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THE RHETORIC OF STATE ASSESSMENT:
EDUCATIONAL POLITICS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

A Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

in

English:

Composition

---

by

Renee Michelle Longshore

September 2004

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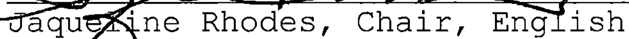
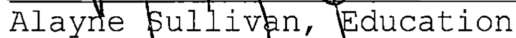


Jaqueline Rhodes, Chair, English   6/17/04 Date

Kimberly Costino



Alayne Sullivan, Education

ABSTRACT

In this thesis I explore the rhetoric behind the assessment push nation-wide and, particularly, in California. I take a close look at what politicians, educators, and citizens say about public education and their views of the current educational reform: whether they are speaking in support of or opposition to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. I look specifically at the finances of public education in California, the impact and current outcome of NCLB, and propose new reforms as suggested by those intimately involved in education.

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CHAPTER ONE

EDUCATIONAL REFORM AND FINANCES

Even before I began teaching, I knew we needed to improve our public school system. I was born in California and attended public school, raised amidst its large class sizes and limited resources. I saw fellow classmates squeaking by, being pushed from one grade to the next regardless of performance. The scholarly expectation bent to individual circumstance; I did not see consistent expectation and accountability.

When the time came to choose my profession I was cautioned by many: teaching was not a coveted profession. It did not take long to see why I was forewarned. I was to teach my students standards that built upon the standards they were to have mastered the previous year, all with a lack of materials I needed to instruct. I found the task to be both frustrating and exhausting. My goal was the same as California's: that all of my students would master the standards by the end of the school year. As the bell sounded for summer break, I stood wondering how this could ever be accomplished.

In view of the current state of our public school system, our country has decided that public education is in dire need of reform. To answer this call, President Bush, along with his constituents, has drafted and passed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: directing an increase of funds to public education in exchange for greater accountability. In this thesis I will examine the need for increased funds in California's public schools, analyze the rhetoric behind the assessment push, study the effectiveness of our nation's current reform efforts, and propose new avenues of reform. Through this analysis I want to take a close look at what money we have in public education, what is currently usurping these funds, why the state and nation has directed spending to standards assessment, and how to better spend the funds we do have.

Money, Money, Money

If I were to gather my experiences in teaching, both in my own classroom and in speaking with other teachers, the results could be sorted into many categories stemming from the topic of money. Just the mention of that word makes a heated forum for discussion in the area of education. If you were to ask a politician to speak on

this issue, they would try to appeal to the voters (citizens), arguing for an increase of funding dependant upon an increase of accountability. If you were to ask citizens, they might speak of a mismanagement of funds and the need to have increased accountability. If you were to ask a teacher, they would speak of their reality: large class sizes, limited resources, and the fear of having even less to work with because of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. While some would like to argue that lack of accountability is the core problem of our low-performing schools, I suggest we look more closely at the educational pocketbook.

A Teacher's Reality

It was three weeks before school began when I stepped first foot into my classroom. I somehow managed to get one on the end of a row, on a bluff, overlooking a portion of the high desert and I knew I had lucked out. It was my second year of teaching and my first year in the Victor Elementary School District. I was one of the "early hires" and so got placed at a year-round school. Anxious to get my room set up and ready for students, I came in on one of my many unpaid days. After getting my first glance

of the room, I was glad that I did; there was not a textbook or any other educational resource in sight. Outside of the teacher's desk, student desks and chairs, a couple of book shelves, and one filing cabinet, the room was bare.

My first stop was the school's library. I knew if there were books to be found, they would be there. Since it was not a paid staff day I had to track down some keys to the library. After obtaining the keys, I headed off to the library with rolling cart in hand. When I got there, I started with the basics; I was going to need reading, math, science, and social studies texts. I began my trek up and down aisles finding few textbooks as I went. Knowing I had to plan for thirty-five students in my class, I scrounged around to find what I could. What I found was not enough. For each subject, I was short five to ten textbooks. Besides that, I could not find any dictionaries or literature books to lead small reading groups. I was woefully short of texts that would be needed to effectively teach the standards mandated by the state of California (though not a year has gone by without the necessary test booklets and supplies needed to assess those standards). When I later asked about the hope of

acquiring the needed texts, the librarian informed me that I would have to make do with what I had. There was no money left to purchase the needed materials.

One big problem in our educational system today is that there is not enough money to keep it running effectively, and the limited funds we do have are being directed elsewhere. Our students are being packed into classrooms and not being given adequate attention or grade level materials to learn. A sufficient number of textbooks and supplies to match student enrollment in a classroom is not given to every teacher; veteran teachers manage to collect enough after a year or two to meet demand. Elementary students are denied the opportunity to participate in music and art programs because schools cannot afford extracurricular activities. Field trips are limited to nearby attractions because the allotted funds only cover the expense of transportation. Every year, teachers take money out of their own pockets trying to "make do." My dad always says, "A problem is not a problem if you can throw money at it." The problem is, even though California can, we do not. Instead, we let ourselves get caught up in political games and spend our limited funds on frivolous pursuits.

