

**A 2014 Joint NEA/VIVA survey of 945 educators shows a landslide of opinion against extreme and exorbitant standardized testing, as well as the evaluation of teachers based on student test scores.** The NEA tasked a small group, including myself, to summarize survey results, research relevant data and communicate with our communities. The NEA survey shows we are facing an exodus of fine teachers, the beginnings of a student drop-out trend, school-wide stress and apathy, and a major loss of time and money due to a testing program run amok.

Testing expenses have consumed electives and extra-curriculum such as art, music and clubs that build on student strengths, instead of hammering away at their weaknesses. The 945 survey respondents advocate a broader, deeper, more holistic approach beyond today's narrow focus on only English and math. These educators also find the current top-down approach frustrating and demeaning, since they have no say in policy formation, even though they and their students live with policy consequences every day. Students, parents and teachers want their voices heard!

**While researching these teachers' concerns with NCLB and RTTT standardized testing, this is what I learned:**

- Way too long - seven hours for a third-grader - twice as long as an adult's college exam, ASVAB or SAT. In practice high school students need 10 ½ hours for the final exam.
- Time tables don't include set-up, moving to the lab, registering individuals on the computer, taking attendance or breaks.
- Extensive set-up – a 60 item checklist for preparing for SBAC, similar for PARCC. Wisconsin estimates districts average 976 hours on test taking and preparation (Fairtest 2012), taking staff away from other duties.
- Requires complex scheduling. 120 minute intervals are recommended, yet students can't take breaks longer than 20 minutes without needing to reregister and reboot.
- Exhausting - students take about 48 hours of standardized tests annually (one or two interim tests monthly, plus tests to practice computer skills, plus a final test - in both math and English). That does not include chapter or concept tests designed by teachers.
- Demoralizing - ELL and disabled students are tested on algebra and literary analysis, albeit with calculators, dictionaries and Computer Adaptive Technology.
- Knowing in advance they will fail, most students are discouraged. Since RTT some schools' scores rose, while others plummeted (Oregonlive 2014 test scores stagnate).
- As much a test of computer skills as knowledge - only 84% (US Census) have access to home computers to practice typing on a keyboard, highlighting with a mouse, etc.
- Inevitably focuses instruction on teaching to tests, due to high stakes for both teachers and students regarding grades, graduation, teacher evaluations and school funding.
- Shortens instructional time – a minimum of 48 hours of standardized testing translates to a loss of at least eight school days, not including hours devoted only to test prep.
- Disruptive, taking over the whole school from March to May, filling buildings with substitutes, diminishing instruction, and hijacking libraries and computer labs.
- To help set-up or proctor, even non-English and non-math teachers must give up time normally devoted to planning or helping students one-on-one.
- Creates a pointless frenzy for data, leading to no measurable improvement.
- Uninformative - results are returned after the school year, primarily to show schools' Annual Yearly Progress in test scores, rendering it a moot point to adjust instruction to individual learners. Yet individualization was one of the promises of mega-testers.

- Way too expensive. The Brookings Institution chides PARCC and SBAC for a lack of transparency in pricing. **For 2012 tests states have spent between \$1.7 and 8.1 billion** in taxpayer funds (including administration and additional technology) (Chingos 2012, footnote #10). Race to the Top is spending \$4.35 billion, much on standardized testing. Finally, the American Federation of Teachers conservatively estimates the actual costs of implementing each test at \$400-800 per student.
- Fees and hidden fees (digital library, pre-tests and practice tests cost extra). The extra \$4.80 for teacher access to a digital library of instructional materials was in fine print buried in the middle of a test administration manual at the bottom of a page.
- Hand-scoring: An SBAC manual states: “The majority of the components were designed to be scored by humans, including teachers, although teachers will not score their own students” (K-12 Center at ETS, March 2014). Hand-scoring is a local/state responsibility (SBAC Interim Assessment Statement of Purpose).
- Reporting (states or districts must cobble together hand- and computer-scores).
- Purchasing extra computers, current operating systems (or else tests crash) and increased bandwidth (or else videos buffer).
- Substitute teachers (to set-up, proctor or take the place of proctoring teachers).

By contrast, the average cost of previous state standardized testing was \$35-50 (Oregon’s OAKS was \$13), and the NAEP or other well established tests cost less than \$100 per student. Although not perfect, those are at least proven valid, whereas SBAC and PARCC are not. This is because they are still under construction. Also, essays and fill-in-the-blank responses still require hand-scoring (accuracy varies wildly, because most graders are not English teachers and are under time pressure). Further, each state chooses which score constitutes passing: 90% of Tennessee’s 4<sup>th</sup> graders are labelled proficient according to NCLB rules, yet NAEP tests shows only 26% actually passed (Education Next, The future of NCLB, Summer 2009). NCLB simply cannot keep its promise of nationwide standardization.

