

EXAMPLES OF A STUDENT FOR WHICH ONE TEST DOES NOT SHOW THE COMPLETE PICTURE

Enclosed please find a copy of Laura's 5th grade district math test results from May 1997.

*** As you can see, she failed with a 64%.**

This student was a very shy student who had just transferred from a school in North Carolina and was not participating in many extra-curricular activities. Our District has excellent remedial programs in place and she attended their summer school math course.

*** As you can see, she passed the District Math test at the end of summer with a 88%.**

*** Enclosed also is a copy of her current report card (she is now a 7th grade student).**

As you can see she is an academic excellence student.

This student is now a thriving well-rounded student who not only achieves academic excellence, but is on Student Council, Yearbook Committee, Peer Mediation Group, and Pom Poms. Had the current law been in place, this student would have been retained (she failed ONE subject test). I believe if this student would have been retained, you could very possibly be looking a very different student. Perhaps one without any self-esteem, not at all active in her school activities. This is only one example of a student who could have been lost in the shuffle of our laws, who could "fall through the cracks" - But this is MY child and therefore I know this would not have been a student in danger of being "socially promoted". This could be your child too.

EXAMPLES FROM LINCOLN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL 1999

- 1) 4TH Grade Boy who is an average student. Started the WSAS testing, however was so anxious and nervous he froze. The teacher tried talking to him and encouraging him, but to no avail. This student eventually was exempted from the test by his parents. (Our Principal indicated that every year about 4 of our 4th graders (class average 75) have test anxiety so severe that they are unable to complete or sometimes even start the test).
- 2) 4TH Grade Boy who is an average student. He is clinically diagnosed with Depression, which is not a learning disability. Attempted to take the WSAS test several times, however failed to complete any sections. Eventually the Grandparent exempted the child from the test because the results would have been unreliable in showing his knowledge.
- 3) 4TH Grade Girl who was extremely ill during testing. On the first day of testing she was in school with a 103 degree temperature. She did complete a small portion and then went home sick. She came back in two days and did another small section of the test, consequently going home again ill. She did finally complete the WSAS testing, however due to her illness during the testing she scored extremely low. Her teachers felt that the test score was not an accurate picture of her knowledge.
- 4) 4TH Grade Girl who is an above average student. Took the WSAS test, however half way through realized that she was missing 4 pages of the test. The testing procedure had to be halted while the missing pages were added (calls had to be made to the district to verify procedure). The child was interrupted during the stressful testing procedure and was emotionally upset. She did complete the entire test eventually, however her scores were extremely low.

All of these examples are average students. I feel that they could be anybody's child. The "**ONE SIZE FITS ALL**" concept does not work for our children. If you are a parent, as we are, we want to see our children achieve their goals and grow into stable, happy, productive adults. Lets make sure that the legislation does that for all our children.

Grade 5 District Math Test Results

Date: *May 1997*

Student: *Laura Reed*

Number Sense:	7/10	<input type="radio"/> pass <input checked="" type="radio"/> fail	
Estimating/Whole Numbers	4/5	<input type="radio"/> pass <input checked="" type="radio"/> fail	
Estimating/Decimals:	3/5	<input type="radio"/> pass <input checked="" type="radio"/> fail	
Whole Numbers:	3/8	<input type="radio"/> pass <input checked="" type="radio"/> fail	
Decimals:	3/8	<input type="radio"/> pass <input checked="" type="radio"/> fail	
Understanding Fractions:	4/6	<input type="radio"/> pass <input checked="" type="radio"/> fail	
Adding & Subtracting Fractions:	2/8	<input type="radio"/> pass <input checked="" type="radio"/> fail	
Measurement:	4/4	<input type="radio"/> pass <input checked="" type="radio"/> fail	
Geometry:	6/6	<input type="radio"/> pass <input checked="" type="radio"/> fail	
Coordinates:	4/4	<input type="radio"/> pass <input checked="" type="radio"/> fail	
Graphs:	4/6	<input type="radio"/> pass <input checked="" type="radio"/> fail	
Problem Solving:	7/10	<input type="radio"/> pass <input checked="" type="radio"/> fail	
Total Score:	64%	51/80	<input type="radio"/> pass <input checked="" type="radio"/> fail

68% required to pass

Grade 5 District Math Test Results

Date: July 1997 (summer school)

Student: Lana Reed

Number Sense:	10/10	pass	fail
Estimating/Whole Numbers	5/5	pass	fail
Estimating/Decimals:	4/5	pass	fail
Whole Numbers:	7/8	pass	fail
Decimals:	7/8	pass	fail
Understanding Fractions:	4/6	pass	fail
Adding & Subtracting Fractions:	8/8	pass	fail
Measurement:	3/4	pass	fail
Geometry:	5/6	pass	fail
Coordinates:	4/4	pass	fail
Graphs:	5/6	pass	fail
Problem Solving:	8/10	pass	fail
Total Score:	88 %	70/80	pass fail

68% required to pass

Reed, Laura A

1415 Norview Circle

Port Washington, WI 53074

Thomas Jefferson Middle School

Grade: 07

Student #: 958

Homeroom Teacher: St. Peter

1/25/99

Period	Course	Course Name	Teacher	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Final	2nd Quarter Comment
00	7200	Social Studies	St. Peter	C+	C+				1. Participates well in class
01	7916	Health (M, R)	Campbell	A	B				
01	7921	Phy Ed (T, W)	Coulson	B	B+				
02	7940	Tech Ed	Culliney		A-				
03	7400	Science	Kane	B	C				
04	7100	Math	Greisch	B-	B				1. Good effort
06	7060	Chorus	Oftedahl	A	A				
07	7300	Communications	St. Peter	B	B				1. Pleasure to have in class 2. Participates well in class