Acquiring the Goods

I remember being jealous of veteran teachers. Their classrooms were set; they had bookcases, an adequate amount of textbooks, dictionaries, thesaurus', and various teaching tools to teach the standards. I often wondered about the skill it would take for me to acquire such goods. It was at the end of that first school year that I found out.

Teachers could be seen scurrying to the nearest classroom that was soon to be vacated and next year filled with a "proby" (probationary teacher; non-tenured). It was a sort of under-the-table dealing as one veteran teacher would divide the spoils to the quickest bidder. Of course I took place in these, considering I had not yet accumulated an adequate number of texts and supplies for my own classroom. I justified my scavenger tendencies, throwing out any pity I felt for the next victim of short supplies. I had put in my time and survived the first year; it was their turn for the rite of passage. Besides, I had to look out for my students. I was not going to allow the next group to be shorthanded if I could help it.

Often new teachers only learn about the shortfalls after the first year or two. Meanwhile they are making do with what they have. There is not enough money or supplies to adequately equip a new classroom for learning. Fortunately, for our students, the majority of new teachers are on a dire mission to educate the students in their classrooms. Unfortunately, with all of the talent they have, it is still not enough. How do we expect kids to know about where to find needed information if we don't have the resources to show them? Many classrooms do not have dictionaries, thesaurus', maps/atlas', or computers. Our libraries have ages-old encyclopedias. Our students must learn and be ready to be assessed on standards they have not been given the opportunity to learn. They tell us to teach the students to be active and involved learners, but it is difficult to inspire those who know they are being asked much but given little.

According to the National Education Association (NEA), in its published Rankings & Estimates: Rankings of the States 2001 and Estimates of School Statistics 2002, California is falling behind other states in the amount of money it spends on education. According to Biddle and Berliner in their article entitled "Unequal School Funding

in the United States," in 1998 California spent, on average, $4,939.00 per student (fourth from lowest) as compared to New Jersey's $8,801 (highest). Even though, according to state statistics in the fall of 2000, California (out of fifty states) had the most students enrolled in public school, we fell under the national average on total monies spent on education.

When we look at the percentage of revenue for public K-12 schools from the local and state governments, we can see the lack of monetary commitment to education. In 1999-2000, California's "revenue for public K-12 schools from local governments" was only 30.7% of the total intake, ranking 37th out of fifty (Rankings & Estimates, pg. 41). In 2000-2001, it decreased to 29.4%, then ranked 40th. Meanwhile, the first ranked District of Columbia increased the percent of its local revenue from 83.4 to 88%. In California's percentage of revenue from the state governments from 1999-2000, it committed 60.4% to education. In 2000-2001, the percentage grew by less than 1%. With California's lack of commitment in dedicating sufficient local and state tax dollars to education, it is no wonder classrooms are short-handed in supplies at their local public schools.

Outside of the basic supplies given to a new teacher, they are sometimes given additional funds to further equip their classrooms. It is up to the teacher to decide how to best spend the money, depending on the greatest need of their classroom. I have purchased books for my classroom library, manipulatives to teach concepts, workbooks and CD roms to reteach or enrich a concept that has been taught, and materials to teach a concept I was expected to teach but was not given materials to teach it. This year, after five years of teaching, I even purchased my first set of dictionaries and thesaurus'.

With this system, it is most beneficial for teachers to stay at the same grade level and in the same classroom. Through the years they are able to buy the needed materials little by little. Before long, they have an adequate supply of materials and manipulatives to teach, effectively and thoroughly, the standards for that particular grade level. I have heard of teachers staying stationary long enough to even purchase items that can be used to teach music and technology. These pricy items can only be purchased after the foundational needs have been met.

Since funds are scarce, many teachers reach into their own shallow pockets to meet the need and demand. My husband, Paul, and I have made many trips to Club Ed (the local educational supplies store) and Foozles (a bookstore). It became no longer necessary to ask each other if we could spend additional monies for needed supplies for our classrooms: it was a given. We would spend money for books, enrichment materials, and incentives for our students. Our job was to teach, whatever it took. The only comfort we found in this was that we were doing our job, and in the end the purchases were tax deductible. You can find this trend among many teachers you talk to. After a while, they even forget to keep receipts to claim deductions. The process of reaching into their own pockets becomes second nature.

Teachers Needed

Many teachers, like me, enter the profession because they want to make a difference in the world. They have dreams of investing their lives, inspiring children to learn, grow, and become the best they can. What is difficult is when these dreams are smudged by starch beginnings. After investing both a lot of personal time

and money to get the necessary credentials, they walk into their classrooms and find that they are under-supplied. They spend their own time trying to materially prepare their classrooms, often reaching into their own pockets to meet demand. Then, on the first day of school, they face between twenty to forty faces looking to them for individual direction, instruction, counseling, and encouragement. The thought alone is overwhelming.