Additionally, money for exorbitant testing has to come from somewhere, namely music, art, foreign languages, shop, culinary arts, civics, drama, debate or any other subject keeping kids in school. Not only are electives disappearing, but so are extra-curricular activities, like clubs, camps, foreign exchanges, student court, internships, etc. Yet it’s common knowledge that electives and extra-curricular activities become life-long vocations and avocations.

On my DC flight, the fellow beside me said he became an engineer because he heard about it in shop class. Shop also taught him precision, logic, problem-solving and critical thinking. What more could you ask of public schools? I asked if his kids had the same elective choices. The answer? No. The Center on Education Policy, reported 84% of surveyed schools had dropped electives by 2007, no doubt more with rising test costs. But considering each student spends over one thousand hours a year in school, those hours ought to be devoted to all aspects of life, not just the narrow English and math curriculum drilled by today’s extreme standardized tests.

Like many surveyed, an English teacher friend of mine decided yesterday to quit due to burnout from endless data production and standardized testing. It’s literally causing her and her students migraines. She is required to produce spreadsheets rating every student on every assignment and test with regard to every one of 4-20 different benchmarks using multiple scoring rubrics. She

and her students feel stressed at too many simultaneous variables. Further, to pass her annual evaluation this teacher is required to bundle spreadsheets into binders to present to her principal who doesn't even open them, but checks them off his list of teacher data to place on a shelf to gather dust. Pointless. **Despite this flurry of data, her students' grades are no higher than with her own creative methods, an experience consistent with national trends. The National Assessment of Education Progress, which has issued standardized tests since 1969, shows increases in test scores have flattened since NCLB and RTTT. These tests and focus on data have been proven completely ineffective, inefficient and exorbitant.**

Even worse, frenzied data production leaves no time for class projects, debates or re-enactments making classes inspiring and memorable. Students lose their motivation to read for pleasure or turn short-term into long-term memory. To top it off, endless pre-, practice and year-end tests steal weeks of instructional time, placing even more pressure on remaining hours. Teachers report over-drilled students are rebelling and want to drop out, which defeats the entire purpose of policies intended to prepare students for "career and college readiness."

Many teachers want no part in turning kids off to learning. Since RTTT began in 2009, there is 12% increase in teachers who have left, with 33% planning to quit soon (USDE fact sheet). *All* my friends, as well as many I've met because of the NEA survey, are leaving despite being the cream de la cream - with MA's, PHD's in education, teacher awards, and parent and student accolades. These teachers are brought to tears describing the destruction of creativity, variety and independent thinking that American schools have always stood for.

We've been told that tying student scores to teacher evaluation and retention will eliminate the worst. Maybe so, but what about the resulting mass exodus of the best? Also, whether worst or best, who is going to replace them? Inexperienced, undereducated and high turn-over Teach for America, produces 20% lower test scores in reading, math and language combined (Ildiko Lczko-Kerr, David C. Berliner). Note: Mathematica's study cherry picks from only 18% of TFA's workforce. Yet the USDE fact sheet shows that students with certified teachers *with low turn-over* achieve up to 50% higher test scores!

It's time for unions and administrators to cooperate in constructing teacher evaluation models that offer poorly performing teachers a chance to either better themselves or leave (NEA July 2011). Many schools rely on mentorship and group planning to train and encourage weak staff. Unfortunately, my school's successful curriculum planning groups were cut due to budget problems. Also, teacher evaluation must balance administrator opinion with teacher input. Without that balance, survey respondents report that principals harass, transfer or fire those who speak up against violence, bullying or unfair practices.

Policy makers like to compare US test scores to those of other countries, as the reason to "Race to the Top". But if you ask teachers, we'd rather compete for the lowest poverty rate or the highest family support for education. University of Oregon Presidential Chair and Director of the Institute for Global and Online Education in the College of Education, Yong Zhao says that Chinese scores are higher due to greater societal support for education. The cost, he warns, is that their students have no other life than studying and that the entire goal of the Chinese system is to produce conformity – hopefully not the goal of American democracy. Meanwhile Finland

is supposed to be our education model, although NCLB and RTTT violate all Finnish methods; Finns only issue one standardized test in a student's lifetime – the less inexpensive PISA.