Congratulations, you have achieved Academic Excellence

Subject: [Fwd: Exit Exam and No Social Promotion Test]

Date: Fri, 19 Mar 1999 12:20:08 -0800

From: larry Boothby <larryb@execpc.com>

To: larryb@execpc.com

Subject: Exit Exam and No Social Promotion Test

Date: Fri, 19 Mar 1999 11:02:35 EST

From: Richphylk@aol.com

To: wisgov@mail.state.wi.us, Sen.Panzer@legis.state.wi.us, Rep.Hoven@legis.state.wi.us,
Rep.Jensen@legis.state.wi.us, Sen.Grobschmidt@legis.state.wi.us,
Michelle.Arbiture@legis.state.wi.us, larryb@execpc.com, adavel@excel.net

This is in regards to the proposed "High Stakes" test law passed by Wisconsin Legislature.

We agree that far too many students are being advanced and graduated without the necessary knowledge to obtain and maintain occupations and life styles which promote a healthy world atmosphere. We do not agree, however, that an "exit exam" or a "no promotion" type test will be the answer to these problems. Many students write an exceptional test and carry an exceptional aptitude for learning, with high intelligence and top grades, but have no common sense. Unfortunately, this trait was exhibited by people like the Unibomber as well as the most recent antics of our administrative leaders in Washington D.C. We feel this problem does not exist because of teaching staff abilities, but originates in the home. There are some students who just do not want to learn and cannot be motivated to do so. The moral decay that exists in our world today has more of an impact on these students than any teacher, professor, law enforcer or religious leader could ever impart.

We have a grandson who has a marvelous intelligence. His grades are never below a 3.75; he has been enrolled and remains in the TAG program at his school since second grade when he was reading and spelling on the 4th grade level. He excels in math as well. He is mature for his age and has an exceptional imagination especially for writing stories. His problem? He suffers from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and is taking medication to control its most obvious distractions. He does not test well at all. His teachers have been very ingenious in formulating his tests in a way that he can understand them so that he will not get a failing grade. He cannot be given a piece of paper, or a pamphlet, where questions are listed from top to bottom. He uses a series of "block-outs" in order to concentrate on only one item at a time. If he is presented with too many options at a time, his focus is disrupted. He carries a high IQ, but would fail a test if it was not presented to him in any other way. What will happen to these students? We know that there are many different scenarios that will need to be addressed, not only for students like our grandson, but for students with other learning disabilities. Since mainstreaming students is now the norm, and we agree that it's much better this way, then global testing with a single "high stakes" test will prove detrimental for many of our young people. This is not fair!

We cannot, unfortunately, offer any answers to this problem. However, we do feel that if this testing is not well thought out with many diversifications, than it will only cause more problems than we already experience with our youth. Students who score well on SAT and ACT testing will have no problems writing another test. Students who do not want to learn will have problems no matter what is taught or tested. Please be considerate of those students who want to succeed but will be penalized with global testing such as is suggested because of learning disabilities.

Sincerely,

Richard and Phyllis Kraft
Saukville, Wisconsin

WORKING DRAFT

Re-configuration of OEA Testing Program for High Stakes Assessment (June 23, 1998)

1997-98 School Year	1998-99 School Year	1999-2000 School Year	2000-2001 School Year	2001-2002 School Year	2002-2003 School Year
WSAS (Grades 4, 8, & 10) Current Contract - Shelf Test Second Year CTB (\$1.3 million)	WSAS (Grades 4, 8, & 10) Current Contract - Shelf Test Third Year CTB (\$1.3 million)	WSAS (Grades 4, 8, & 10) Contract Extension DOA Approved CTB (\$2 million) est.	WSAS (Grades 4, 8, & 10) Contract Extension DOA Approved CTB (\$2 million) est.	WSAS (Grades 4 & 8) Contract Extension DOA Approved CTB	WSAS (Grades 4 & 8) Contract Extension Pending Consideration CTB
2 Blueprints: 4 & 8 Grades Architecture Customized Development \$1 million (est.)	4 & 8 Grades 8 Forms Specification/Item Development \$1.6 million (est.)	4 & 8 Grades 8 Forms Field Trials/Item Development \$3.2 million (est.)	4 & 8 Grades 8 Forms Field Trials/Item Development \$3.2 million (est.)	4 & 8 Grades 4 Forms (NF) Administration/Set Pass/Fail \$6 million (est.)	4 & 8 Grades Administration - Secure Forms 2 at 4 & 2 at 8 STBD
High School Graduation Test Blueprint/Architecture Customized Development \$.5 million	High School Graduation Test Item Development 6 Test Forms + Field Testing \$4 million (est.)	High School Graduation Test First Administration 2 Forms (NF) - Set Pass/Fail \$7 million (est.)	High School Graduation Test First Administration 2 Forms (NF) - Set Pass/Fail \$7 million (est.)	High School Graduation Test Administration - Secure Forms 1 and 2 STBD	High School Graduation Test Administration - Secure Forms 3 and 4 STBD

*Governor Tommy Thompson's
Education Retention Law for 4th, 8th, 10th grade and the
High School Exit Exam*

This bill was proposed by Gov. Thompson. Its intent is to counteract "social promotion". This bill was passed in June 1998 under the "umbrella" of the 1997-1998 budget. The implementation will take place in the school year 2001-02. Students will have to pass the test or they will be **RETAINED** in their current grade.