In the National Education Association's (NEA) published Rankings & Estimates: Rankings of the States 2001 and Estimates of School Statistics 2002, California's teachers were second on the list of the greatest amount of students in their classrooms. The student to teacher ratio in K-12 on average is 21:1(NASBE, California's Governances Structure). Although these numbers might not seem drastic at first look, Biddle and Berliner note that "student-teacher ratio is normally measure at the school or district level and often counts the school's coaches, nurses, social workers, and other service professionals who do not teach" (Unequal Funding). In my own classroom, grades 3-4, the number of students has ranged from 30-40; from these numbers alone it's easy to deduct that this is a high-stress position. Not only do you have to

thoroughly learn the material to be taught in your own grade level, but also be aware of standards below and above you. In a classroom of twenty to thirty-seven students, a teacher has a few that need an advance teaching of objectives, some that need a re-teach of prior grade objectives, and the rest the basic grade level skills. On top of the student's educational needs you also need to be proficient at crowd management and disciplinary tracts. If one can imagine being a parent of a family with eight children and then tripling that, one gets a taste of the skill needed to maintain an effective classroom.

With this type of skill needed one would think that California's K-12 teachers would be fairly compensated for their efforts. In fact, according to the NEA's publication, they were sixth on the average amount of salary paid to our nation's teachers. According to a recent study, the statewide average salary for full-time teachers was $54,000/yr, moving us up to being top paid nationally. What fails to get highlighted in this statistic is the above mentioned student-to-teacher ratio, which is also the highest nationally. For a teacher that works one hundred eighty-two days at the paid six hours

per day, that works out to be about $49/hour; a little over $2 per child per hour. And these figures do not even begin to take in account the number of overtime hours needed to prepare for teaching lessons and grading assessments. That means that we pay our teachers less than we pay our daycare workers, but we expect a lot more from them.

In order to be a teacher in California, you have to receive a lot of schooling. To begin with, every teacher needs a four year degree (B.A.) in Liberal Studies or another specified field. After that, he needs to acquire a Teaching Credential, another two years of advanced schooling. This is when you become a certified teacher. The mandated education, however, does not stop there. Teachers are required to take additional classes every year to maintain their certification, paying for them with their own money and spending uncompensated time on class and homework. Many begin teaching after they have received their B.A. and passed a test, the California Basic Education Skills Test (CBEST). They work towards acquiring their credential while they begin their first year of teaching.

With minimal funds going into education, it is difficult to attract and keep highly qualified teachers. Because of the lack of funds, teachers are not adequately compensated for their energy and expertise. On top of all of this, it is easy for them to get frustrated trying to meet the individual needs of the 21+ students in their classroom. So they must deal with being under-supplied, under-paid, and over-worked. It is no wonder why many teachers burn out within the first four years. It seems to me that we should be focusing more of our monies toward preparing, assisting, and compensating teachers for the jobs they do. The talk lately has been about how to get highly qualified teachers into the classroom. I suggest we direct our energy and money towards recognizing those who are already there, either aspiring or already certified, and working our hardest to ensure their continued employment.

Debt Versus Extra-curricular Activities

Let me begin by saying I feel very fortunate to be part of a district and school that is wise and proactive with its dealings in money. Knowing the trend of the government to not give, or even pull back monies promised,

my district puts money aside when times are good to cushion the fall when times are bad. While other districts need to lay off teachers to meet budget cuts or go further in debt, ours maintains its fiscal balance. Not all districts are prepared in this same manner. As a result, many teachers fear losing their jobs and much of the educational funds in subsequent years must go to paying interest on loans districts must take out to keep from going under. Extracurricular activities are lost in a struggle to maintain a system in dire financial straits.

According to a Los Angeles Times article, Legislators Letting Davis Lead on Budget, California faces "a projected budget deficit of $21 billion" (Jones, L.L.D.L.B). When discussions ensue on how to meet the budget needs, education comes to the forefront. Jones speaks of Elizabeth Hill leading recommendations with a suggestion to "'recapture' $1.9 billion in education spending - the amount by which the 2002-03 budget exceeds the required state support to public education under voter-approved Proposition 98" (Jones, L.L.D.L.B). "Recapture" suggests that something has gotten away from us unintentionally. Were our public schools not in need

of the money in the first place? These much needed funds would be missed and our children, as in such past bad decisions, will bear the consequences of these actions.

A continuing downward trend of monies spent on education is evident. Despite the rate of inflation, monies allotted for education in California are increasing only minutely. According to the NEA's publication of Rankings & Estimates, the "public school revenue per student in average daily attendance, 1999-2000," was $7,999 (Rankings & Estimates, pg. 39). California was ranked 25th out of fifty states. New York was 1st with $11,568 in revenue per student. In the 2000-2001 school year, California fell to 29th; money allotted per student was $8,281. Compare that to the 1st placed District of Columbia which portioned $13,357. The increase in California was $282 per student while the increase in the first ranked state was $1,789. California is falling woefully short in meeting the monetary needs of its public schools in the ever-growing economy. And it is no wonder considering when as a state we meet financial hard times we return to taking money from where it is greatly needed.

When our state is faced with the harsh reality of debt and a lack of funds, monies promised and directed to be spent on education is one of the first pulled (Jones, L.L.D.L.B.). As a result, districts and schools have to cut back in areas that are not essential in meeting state standards and national expectations. Often it is the extracurricular activities that are the first to go: music, art, technology, and field trip funds are usurped.

