen Ventures
Randall Whitfield	President & CEO	VIA Medical Corp.
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Curtis Wozniak	CEO	Electroglas, Inc.
Pardner Wynn	President & Founder	Stanford Testing Systems, Inc.
Gerald J. Yakaran	President & CEO	IriSys R&D
John Young	Retired, CEO	Hewlett Packard

SEP. 17, 1997 10:16AM OFFICE OF SECRETARY
UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



NEWS

FOR RELEASE
September 16, 1997

Contact: Erica Lepping, 401-2571
Melinda Malico, 401-1008

STATEMENT BY U. S. SECRETARY OF EDUCATION RICHARD W. RILEY
On the U. S. House of Representatives' action on voluntary national tests

I regret that the U. S. House of Representatives has voted to halt funding for voluntary national tests. It was a vote against empowering parents and teachers with the information they need to prepare students for success in the 21st century.

Voluntary national tests in 4th-grade reading and 8th-grade math would help American students to master the basics once and for all. They would measure student performance against national and even international standards of excellence, giving teachers an important new tool for raising achievement and giving parents a reliable way to know how well their children are doing in school.

The House action would undermine accountability and deny states and school districts the right to decide for themselves about these tests. Already, states and districts that serve 20 percent of the nation's children have chosen to offer the tests. The House of Representatives would forbid them from doing so.

The House's decision today stands in sharp contrast to the overwhelming 87-13 vote in the U. S. Senate last week to allow the tests to proceed. The Senate approved a plan to have an independent, bipartisan board--the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB)-- develop and oversee the tests. I have supported that bipartisan plan. But the House of Representatives did not vote today on NAGB. I urge conferees to join together behind this bipartisan approach and give America's children the chance to reach for high standards of learning.

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September 16, 1997

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

Message Creation Date was at 17-SEP-1997 08:26:00

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release September 16, 1997

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

I am disappointed that the House of Representatives voted tonight to block my proposal for voluntary national tests in the basic skills. These tests will help raise expectations for our students, provide clear standards of achievement in 4th grade reading and 8th grade math, and give parents the tools they need to measure the progress their children are making. They will help our students learn and our schools continue to improve.

Yet the House of Representatives tonight cast a vote for the status quo and against better schools. The same old forces that have resisted education reform over the past decade came together to defeat high national standards in the basics. They have voted against a plan to improve our schools by raising standards, empowering parents and increasing accountability.

The House vote is unacceptable, and it will not stand. Last week, by a bipartisan vote of 87-13, the Senate endorsed my plan for voluntary national tests to help students master the basics, and embraced my proposal to place them under the control of the independent, bipartisan National Assessment Governing Board. My Administration will work hard to make sure that the final legislation reflects the bipartisan support of the Senate and the broad support of the American people.

-30-30-30-



To comment on this service: feedback@www.whitehouse.gov

**UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION****NEWS**

FOR RELEASE
September 25, 1997

Contact: Melinda Kitchell Malico
(202) 401-1008

**STATEMENT BY U.S. SECRETARY OF EDUCATION RICHARD W. RILEY
on voluntary national test specifications**

The Council of Chief State School Officers and the panel it established have concluded work on recommendations for specifications for national tests in the basic skills of reading and math. I thank them for their hard work on this very important effort.

The Administration has proposed that the independent bipartisan National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) be in charge of the tests and I am pleased that the Senate voted by a large bipartisan majority to adopt our proposal. I hope and expect that this provision will soon be enacted into law when Congress completes work on the appropriations bill and sends the President a bill he can sign. At that point, NAGB will assume full responsibility for overseeing the development of the voluntary national tests.

NAGB already oversees the widely used and respected National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The NAEP frameworks were developed through a broad national consensus process and 43 states participate in the NAEP tests. The voluntary national tests will be based on the NAEP content and performance standards and must be fully consistent with NAEP. The voluntary national tests can be thought of as individualized versions of NAEP that, unlike NAEP, will for the first time provide parents, teachers and students with information about how well individual students are doing compared to national standards. It is important that Congress act expeditiously to ensure NAGB's role in overseeing these tests.