POINTS OF THE BILL

- According to D.P.I. (Department of Public Instruction) this test will be more extensive than what our students have taken in the past. The state exam for 4th, 8th and the high school exit exam will cover 5 subjects: Math, reading, science, social studies and language. We have been told that the state test will most likely include multiple choice, fill in the blank and written essays.
- The D.P.I. has been tasked to come up with a statewide test for these specific grades. The D.P.I. was against the bill, because they felt that the use of the test as the sole factor in the decision to retain pupils in 4th or 8th grade places too much emphasis on a single, high stakes performance, rather than the complete picture of a pupil's abilities and knowledge, including a broad array of pupil performance indicators, such as grade points average, general test scores, extracurricular activities and behavioral indicators.
- The test will be given at the 4th, 8th, and 10th grade levels. The 4th and 8th grade students will have 2 chances to pass the test. They have to pass in all five subjects or they will be retained in their current grade.
- As we understand, the 10th grade state exam that has been administered in the past will be grandfathered out and an exit exam will take its place. If a student has failed any portion of the test they will have three more opportunities to take the exam. The exit exam will also cover 5 subject areas. At this time no student will be exempt from taking the exit exam. If a student fails in any of the subjects, they *will not receive their diploma*.
- The DPI estimates that the test will cost approximately 15 - 20 million dollars to prepare, administer and score. This figure does not include any consideration for remedial assistance for those students who do not pass.

NOTES ON THE POSSIBLE RAMIFICATIONS

Based on the statewide results of the 1997-1998, 4th and 8th grade knowledge and concepts examination, 10% of 4th graders and 24% of the 8th graders in the state of Wisconsin would have been retained in their current grade had this bill been in effect for the year 1997/1998.

Researchers around the country who have studied the effects of pupil retention on pupil performance, self esteem and behavior have found very little evidence that grade retention is beneficial to children. These research findings indicate that the effects of retention on pupils tend to be negative, harmful or negligible, rather than positive. Additionally, there appears to be a high correlation between grade retention and future incidences of school dropouts.

CRITICAL POINTS REGARDING THE EXIT EXAM

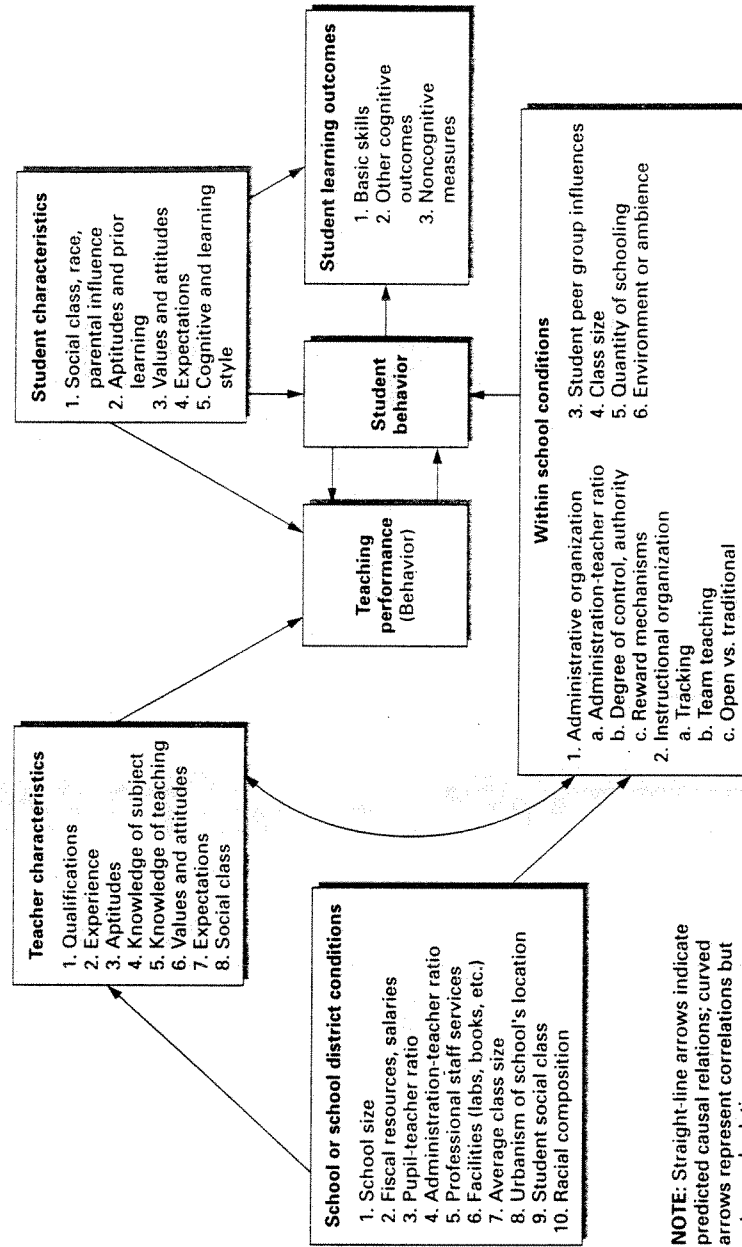
- If our state is relying solely on the exit exam as the determination for the receipt of a diploma, parents, teachers and administrators ***must*** have the option to opt out a student. Not all students can be measured accurately with a single High Stakes test.
 - We have come so far in our curriculum for education, that school districts are practically able to tailor make a curriculum according to a students abilities and career interest. By implementing the exit exam, there is no way a single test can measure the wide variety of curriculum offered throughout the state of Wisconsin, and therefore resulting in higher failure rates.
 - The greater the failure rate on the High Stakes test the greater the drop out rate. Already students at the 8th grade level have stated that if they fail the first time, they will drop out of school.
 - The state of Wisconsin already has a solid assessing program in place. Why spend an additional \$10,000,000. - \$15,000,000. for a new test? Especially when the business community, whom have sampled the test say that the content is not what they had intended. The business community has felt that students were ill equipped to fill out applications, resumes, checkbooks etc.. Nor are the students prepared for the interview process or public speaking. Computer skills were also lacking with graduates. The state exam covers ***none*** of the above.
 - To demonstrate the extent that this exit exam will drive curriculum, our school district has eliminated Speech as a year long required class. Instead the school district plans to integrate speech with communications (English) to focus more on the test content.
 - The Exit Exam ***does not*** test for ***basic knowledge***, which it was intended for. This exam is definitely geared toward the accelerated and college bound students. For the student who is preparing to enter the Military, Tech School, Vocational School or simply to work in our factories and farms, ***these students are being set up for failure.***
-
- If there is a student who has met the required high school credits for graduation, carried an average or above grade point and has demonstrated their proficiency through assessing, yet does not pass the States High Stakes Exam, what has our state accomplished by denying this student their diploma?