The majority of artistic expression in our children has been lost. What might have been a required course of all elementary students a few years back is now just a privilege to few. The education of art and music is left up to the regular education teacher because there is not enough money to support a program. The regular education teacher's instruction in these areas depends on the acquisition of "luxury" educational tools (which one usually doesn't acquire within the first five years of teaching). When you have a high turn-over rate of teachers who have taught less than five years, you have the majority of classrooms lacking these. Studies have proven that children are able to think more abstractly and reason better with higher mathematical skills when they are given instruction in art and music, but because of a

lack of funds, teachers are unable to provide this. We have many teachers attempting to educate students in this area, but there is only so much that can be done with musical instruments made out of toilet paper rolls and beans rattling around in adhered paper plates.

Alongside artistic dollars, we find the need for educating our students in the area of technology. When monies spent on education are in constant flux, it does not make much sense to invest what little we have in a program that is going to demand more for upkeep and progress. As a result, the area of technology is avoided. This is unfortunate considering our country and the world is growing more dependent on technological know-how and advancement. While we progress, our students are being left behind. According to the NASBE (National Association of State Boards of Education), California has an average of ten students to every one Internet-connected computer in K-12 education. Most students do not have computers at home. When you put these two facts together, one will find the majority of our children, tomorrow's leaders, severely under-prepared for tomorrow's jobs. We are failing to educate our students and prepare them for the world they will have to enter some day.

With these areas of education being slighted, our children are growing up less exposed to the beauty of the world in which they live. Their education is more focused and singular. Teachers spend classroom time giving instruction on the state content standards, focused on ensuring student mastery of the standards. Schools funnel money to texts and materials that further ensure the teaching of those standards: all of these efforts directed so that low test scores do not result in a loss of more educational funds. As a result, students are unduly robbed of elective courses and extracurricular activities. Unfortunately, it is rare that students have opportunities outside of the classroom to experience instruction in extra-curricular courses, such as music and technology: especially children from low-income families. But, as we cut back funds (or direct them to state assessment), not only are extra-curricular classes put on hold but field trips are also restricted and the opportunities to broaden our students' perspectives become few.

It was my third year teaching and I managed to get my feet under me enough to venture out and plan an extravagant field trip for my students; this year we would visit the California Science Center. When I calculated

the cost of transportation for my class of Victorville residents to travel to Los Angeles, I was floored. The cost for transportation alone was above the allotted field trip funds. I comprised a letter asking for donations from parents and, fortunately, they came through, all the while confused as to why I needed to raise money to cover the basic cost. In the end, it all was worth it, though. I will never forget the excitement I felt seeing the look on my students' faces as they viewed the sky scrapers against a smoggy sky. "Look," one of them exclaimed, "It's New York City!" Before that day, Victorville was their boundary of experience. Only so much can be learned within the four walls of a classroom. It is imperative that we provide the opportunity for our students to be exposed to and learn from things they might not have otherwise had the chance to experience. Field trips and extra-curricular courses provide opportunities for children to get excited about learning and become active players in their own education.

When you look at the numbers, it is easy to see that lack of finances is one of the big reasons why our public educational system is failing to meet the needs of its students. In California, our expenditures per student are

nowhere near where they need to be. In 1999-2000, we fell behind more than twenty-five states in the amount of money we put into education. In 2000-2001, we fell even further behind. We are losing teachers due to lack of materials, educational support, and monetary compensation. Students are being assessed on standards they were not taught because of the lack of needed textbooks and support materials. The joy of learning and fostering of creativity is squelched as needed funds are pulled from art, music, technology and field trip budgets. Unless we learn from these past mistakes and change our strategy, we will be destined to make them worse. In fact, as state politicians avoid this area badly in need of reform, national politicians are jumping in as reactive players.

In the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, an exorbitant amount of funds are being directed to the creation and administration of normed-reference tests. We, as a nation, are spending much needed and coveted monies on accountability, trying to assess what students have learned rather than directing funds to aid them in learning: being reactive instead of proactive. Monies are being directed to fund positions in government needed to monitor state compliance and assess results. Monies are

being spent on researching and choosing assessments that meet the specifications of NCLB. Our country should be taking that money and investing it in programs that instruct our students and better prepare them for a competitive world. That would be money better spent.

In addition, failing schools (so labeled by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 according to their failure to meet yearly goals on the state assessment) must direct their already limited funds to transporting students to another school and provide additional after-school tutoring (White House Website). If a school continues to not meet the Annual Yearly Progress, "(it)could ultimately face restructuring, which involves a fundamental change in governance, such as a state takeover or placement under private management" (White House Website). This would result in spending even more money on problems created by the implementation of this law.

Instead of continuing our course on this downward spiral, we can provide more opportunity for students to learn by investing the money in our schools to ensure their success rather than highlight failure through state and national assessment. So how did a country of proactive adventurers find themselves in a reactive slump?

In my next chapter I will examine the rhetoric that pushed the idea of state and national assessment from a stark suggestion to a mandatory task (contingent on receiving federal dollars). I want to take a close look at how a country, already past due for investing federal dollars in education, chose to direct its funds, not to classrooms, but to the politician's and assessment company's pocketbook.