Through my German exchange program, I discovered reformers mistakenly compare American students to the 1/3 of more affluent foreign students who attend college prep schools. This fails to take into account the other 2/3 of students in vocational and remedial schools - with lower socio-economic conditions, lower scores and earlier graduations (Stanford Graduate School of Education, January 2013). Yet NCLB naïvely assumes everyone can or wants to attend college, which translates to testing all students on algebraic equations and analyzing judicial briefs (SBAC and PARCC). Further, RTTT expected all students to be 100% proficient by 2014. But no amount of idealism can change an IQ or students' inherent interests and abilities, nor should it. One size does not fit all.

Likewise, the rest of the world never uses standardized tests for the handicapped and non-fluent students, because it's demoralizing, ineffective and pointlessly lowers test averages. Imagine how US test scores would rise if disabled students took only tests already designed for their Individual Education Plans and if English Language Learners didn't test until they were at grade level! In our competition with other countries' education systems, we have been comparing apples with oranges.

Another concern is the tying of student scores to teacher evaluations and even retention. To receive federal funding, schools must use the Value Added Model, even though the American Statistical Association explains VAM's accuracy varies by as much as 30%! Because VAM rates teachers based on student test scores, even award winning teachers receive poor evaluations in low socio-economic schools or low level classes, generating wide-spread disrespect for NCLB. Who will want to teach the neediest, slowest students and risk losing a job?

Charter schools, on the other hand, conveniently exclude the disadvantaged - whom society will have to support anyway if they go uneducated (SPLC Fact Sheet: Educational Access for New Orleans Public School Students with Disabilities). But public schools, being democratic, are required to teach everyone - not only the college bound, but also the handicapped, those destined for blue collar jobs and the just plain unmotivated. Still, charter test scores are no higher than in public schools. Yet the pressure of NCLB and RTTT now tempts even public schools to push out under-achieving students just to raise test scores and obtain federal funding (Exacerbating Inequality: The Failed Promise of the NCLB Act, 2007).

Ignoring these problems, today's promoters of mega testing pay lip service to educator, parent and student feedback. VIVA's latest teacher survey asks this leading question: "As your school and district implements Common Core State Standards, what are the most promising changes in practices you've seen in your school, district or state?" That effectively bypasses any disagreement about Common Core. After issuing trial tests, the SBAC asked, "How well did students interact with the testing interface?" Instead of: "Were tests a useful instructional tool? Interesting? Well-worded? Accurate? Developmentally appropriate?" – which they were not. In too many instances the vocabulary, phrasing and references were beyond most educated adults. Then buried among over 1000 pages of internet manuals, in the tiniest print imaginable, I found the window for public comment. It had passed. At the same time, only two teachers out of a dozen

officials sit on our state standardized testing committee, and only three K-12 teachers helped develop Common Core. In short, for tests to be appropriate, interesting and helpful, and for teachers to buy into the process, a true majority must be involved in test development or any other policy decision affecting classrooms.

These five pages are but a brief summary of our 50 page summary of NEA's 2014 teacher survey on "360 Degree Accountability". A pdf of the report is available under: [Changing-the-Story-Transformation-toward-Fair-Accountability-and-Responsibility-in-Public-Education](#)

Momentum is growing against the consequences of NCLB. Now is the time to reverse these policies, restore lost programs and choose a more reasonable approach to standardized testing.

- In a recent Gallup Poll, the public overwhelmingly demanded changes to education law.
- UCLA's National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing urged specific revisions of federal education law (Gordon Commission 2013).
- Despite throwing millions at teacher training for NCLB, the NEA now denounces extreme testing and seeks a return to a model already proven more successful - with standardized testing only three times in a student's life (January 2015).

The Fairtest 2012 report lists other alternative proposals for NCLB reform:

- The Forum on Educational Accountability laid out a four-pronged approach validated by US and international studies:
  1. Overhaul student assessments.
  2. Restructure schools' accountability.
  3. Serve all students.
  4. Address students' unmet needs.
- Fairtest itself promotes a three-part assessment and evaluation program for states:
  1. Gather and evaluate evidence of student and school-wide learning – which would create a richer picture of achievement than through standardized testing alone.
  2. Administer low-stakes standardized state-wide tests in reading and math *every few years*. (Similar to NEA's recent recommendation.)
  3. Conduct school quality reviews every 4-6 years by a team of experts to see if programs are meeting the needs of all students.

Now is the time to replace today's manic program of data collection and over-testing. Stakeholders, *not profiteers*, must create an alternative that is much less expensive, sustainable, sensible, humane, and multi-pronged. With such a large and diverse public education system as ours, there is no silver bullet.

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