- School accountability must not be placed squarely on the shoulders of our young people. There are many other factors that have a direct influence on how our children learn and perform in school. School accountability is a shared responsibility between administrators, teachers, parents and students. *With the High Stakes Exit Exam, our students pay the full price. No one else is held accountable.*
- Testing must be just one tool used to measure a students ability. Parents, teachers and administrators ***must*** be allowed to consider other measures of proficiency before the denial of a diploma is considered.
- Many of our legislators are under the impression that parents can opt out or exempt their child from these exams. So far we have discovered as parents that this is not an option. From what we understand our district plans to create or purchase an additional ***test***. For those students where testing is not an accurate measure, this is not an option.
- As a last note - Colleges, when considering a student look at variety of criteria. ACT's or SAT's, high school grades, extra curricular activities, past community service. There are a number measures a college will consider. If colleges look at a broader picture of a students achievements, why should our state use only a single high stakes test to determine whether a student has earned their diploma?

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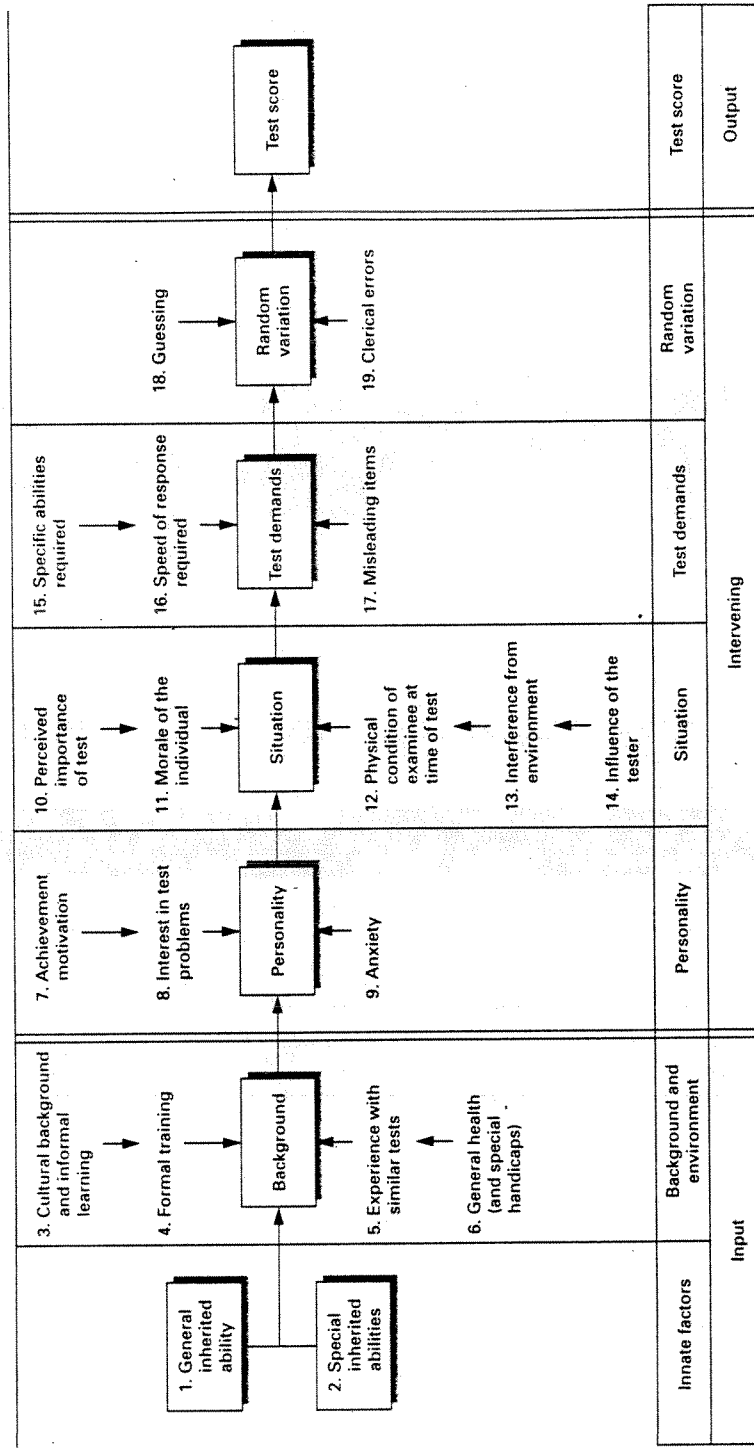
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Figure 1.2 Structural Model of School and Teacher Variables Influencing Student Learning Outcomes



From J. A. Centra and D. A. Patter, "School and Teacher Effects: An Interrelational Model" in *Review of Educational Research*, 50:277. Copyright © 1980 by the American Educational Research Association.