CHAPTER TWO

THE RHETORIC THAT PUSHED STATE ASSESSMENT

Every year when April and May roll around, with birds singing and flowers blooming, students are filled with anxiety. At a time of the year when they should be outside, soaking in the spring rays, students are hunched over desks, sweating over carefully scripted assessments prepared by a company they (and their parents) do not even know the name of. Teachers alike are filled with anxious anticipation, taking on the pressure passed down from the President, to the state, district administrators, principal, and finally to their own classrooms. Why have these state-mandated tests been accepted? When we are struggling just to maintain current education programs, why have we felt the obligation to take upon our backs the burden of state and national accountability?

My curiosity on this subject drove me to study and observe the rhetoric behind state mandated tests. In teaching for five years I, like the many other citizens of our nation, have been swept up unaware into a whirlwind of state-, and soon to be nationally-, mandated tests. My one big question was, "How are the state/national powers

getting states, districts, school sites, teachers, students, and parents to buy into this idea?" I found that state and national assessment began just as that: an idea. It then moved to a suggestion, evolved into an unspoken requirement (motivated by a withholding of educational funds from non-participants), and was signed into law after four years of social acculturation. It was not long before the whisper of accountability, in the shape of mandated testing, became a yell.

One way the ball started rolling on state and nationally mandated assessments was that it made sense. Who would doubt the sincerity behind wanting to assess students to find out what they knew and what they needed to learn? This method of instruction, through the use of exams and other means of oral and written assessment, was effective. It had already been a way of checking for comprehension and mastery and assigning grades for some time already. Teachers used it to see if they should re-teach a concept or move on to another. Parents liked knowing if their children were doing okay in whatever it was they were learning. Assessment began as a simple means of communication between parent and teacher; students were taught standards, given a classroom

assessment, and their performance measured and assigned a grade on their report cards. When it moved to the state and national level, no one thought of asking why; the idea was not obtrusive but a familiar, warm blanket.

Like Augustine, President Bill Clinton, along with a large constituency (including congress), used what was known and familiar to his audience to pull them (U.S. citizens) into his way of speaking so they could understand what he was talking about. He signed into law the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 in January of that year, despite the fact that this legislation was fought by many intimately involved in public education. The suggestion began at his fingertips. In Section 411, "National Assessment of Educational Progress," it states, "b-1 Purpose-The purpose of the National Assessment is to provide a fair and accurate presentation of educational achievement in reading, writing, and the other subjects included in the third national Education Goal, regarding student achievement and citizenship" (Improving America's Schools Act of 1994, sec. 411). And so it was tied in to the familiarity of assessment providing a "fair and accurate" picture of where a given child was performing academically. Through the use of these terms, "fair and

accurate," he created the sense of comfort in a new and uncharted territory: state and national assessment. There was no reason to fear since the results would supposedly portray a clear and precise picture of the students' abilities. President Clinton shocked no one with this proposal because it appeared non-threatening; it was an idea that anyone could choose to accept and participate, or ignore and continue on with their current ways of measuring progress. "d-1&2 Participation-National and regional.-Participation in the national and regional assessments by state and local educational agencies shall be voluntary. 2) state.-Participation in assessments made on a state basis shall be voluntary" (Improving America's Schools Act of 1994, sec. 411). This type of assessment was to be "voluntary," participation was not mandated, but available if one was interested.

It was not long after this, just under two months, the rhetoric of "voluntary" somehow metamorphosed into mandatory. From information in an article in *Education Week* entitled "California Districts Fighting State Testing Orders," I concluded that the state mandated the assessment to school districts even though the national/state assessments were supposed to be

"voluntary." The article begins, "LA district plans to head into court soon to ask for relief from giving the test to the limited-English-proficient students" (Education Week, "Fighting"). Their claim was that the test was unfair and did not accurately measure these student's abilities, which contradicted Clinton's original statement on the purpose of assessment. Despite these two verbal, and valid, claims the state persisted in enforcing the test. "The state school board is not pleased with the protests. The board has already voted to make disbursement of federal technology-grant money contingent on districts' participation in the testing program" (Education Week, "Fighting"). Lisa Kalustian, a spokeswoman for Governor Pete Wilson, said, "People can't choose which laws they like to obey. The issue here is accountability" (Education Week, "Fighting"). The art of persuasion, begun by President Bill Clinton, made a nasty turn toward bribery; schools and districts were pressured into administering the assessments in fear of losing greatly coveted technology funds during a time of technological advancement in the public schools.

How did the public respond to state and national tests moving from "optional" to mandatory (motivated by educational funds)? <u>Rethinking Schools Online: An Urban Educational Journal</u> decided to turn the tables, using Clinton's words of "fair and accurate testing" and the state's idea of "accountability," right back on the advocates of state and national assessment.

> [C]hildren 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" (Rethinking Schools, "Craze").

They used the loaded word "discrimination," as it referred to a certain people being wronged due to situations outside of their control, and linked it to the state's mode of operant word, "accountability," holding someone to the results of a choice they made. They also brought in

IQ testing (something that left a bad taste in the mouth of many because of the historic inaccuracy of previous tests given to unfairly group individuals) and linked it to standardized tests. Did it work? Not entirely.