Because of its role in overseeing NAEP, NAGB is best suited to ensure comparability between the voluntary national tests and NAEP tests. One issue that NAGB will need to address is the National Test Panel's recommendation that students be permitted to use calculators for the entire eighth-grade mathematics test. NAEP permits calculators to be used on just over a quarter of the exam. In my view, a test of eighth-grade students should measure, as NAEP does, whether students have learned how to do arithmetic accurately without a calculator. But a visit to any good eighth-grade classroom will show students who have moved beyond arithmetic to more advanced topics -- and are using calculators to do work in algebra and geometry, such as finding square roots, exponents and other rigorous work. That is why a test of eighth-grade students should also measure, as NAEP does, whether students can do advanced mathematics using calculators as a tool.

In order to ensure that test development does not proceed before NAGB assumes its new role, I will not forward the test panel's recommended specifications to the test contractor at this time. When NAGB assumes its new role, I will urge them to take the steps necessary to ensure that the specifications for the national tests are fully consistent with those for NAEP. NAGB will be responsible for the final specifications that will guide the selection of test items. The contractor will discontinue development of test items until NAGB has approved test specifications.

###

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 4, 1997

Contact: Johanna Schneider
(202) 872-1260

STATEMENT ON VOLUNTARY NATIONAL TESTING
BY JOHN A. KROL, PRESIDENT AND CEO, DUPONT COMPANY AND
CHAIRMAN OF THE BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE
EDUCATION TASK FORCE

Washington, DC--In 1989, over 200 member companies in The Business Roundtable made a ten-year commitment to a state-by-state initiative to improve our K-12 education system. Over the course of the decade, states have made great strides in raising standards, assessing student performance on challenging tests and reforming state policies that affect student learning. However, a critical piece of information has been missing for parents -- how their own children measure up against national and international performance benchmarks. This was recognized by President Bush in his call for voluntary national testing.

New national tests that provide a national benchmark in fourth-grade reading and an international benchmark in eighth-grade mathematics for individual students could be in place by 1999. These national tests also could be killed by concerns about testing, governance struggles and partisan differences. There are important issues to be resolved but none are insurmountable. **In my own view, a national test must be free from even the appearance of partisan politics so that it can be a long-term barometer for student achievement. For this reason, the tests need independent oversight by a group outside the U.S. Department of Education, as recently agreed to by the Administration in response to concerns raised by Republicans. I urge the Administration and Congress to quickly work out any remaining differences that impede bipartisan support for voluntary national tests.**

No one in business believes that testing alone will improve our schools. But you also don't get what you don't measure. Successful companies continually assess performance -- both their own and their competitors. However, we don't do this just to record the data and file it away. We measure our strengths and weaknesses to make better-informed decisions and change direction if necessary.

Students already take a lot of tests. But parents often do not know whether their children are learning what they need to know to succeed or whether their children's test scores measure up to expectations in other communities, states or countries.

Good tests that are comparable across geographic boundaries are prerequisites to the actions needed to make dramatic improvements in our schools. Some schools obviously will need more help than others. What's needed to help students achieve higher academic performance will vary from place to place, but we must not shortchange students by lowering the standards based on where they reside.

States are beginning to set higher standards. I am particularly proud of DuPont's role in partnership with teachers to develop Delaware's science standards. Other states are equally proud of their own standards. But I also believe that Delaware needs an external measure to independently verify that we are indeed holding our students to a world class standard. That's the power of a national test that reports individual student scores.

The national test proposal endorsed by President Clinton has three compelling features that merit bipartisan support from Republicans and Democrats in Congress and the nation's Governors:

- First of all, it is voluntary. No state or district will be required to administer the tests. No federal strings will mandate use of the tests. **Local control will be maintained.**
- Second, two highly-regarded existing tests, now only given to a sample of students to measure state and national student achievement, will be adapted so that individual student scores can be reported. For the first time, parents and educators would know how their own children and students perform on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade mathematics. In math, there is an added advantage. The test would also be adapted from the math portion of the Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS) so that an individual American child's performance could be compared to children in 40 other countries. Results from tests given to a sample of students are too easy to dismiss as about someone else's kids. Individual student scores on these challenging tests will bring the message home.
- And third, the testing is limited to two basic subjects, reading and mathematics, at two critical junctures in a child's education, fourth grade and eighth grade. Of course, since people vehemently disagree on the best methods for teaching reading and math, the tests should be clear about the performance expected and leave it to local educators and parents to choose the methods they believe will best produce the desired results.