Figure 1.3 Paradigm for the Analysis of Variables that may Influence Learning and Behavior



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RETHINKINGSCHOOLS

Volume 13, No. 3 - Spring 1999

Why the Testing Craze Won't Fix Our Schools

Spring 1999

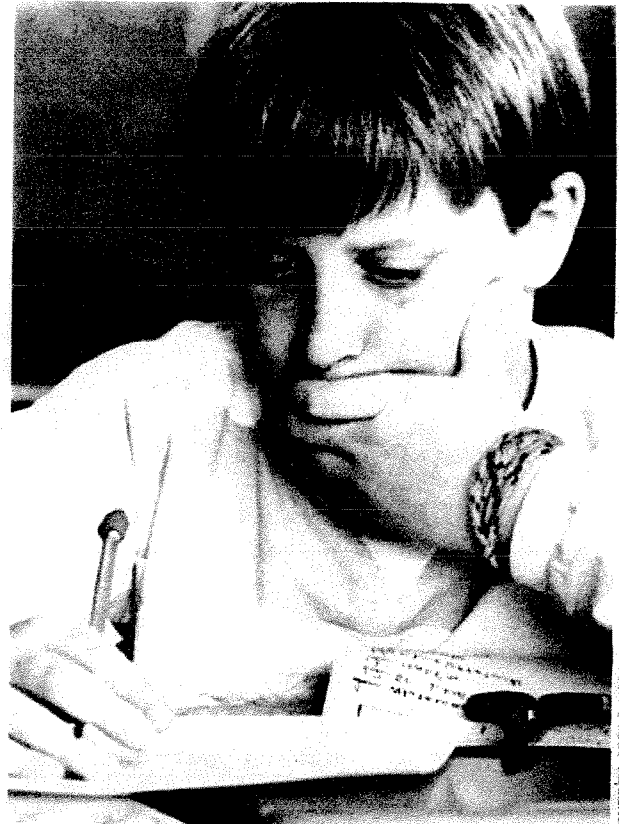
Whether you're a parent, teacher, or policymaker, it's impossible to ignore how the long arm of standardized testing is reaching into every nook and cranny of education. U.S. students are already tested more than any other children in the industrialized world. And it's getting worse.

This issue of **Rethinking Schools** presents a number of articles on testing and assessment, particularly from the perspective of the classroom. We hope the articles will increase parental, community, and teacher input into discussions too often dominated by politicians and policymakers.

It's not just that the use of tests is growing. Most ominous is the increasing reliance on "high-stakes" standardized tests and how these tests, tied to state standards, shape curriculum. Standardized tests mandate one "correct" answer and demand that children darken the circle accordingly. So nice, so efficient. And so unlike the real world.

Proponents of standardized tests often wrap themselves in the language of high standards. But that's not the issue. No one advocates low standards. The issue is what we mean by higher standards, and how we can reach those standards. By and large, calls for more standardized tests come from politicians eager to prove they are serious about school reform and creating a "high skills," internationally competitive workforce. But they offer little if any evidence that links increased testing to improved teaching and learning. Similarly, test-pushers pay scant attention to key issues such as smaller classes, improved teacher education, more time for teacher planning and collaboration, and ensuring that all schools receive adequate and equitable resources needed to boost achievement.

Rather than grappling with these issues, too many politicians have seized on a simplistic formula for reform: more standardized tests, especially "high stakes" tests.



Jean-Claude Legrand

What is the effect of so many 'high-stakes' tests on children?

Nationwide, states and school districts are forcing a growing number of children to take "high stakes" standardized tests and, on the basis of test scores, children may be retained, denied access to a preferred high school, or, in some cases, even refused a high school diploma. That's not public accountability, it's discrimination.

Dating back to the development of IQ tests at the turn of the century, standardized tests have been used to sort and rank children, most reprehensibly along racial and class lines, and to rationalize giving more privileges to the already privileged. Indeed the first standardized tests were developed by eugenicists anxious for "scientific" data to prove their theories of biological determinism.

To acknowledge the sinister origins of standardized tests is not, however, to dismiss parent and community concerns about school accountability. We understand and agree with these concerns. Too many schools fail too many children, especially low-income students, students of color, and students who do not speak English as a first language. The broader community has the right and the responsibility to oversee how well schools perform. Good assessments can be one valid method of insuring accountability.

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Tests Shape Curriculum

Problems with standardized tests go beyond their "high stakes" use. Standardized tests can also drive curriculum and instruction in ways that harm children. Teachers are subjected to increasing pressures to prepare students for the tests, even when we know that the tests don't assess the most essential aspects of thinking and learning. Students often internalize the judgements of the tests -- as if test scores were the final word on one's knowledge or potential.

In addition, standardized tests come packaged with demands for more standardized curriculum -- again, wrapped in the rhetoric of "standards." These calls do not take place in a political and cultural vacuum. They are part of a broader movement to promote a narrow version of patriotism and "family values," and to silence the critical voices of feminists, environmentalists, labor activists, and advocates of racial justice. It is also worth noting that when the right wing pushes voucher schools or charter schools, they often want these exempted from statewide high-stakes tests, so that the schools can be free to pursue their entrepreneurial "creativity."