Two years after the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 was signed into law, the idea of state and national assessment became a common, non-intrusive occurrence. In fact, people grew so comfortable with the idea that George W. Bush, then a presidential candidate for the Republican party, discussed openly his desire to take state and national assessment one step further. "You can't have voluntary testing. You must have mandatory testing. You must say that if you receive money you must show us whether or not children are learning to read and write and add and subtract. Testing is the cornerstone of reform. The cornerstone is to have strong accountability in return for money and in return for flexibility" (The First Gore-Bush Presidential Debate). The idea of accountability for money worked its way from the California's, and other State Boards of Education, to the political playing field in Washington, D.C.. But how were

the listening citizens going to take it? How was this future president going to convince the people of the United States to buy into his idea?

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush, already having convinced key Democrats and Republicans of the validity of his vision, signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. He began his speech by addressing the different parties involved, praising them and then challenging, wholeheartedly calling (sometimes threatening) them to jump on the band wagon.

President Bush begins his speech with four main, encompassing points of the No Child Left Behind Act: "We're bringing new resources and higher standards to struggling schools. We're placing greater emphasis on the basics of reading and math. And we're giving parents better information and more say in how their sons and daughters are educated" (RNC, "Education Reform"). He sums up the gist of the bill in three short and understandable sentences that any average person could understand. It is a simple language: uncomplicated and to the point. Directly he links "standards" to "struggling", suggesting that it is the cure-all to the failing public school system. He entices teachers with the idea of "new

resources," (appealing to their desire to have well-equipped classrooms) districts with getting back to the "basics," and parents with power in having "more say in how their sons and daughters are educated" (an indirect attack on professional educators and teachers -- he wins the favor of those who feel educators are not doing an adequate job). By using simple language, touching on key points of interest for each group, he is able to gain and retain the attention of his audience.

Next, he turns to explaining the inspiration for and motivation behind the act: "Experts looked at public education and saw a nation at risk" (RNC, "Education Reform"). By terming the team behind this act as "experts" he creates the illusion of a board that knows what it is doing. "A nation described at risk is now a nation on the road to reform" (RNC, "Education Reform"). The repetition of the term "a nation at risk" creates the sense of the need for immediate concern and ratification. Bush then proposes that the signing of this Act put the nation "on the road to reform." He sets the stage by creating a sense of urgency, but then calms the audience with the reassurance that the problem has already been dealt with.

President Bush calls on Republicans and Democrats alike to buy into this Act: "We have shown that if you put the nation's interests ahead of political party, you can achieve mighty, mighty reform" (RNC, "Education Reform"). He goes on to give an example of a politician from each party who had a hand in signing it into law: Secretary Rod Paige at the Department of Education (Republican) and George Miller (Democrat). Of Rod Paige he says, "The guy is down to earth, he's got a lot of experience - - he ran a huge school district" and George Miller, "(He) is a proud liberal, but also he's a proud author of this bill. He cares deeply about a system that quits kids - - he wants to change it" (RNC, "Education Reform"). Bush is able to present the followers of this bill as regular, "down to earth" people who have experience and care about something that is perceived to be failing and willing to do something about it. He does a good job creating pathos, helping the audience (coming from a variety of backgrounds) to connect and relate and feel the same way: they, too, are regular people, who see a problem, and want to take the necessary steps to fix it. As he moves further along in his speech, President Bush continues to bridge the division between Democrat and Republican,

trying to show we all have the same concerns. In fact, he uses the word "we" 8 times in the 8 sentences following this point; a few "we" phrases include "we believe," "we share," and "we must finish." He concludes his introduction by stating, "We have a great task to complete, and everyone has responsibilities to meet" (RNC, "Education Reform").

The first responsibility, according to President Bush, is the teacher's and principal's. "Those responsibilities begin in the classroom" (RNC, "Education Reform"). By using the word "begin," he suggests that this program is going to work only if the teachers and principals take the ball and run with it. In his opening, the President highlights the part of the bill that teachers and principals would find most appealing: money. "Because of our commitment to assist low-income students, we will increase spending on Title 1 by 18%. Because teachers are so important, we will increase spending on teacher training by 33%" (RNC, "Education Reform"). He links the need for teacher and principal involvement with "increase spending" which is a sure way to get a positive response from those who believe that this is a key idea in picking the public school system up and getting it back on

its feet. President Bush knows he is speaking to the people who have gone to the empty supply cabinets, browsed the short-handed textbook and resource sections of the school libraries, and scraped the bottom of field trip fund buckets. He is speaking directly to their experience.

After he butters these key players up with what they want to hear, he then makes a call for action: a tit for tat: "In return for this commitment, my administration and the American people expect results. We expect teachers and principals to do their jobs well, to have a firm grasp on their subject matter, and to welcome measurement and accountability" (RNC, "Education Reform"). The idea of state and national assessment is no longer a suggestion but an expectation. When you expect someone to do something, there is no discussion involved. The "increase in spending" is contingent on meeting expectations. He paints a clear picture here by using the words "in return" and "expect results." Results from what? Those state and national assessments.