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.

As a parent and grandparent, I believe we owe our children the kind of K-12 education that allows them to be successful in today's fast-paced world. Parents should be confident that their children are graduating from high school with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed at college or to obtain a good job.

Our schools serve many purposes, not the least of which is to instill the principles of citizenship in a democratic society. Education also prepares young people to succeed when they finish compulsory schooling to pursue further education and work. For business, improving the

education system's performance is more than a matter of good works; in our highly competitive global economy, it is a business necessity.

The Business Roundtable is an association of more than 200 chief executive officers 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.

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Council of the Great City Schools

1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. ♦ Suite 702 ♦ Washington, D.C. ♦ 20004

FOR RELEASE

July 25, 1997 (Embargoed)

CONTACT: Henry Duvall

(202) 393-2427

Major Urban School Systems Step Up to Clinton's Voluntary National Tests

WASHINGTON, July 25—Many of the nation's largest urban public school systems indicated their intent today to participate in President Clinton's voluntary national tests for 4th grade reading and 8th grade math, setting the pace to raise standards and performance in schools everywhere.

President Clinton—before superintendents, school board members and teacher organization heads from 15 major urban school districts across the country—announced the likely participation of the districts in his testing initiative unveiled during his State of the Union address in February.

The willingness of these districts to participate in the Spring 1999 national testing signaled an important commitment by the nation's major urban public schools to the highest academic standards and to assessing their progress on them. "Urban public schools are driving their own improvement and reform at a pace that should encourage the American public," said Michael Casserly, Executive Director of the Council of the Great City Schools, a coalition of the nation's largest urban school systems, which assisted in organizing today's event for participating districts.

"Let our presence here today dispel any notion that urban educators are committed to anything but high performance and quality schooling for children in our inner cities," stressed Casserly.

City school systems everywhere are making major efforts to raise standards and improve performance. This year many urban school districts saw test scores increase; for example, in New York City, Houston, Chicago, and San Francisco—all the result of higher standards and greater focus on student achievement. In addition, the public is beginning to show greater confidence in these school systems by passing a large number of construction bonds and increased operating levies (e.g., Cleveland, Minneapolis, Oakland, Las Vegas, Los Angeles).

(more)

Many Great City Schools across the nation are becoming centers of innovation, collaboration and effort—despite the many challenges they face and the distance they still need to travel. Atlanta's *Teaching All Children to Read* program is a unique partnership of the Atlanta Public Schools and Georgia State University to boost reading achievement. Houston's *MOVE IT MATH* program is an innovative effort in grades K-6 to introduce algebra in the early grades. Chicago has moved aggressively on a number of fronts, including a collaboration—*Teacher for Chicago*—of nine colleges and universities in the metropolitan area to recruit, train and retain high quality teachers.

The New York City Schools are pursuing a relentless campaign to reduce school size and boost academic standards of students. The Philadelphia School District is pursuing one of the most ambitious systemic reform programs in the nation, *Children Achieving*. And El Paso's *Focus on First Graders* program works to build academic success for early grade students coming from low-income families.

The urban school districts assembled here today with the President collectively enroll some half-million 4th and 8th grade students, 20% of whom are limited English proficient and 66% free and reduced price lunch eligible—rates over twice the national averages.

"Attaining the standards measured by the yet-to-be developed tests, however, will require a substantial commitment by the American public to urban children," added Casserly. "Our urban children deserve the same opportunities for a bright future as any other child, no matter where they live in this nation."

"America needs to invest in urban public education—the federal government, states, parents, and business," noted Casserly.

Following the announcement with President Clinton, the urban school leaders met with senior Administration officials to review draft features of the tests and to discuss issues about test implementation and use.

Participating in today's event were school leaders from New York City, El Paso, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Antonio, Philadelphia, Fresno, Omaha, Atlanta, Cincinnati, Broward County (Ft. Lauderdale), Houston, Long Beach, Seattle and Detroit.

The Council of the Great City Schools is a coalition of some 50 of the nation's largest urban public school systems working to improve the quality of public education in the nation's major cities.

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