Analysis into Action

We hope that this special issue can help turn analysis into action. An essential first step is to expose the fallacy that "high-stakes" tests will lead to higher standards and improved academic achievement. Some groups, for instance the Local School Councils Summit in Chicago, have worked with national groups such as FairTest to produce parent-friendly information explaining the inherent problems in standardized tests.

Another important task is to promote alternative forms of assessment and accountability. Parents and the public need to know how well their children and their schools are doing. Developing more democratic forms of assessment and

accountability is essential to defeating calls for standardized curriculum and testing. Educators must not box ourselves into a corner where we are perceived as opposing any form of schoolwide, districtwide, or statewide assessment and accountability. Historically, social justice activists have used such aggregate data to show how schools fail to provide a quality education to all children -- to highlight schools' "savage inequalities."

"High-stakes" standardized tests must be resisted. Such resistance can, and is, taking many forms.

In Ohio, for instance, a "Say No" campaign is underway to let parents know they can exempt their children from the 4th, 6th, or 12th grade Ohio Proficiency Tests, which are used to determine graduation and grade advancement. In Oregon, teachers have publicly challenged the state's standards and tests; they are developing alternatives to the Trivial Pursuit-like social studies multiple-choice tests. In Texas, the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) is asking the courts to declare unconstitutional the requirement that students must pass the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills in order to graduate from high school. MALDEF is particularly concerned about the requirement's discriminatory effect on Latino and African-American students.

We realize that this issue of **Rethinking Schools** only begins to touch on the many controversies surrounding standards and assessment. We hope you find it useful, and we look forward to continued discussion in future issues.

Spring 1999

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RETHINKINGSCHOOLS

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Viewpoint

CAN RETENTION BE GOOD FOR A STUDENT?

By Philip B. Bowser, NCSP

Imagine going to your physician with an illness. The doctor says, "There is an old treatment for your condition. At best it will help only one in ten, but no one can predict who that will be. That one person will experience a little bit of relief for a short period of time, but then the problem will return. Everyone will have negative side effects, some which can be severe. Many will suffer from the side effects of the treatment for the rest of their lives." If educators practiced "full disclosure," this is what we would have to say to parents about grade retention as a treatment for underachievement.

It's easy to understand the appeal of holding back a student who fails to meet benchmarks. Retention can take a student from the bottom of a class to somewhere nearer the middle. That seems like progress doesn't it? The error in this analysis is that the student is compared to the grade placement, not the non-retained peers. The student has "caught up" to the wrong group!

In the ensuing years, schools will present new topics at full speed. The retained student no longer will have the luxury of taking two years to learn a subject. Whatever learning problems contributed to the original retention decision will still be present - simply holding the student back will do nothing to change that. Thus, in a year or two, the retained student will again be "at the bottom" of the class, a comparison group that is a year younger.

As a district-wide school psychologist, I got to follow retained students over a number of years. My personal experience has shown that grade retention is a dangerous gamble. Too often, the held-back "first grader with a reading problem" becomes a "middle school behavior problem" and eventually a "high school drop-out." But don't take my word for it - the overwhelming majority of the research on the effects of grade retention shows:

- Retained students rarely make significant academic progress in the retained year.
- First or second graders who show improvement over non-retained under-achieving peers quickly lose the advantage. The two groups soon perform the same academically, however the retained group will develop measurable deficits in mental health.
- A single retention increases one's probability of dropping out by 21-27%.

- The stigma of retention will damage self-concept and create a negative attitude towards school to a much greater degree than most educators will predict beforehand or recognize in later years.
- The most common retainees are non-white males, small of stature, from a low-income family, with parents uninvolved in schooling.
- “Old for grade” adolescents are at increased risk for substance abuse, earlier age of sexual debut, behavioral problems and emotional distress (including suicidal thoughts).

Many leaders in education are calling for better a solution than retention. Dr. Deborah Crockett, in a recent policy statement for the National Association of School Psychologists, suggested that schools should not decide in May who should be retained. Instead, educators and parents should decide in September what we are going to do to ensure that everyone will be ready for the next grade. She called grade retention (and its cousin, social promotion) “failed practices.” A similar statement was released by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Those who frame the problem as a choice among grade retention, social promotion or ignoring the need for high academic standards do not see that we have a variety of remedies with stronger therapeutic force and fewer negative side effects.

What if school districts took the cost of extending a student’s career an extra year - on the average around \$5,000. - and used that money instead for effective prevention and remediation programs? What if our teachers had decent class size and adequate time to reflect and plan individualized instruction? What if schools abandoned grade retention, thus clearing the way for the development of innovative alternatives? What if schools involved parents earlier, gaining their support for additional tutoring, cross-grade groupings and summer school? Wouldn’t that be more effective than running a student back through the same course of instruction that was just proven to be inadequate?

What concerns me the most is that no one can predict in advance whom we will help by grade retention. When parents and teachers decide to retain, they do so in the dark, in spite of ample evidence that they will be adding a significant risk factor to the life of a child. To me, it is a chance not worth taking, especially when there are more effective treatments available.

Phil Bowser, NCSP, is NASP’s 1997 School Psychologist of the Year and a practitioner in Rosenberg, OR. He also serves as NASP’s Web Editor and a Communique Contributing Editor. This article was originally written for the March 1998 issue of NEA Today as a “counterpoint” and is reprinted with permission.

William A. Owings and Susan Magliaro

Grade Retention: A History of Failure

A long trail of research tells us that retention is not the route to take in our efforts to improve student achievement.