It would not be a wise move by President Bush to end this important section on teachers and principals, key cogs in this assessment machine (since they give the

test), on a bad note. President Bush then moves in to pick them back up off the ground from this blow by dusting them off and building them up: "All you who have chosen the noble profession of teaching should know this: we are counting on your energy and your imagination to make these reforms real for America's children. You have our confidence and you'll have our support" (RNC, "Education Reform"). "Noble profession" is used to give teachers importance, "your energy and your imagination" to highlight their strengths, and "reforms real for America's children" to remind them of their spirit; they went into teaching for the children. He assures them that through it all they will have "our (speaking for the country as a whole) confidence and support" (RNC, "Education Reform"). Bush suggests that teachers will gain esteem and respect from the community by buying into the bill.

The next call is for the states to step up to the plate. He uses words such as "trust," "unprecedented flexibility," "increasing support and funding for research," and financial support "to help states design and administer tests." These words and phrases are used to catch the attention of those at the state level; these are things they are most concerned with. They, like

anyone else, want to know what they are going to get out of state and national assessment and what it is going to cost them. President Bush assures them they will get more freedom and money for their own endeavors, and will not have any out-of-pocket expenses for this bill.

Of course, just like for teachers and principals, there is a catch: "In return, we expect states to set standards of basic knowledge and to make steady progress toward meeting those standards. Every student in grades three through eight will be tested in reading and math" (RNC, "Education Reform"). Again, there is that word "expect." In return for more money and flexibility in how states spend it, President Bush expects states to be open to national accountability. He builds state officials up, telling them of the prizes, and then mentions the cost of participation: they will need to create state standards and report on student "proficiency" in relation to the state's assessment of those standards.

From here, President Bush breaks away from the call to participants in this bill and moves towards addressing the overall concern of state and national assessment; a little pep talk, if you will. He talks about the reaction to testing being a "wince," and directs this as being an

action of "students" because "they don't like to take tests." He downplays negative reaction towards testing to a "wince," rather than a rebellion or outcry (by the media and general public). Then, in talking about those who might oppose the idea of state and national testing, he draws the attention away from the main players (parents, teachers, principals, states, districts: those who would be most likely to speak out against it) and puts it on a minor player (students). In doing this, he undermines the defensive reaction of those who may have reservations about exams (state and national assessments).

If he did not prepare his audience in this manner, they might have taken great offence with what he said next: "My attitude is, too bad. How can you correct problems if you do not diagnose the problem in the first place?" (RNC, "Education Reform"). He then goes on to portray national assessment as medicine a child does not want to take, even though it is good for her, by saying that "we must determine what needs to be corrected early, before it's too late" (RNC, "Education Reform"). It is for her (our) own good.

Next, President Bush makes a call to higher powers: school, district, and state administrators. I was surprised to find that, in this call, he did not stick the bitter medicine between two layers of peanut butter and jelly. He begins with the infamous word "expect" in connection with the schools "ris[ing] to the challenge" (RNC, "Education Reform"). If they do not step up "they must be held accountable." As far as the audience is concerned, these administrators are the power players; they are the heads of our educational companies. In using their positions, President Bush is able to indirectly blame them for the failures of public education and call them to step up and fix the problem they have created or get axed. Bush entices his audience with the idea of money (they will have "resources" and "incentives to improve as a result of this bill"), and then threatens with unnamed consequences ("and if they still do not improve, there are real consequences") (RNC, "Education Reform"). Here is where I saw the President moving from a whisper to a scream. The idea was that this is the way things are going to be, and if they are not, there are going to be some real consequences. Interestingly enough, through all of this, President Bush still manages to bring

them back to their feet, into playing position. He ends by saying that school, district, and state administrators "carry a great trust," "are the rising generation of reformers," and calls them into service by making a final beckoning to them to "You can serve your community and you can serve your country" (RNC, "Education Reform"). The idea of serving your country brings to mind that this is a battle, and "It's you and me against them, baby."

The last calling to arms is for parents. President Bush calls them "your child's first and most important teacher" and asks them to do what they innately have a desire to do..."what is best for their children" (RNC, "Education Reform"). He tells them of the benefits they will have as a result of this bill: "access to statewide results," knowing the "qualifications of the teachers," and "more options" (RNC, "Education Reform"). He tells them of the power they will have to control, what would seem to them as, an out of control system.

As he tells them of their responsibility in this bill, I was not surprised to see his call to them as more of a whisper; after all, he needs their motivation and support in the area of education. He asked them to "support the school," "demand excellence," "remember that

every child should come to school ready to learn," teach "good manners and respect for teachers," and foster "good study habits." By being non-combative, suggesting things that the average and above-average parents do anyway, the call does not seem out of the ordinary, but more like common sense. He presents the assessments as a way to keep schools and teachers accountable, "expect(ing)" good results. Instead of naming the parent's action, or failure to act, as essential parts in the outcome of these assessments, he merely makes subtle suggestions.