For almost 50 years, research has shown that grade-level retention provides no academic advantages to students. Yet, the practice is gaining increasing attention as schools face political pressure to demonstrate accountability for student achievement. Publications including *USA Today* (Ritter, 1997) and *Education Week* (Reynolds, Temple, & McCoy, 1997) have addressed the topic, and President Clinton in his 1997 and 1998 State of the Union Addresses called for increased retention of students with low scores on standardized tests, stating that a child should not move from grade to grade "until he or she is ready." Research suggests that retention is on the rise. According to one study (Roderick, 1995), from 1980 to 1992 the national percentage of retained students increased from approximately 20 percent to nearly 32 percent.

The overly simplistic view of retention as a panacea for education woes ignores its negative impact on children. A walk through history reminds us of what we have learned about retention.

History of Grade Retention

It was not until about 1860 that it became common in U.S. elementary schools to group children in grade levels, with promotion dependent on mastery of a quota of content. The New York City school system was reporting the results of promotion and retention as early as the turn of the century. Maxwell's (1904) age-grade progress study became the standard vehicle for school system reports on retention, promotion, and dropouts. Within the next two decades, researchers started to examine the efficacy of retention in terms of student achievement.

The goal of grade retention was to improve school performance by allowing more time for students to develop adequate academic skills (Reynolds, 1992). By the 1930s, researchers were reporting the negative effects of retention on achievement (Ayer, 1933; Kline, 1933). Goodlad (1954) summarized the research between 1924 and 1948 related to grade retention. This synthesis showed that retention did not decrease the variation in student achievement levels and had no positive effect on educational gain. Otto (1951) suggested that retention had no special educational value for children and that the academic gain of nonpromoted students was smaller than the gain of their promoted counterparts.

In the mid-20th century, researchers began to investigate the relationship between retention and dropouts. One study (Berlman, 1949) indicated that students who were retained might be more likely to drop out of school than those who were not retained. This article appeared at a time when the literature was emphasizing the need to keep students in school (Anderson, 1950; Holbeck, 1950; Moffit, 1945; Nancarrow, 1951; Sandin, 1944).

In the 1960s and the 1970s, the pendulum moved toward the social promotion of students. After the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), a time of reduced public confidence in schools, many school systems instituted more stringent promotion and retention policies—in spite of the lack of supportive research evidence (Roderick, 1994). For the public at large, it



Research indicates that students learn better without grade retention.

Photo courtesy of William A. Owings.

was counterintuitive to think that retention was not useful in helping students to reach basic skill levels (Natale, 1991).

Current Practice and Research

No precise national data record the exact numbers of retained students. However, a number of studies suggest that retention has persisted and possibly has increased. The Center for Policy Research in Education (1990) reported that by the 9th grade, approximately 50 percent of all U.S. school students have been retained. Roderick (1995) reported that the proportion of overage students entering high school has risen almost 40 percent since 1975. One synthesis of research indicated that the current level of retention matches that of the early 20th century (Shepard & Smith, 1990).

Of 66 articles on retention written from 1990 to 1997, only 1 supported retention (Lenarduzzi, 1990). These articles and Holmes's (1984) and Holmes and Matthews's (1989) meta-analyses document the effects of retention.

Many studies show the association between retention and dropping out of school (Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989; Dawson, 1991). These studies control for the effects of other influencing factors. Grissom and Shepard (1989) determined that retention significantly increases the probability of dropping out, controlling for prior achievement, sex, and race.

Demographic data show that retained students tend to come from lower socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds than nonretained students (Thomas et al., 1992). Meisels (1993) found that approximately 40 percent of repeaters come from the lowest SES quartile, whereas approximately 8.5 percent come from the highest SES quartile. Meisels (1993) also determined that more than two-thirds of all retentions take place between kindergarten and 3rd grade. Other studies have shown that retained students tend to be male and African American, with parents who are less educated than the parents of nonretained students (Byrd & Weitzman, 1994; Dauber, 1993; Foster, 1993; Meisels, 1993). In California, George (1993) found that retention

rates for African Americans and Hispanics are twice the rate for whites. Byrd and Weitzman (1994) examined social and health factors associated with retention. Poverty, gender, mother's education level, hearing and speech impairments, low birth weight, enuresis, and exposure to household smoking are significant predictive factors. Learning disabled students may also be retained more frequently than the general population (McLeskey, Lancaster, & Grizzle, 1995).



The long-held belief that early retention is best for students continues to be refuted in the literature.

The long-held belief that early retention is best for students continues to be refuted in the literature (Johnson, 1990; Mantzicopoulos & Morrison, 1992; Thomas et al., 1992). Studies of retention in kindergarten indicate that retained students have significantly lower scores on standardized achievement tests than do nonretained students (Dennebaum & Kulberg, 1994). Another study shows no differences in achievement for retained kindergarten students and the matched control group (Shepard & Smith, 1987). Some research indicates that early retention may produce a short-lived increase in achievement; however, this gain vanishes in two or three years (Butler, 1990; Karweit & Wasik, 1992; Snyder, 1992).

Research indicates that retention produces negative social implications. Kindergarten students who were

retained indicated a slightly more negative attitude toward school than did a matched control group (Shepard & Smith, 1987). Retained students may have more behavioral problems than those who are not retained (Meisels, 1993). Rumberger (1987) suggests that retention contributes to a permanent disengagement from school.

Research also shows that retention may have negative effects on long-term student achievement. Holmes's (1989) meta-analysis reviewed 63 controlled studies that compared the progress of retained students with that of lower-achieving promoted students; 54 studies showed negative achievement results for the retained students. Holmes then reviewed only those studies with the greatest statistical control. The negative achievement effects were again demonstrated. These findings were substantively identical to those of Goodlad's analysis in 1954. Subsequent studies have provided little new evidence to contradict Holmes's synthesis of research.

Other studies indicate an increased, cumulative negative effect of retention on achievement for at-risk students (Reynolds, 1992). Retained children may continue to decline in reading achievement over time compared with nonretained students. Whether this cumulative decline occurs in mathematics achievement is uncertain.

Retention Harms Learners

Historically, educators have viewed retention as a means of reducing skill variance in the classroom in an attempt to better meet student needs. Clearly, this practice has not achieved its goal. In the process we have harmed our clients. Physicians take an oath that guides their professional practice—first, do no harm. Educators would do well to take a similar oath. Retention harms an at-risk population cognitively and affectively. Alternatives to consider include requiring summer school, offering intensive remediation before and after school, changing teacher and administrative perceptions, and increasing teacher expectations.

One indicator of a profession is that a body of research guides its practice

(Darling-Hammond & Goodwin, 1993). A body of research exists on the subject of retention, and it should guide our practice. If we are to treat our "patients" professionally, we need to stop punishing nonlearners and instead provide opportunities for success. ■

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Wisconsin Council of Administrators of Special Services

April 15, 1999

Representative John Gard
Senator Brian Burke
Joint Finance Committee
P.O. Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Members of Joint Finance Committee:

The Wisconsin Council of Administrators of Special Services & School Administrators Alliance strongly recommends that you retain the 63% and 51% special education funding language currently in Wisconsin Statutes. In 1973 when Wisconsin first passed legislation that required the state's school districts to provide education programs to students with disabilities, the funding for teachers, support staff and transportation was at 70% of approved costs. This 1973 Wisconsin legislation was approved 3 years before federal law 94-142 mandated programs across the country. As you are aware, currently the state is reimbursing school districts at 34% or less for approved costs.

WCASS & SAA recommends that you increase the 34% amount for these important programs to at least 50% for approved staff and services. This must be done to stop the pitting of students with disabilities against regular education students and others needs in school districts across Wisconsin. School districts have done everything possible to operate efficient and effective programs for students with disabilities, but costs continue to increase faster than regular education as school districts implement new state and federal laws and enrollments continue to increase.

On a national level, states fund special education programs at an average of 56% where Wisconsin is currently at 34% or less.

WCASS & SAA would also recommend that along with increased funding that modifications be made in revenue caps for costs of special education programs caused by increased enrollments, high cost students and the shortfall in funding by the state.

In addition, we would encourage the legislature to fund the County with Disability Education Boards general state aid at \$6.2 million to keep their aid payments on an equal level with district or CESA operated special education programs.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss these very important special education concerns with you. If I can provide additional information please, feel free to contact me.

Sincerely:


Philip B. Knobel
Executive Director

KHMER STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

April 15, 1999

Sameth L. Ros
Khmer Students Association
1014 W. Badger Rd
Madison, WI 53713

Finance Committee

To Whom It May Concern:

Good afternoon. I'm here to support the goals of plan 2008. Why because it helps individuals like myself.

The majority of minority students are made up of Southeast Asian and Asians at the university. Yet despite the numbers, Southeast Asian Americans and Asian Americans are under-served. In the past two years we've had "token," temporary Southeast Asian American faculty. They are token because they are only temporary and "special projects" at the university. Lasting no more than a year.

Who am I?

My name is Sam Ros and my family has lived in Madison for over 16 years. We are voting citizens and residents of Wisconsin. I'm a senior at the University and barring unforeseen circumstances I expect to graduate this May. I'm also the first person in my family to go to college. I have two sisters. One is in the school of education and the youngest one is a senior at Memorial High School.

When I first started school I felt lost. The University of Wisconsin-Madison is a large campus. I tried to use of the minority services such as the Academic Advancement Program (AAP) to help me get through, but I felt out of place. Because it seems to be geared toward helping Blacks and Hispanics, but not a Southeast Asian like myself. The staff is mostly Blacks and Hispanics and the issues that were addressed catered to these two minority groups. The publication-newsletter was clearly expressed interest. Lip service was given that they helped all minorities. None of them helps people like myself because they lack the commitment. Under this circumstance I felt like a "token" minority among minority groups. After a while I stopped using them altogether.

For awhile I was doing OK academically, but I still felt lost and alienated from the services that were supposed to help me. Toward my last three years I depended on myself. I had to become self-reliant. I started working 40-45 hours a week during the summer to save enough money for the school year, but even that was not enough. I had to go to school part-time and work 30 hours a week to get by. I no longer accept financial aid. It's taken me longer to finish my degree. My grades have also suffered and working to put myself through

April 15, 1999

college is just one reason.

Money wise I get limited help from home. My mom is a single head of household and she makes less than \$15,000 a year at her job. After rent and food there isn't much left over. This picture of a Southeast Asian household is common, 60% of households are single parented family making less than \$20,000, but supporting more than two children.

Economically, a typical Southeast Asian family can not afford to put a son or daughter through college, alone. Without help from financial a college dream is just that-a dream.

Current programs to minorities are available, but they are *not* committed toward helping Southeast Asian American interests. Even though Asians are the majority of minorities on campus.

Closing Statements:

The Southeast Asian American community needs your help. We are asking for REAL help. Not token handouts. You need to help these people, because you are in a position to help. It is too late for you to help me. I'm graduating this May, but it is not to late for you to help my sister, Litha, and individuals like her who will be starting college this fall.

Plan 2008 will help individuals like my sister.

And remember...Money talks and everything else is just bullshit. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Sameth L. Ros