Throughout this speech, President Bush highlights and plays off the tension between parents and professionals of the public school system. A common argument I have heard from parents is that the public school system is not effectively teaching students on an individual basis; it has gotten caught up in the idea of educating the masses. As a result, individual student needs are not being identified or addressed. A fear that results from this is that each parent's child is being cheated out of a good education. Bush repeatedly highlights the idea that state and national assessment can be used by the parents to make sure their child is getting the education they deserve (a way to hold the public school system accountable). In

contrast, the view of the professionals of the public school system is that parents are not involved enough in their children's education. Towards the end of the speech, Bush suggests to parents that they become more involved in their child's education. He falls woefully short of calling them to the same accountability teachers, principals, and school districts have. This political move could be advantageous (considering parents outnumber professional educators) or counter-productive (professional educators are the ones who administer the tests). Whatever the outcome, he has momentarily succeeded in promoting the bill; in playing these two parties off of each other, President Bush lures the parents and adds pressure to the professional educators.

In his closing, President Bush highlights the urgency of getting the provisions of this bill underway immediately. He highlights that "this nation has waited many years for major reform in education," bringing out the idea that there should be no more waiting (all of which is "wasted time"). "Tonight, Secretary Paige will meet with state education leaders on plans to put these reforms to work" (RNC, "Education Reform"). The urgency is brought out by the fact that a meeting was happening

"tonight"; they are not wasting even one more night's rest. "And now, together, let us see these changes through until every school succeeds and no child is left behind" (RNC, "Education Reform"). With "together" and "let us," he shows the unity and calling of the many different facets of education to join together for the good of the children, so that "no child is left behind." President Bush ends the speech in a fostering, rallying tone with an emphasis on team.

The idea of state and national assessment has thus evolved into a mandatory task for students, parents, teachers, principals, district, and state officials alike. What started out as a means of assessing and reporting between teacher and parent with report cards has turned into a way of manipulating and directing funds, through a motivational factor of fear, throughout the educational system. Parents are promised positive results; teachers, principals and districts an increase in funds; states, financial support; and the citizens of this country, a cure to the disease of the failing public school system. But does accountability in the form of multiple choice and normed-reference state and national testing deliver what it promises? In my next chapter I will take a look at the

results of, and public reaction to, the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 over the past two years. The Act was created and signed in an effort to improve the public school system by providing feedback as a means to address individual needs of students and holding schools accountable for meeting those needs. These steps dictated educational funds to creating, administering, and reporting on state-wide assessments. The result of these steps was to be an increase in student learning. While the ideal was presented and planted, time has given roots it, and the fruit of our labor is up for inspection. After two years of state and national assessment, politicians boast of an increase in spending and the results of such being and increase of student learning and achievement. The problem with these pats-on-the-back is that they fail to note the fact that the increase in spending is going towards funding, administering, and reporting on state assessments, and the assessments themselves (their proof for and increase in student learning) are falling woefully short of the promise of identifying and meeting each student's individual needs.

CHAPTER THREE

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT OF 2001: HELP OR HINDERANCE?

When the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was signed into law, it carried promises of a revised and more sure-fire way of increasing student academic achievement by holding States accountable for making sure their districts and schools were teaching and assessing State content standards. States bought into the idea, lured by the prospects of increased funding; they needed money to supply their district with administrators, their schools with teachers, and their classrooms with educational materials. Districts and schools bought in, excited about the added flexibility in how they would be allowed to spend Title 1 monies (the area of spending previously dictated to them) on programs they found most valuable. Parents, too, followed suit, anticipating an increase of individualized instruction and accountability. Now, two years later, we have the advantage of looking at the results and impact of increased national accountability. While some praise the creation and implementation of state standards and an overall increase in assessment scores,

others question the validity of assessment results and note a decrease of genuine learning opportunities. The question we are left with is whether the implementation of this law is bringing about the desired and expected results.

By signing into law the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994, President Clinton and his constituents made an unspoken statement that the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was providing successful results and had to be further implemented: "The Congress further declares it to be the policy of the United States to expand the program authorized by this title over the fiscal years 1996-1999 by increasing funding for this title by at least $750,000,000…" (Sec. 1001, [a][2]). It was in this Act that the creation of State standards was first introduced and the assessment of them encouraged:

> The purpose of this title is to enable schools to provide opportunities for children served to acquire knowledge and skills contained in the challenging state content standards. This purpose shall by accomplished by—8)improving accountability as well as teaching and learning,

> by using state assessment systems designed to measure how well children served under this title are achieving challenging state student performance standards expected of all children. (Sec. 1001, [d][8])

States were to submit their own content standards and keep record of and respond appropriately to assessment results—all the while assuming that the assessments were providing an accurate picture of each student's mastery of the State's standards.

When President George W. Bush took office, he supported the idea of state standards and yearly assessment of student progress. Where the "Improving America's Schools Act" fell short, however, was in the reporting of student progress and growth to the national governing boards of education. A way to improve upon this flourishing system, he thought, would be to make States accountable for the reporting of their yearly progress in the form of State plans. The purpose of reporting the results was to make sure not only the schools and districts were accountable to the State, but that the State was accountable to the nation. The Act states that, "Each State plans shall demonstrate…what constitutes

adequate yearly progress of the State…toward enabling all public (school) students to meet the State's student academic achievement standards" (Sec. 11111 [b][2][B]). In return, he gave the States more flexibility in how they chose to spend the Title 1 money. Did this increase in State accountability and flexibility further improve the public school system? Some believe it did.

Teaching Standards

By requiring States to create standards and assess student acquisition of them, the process of educating students became more concrete. Teachers were given a blueprint of what students were expected to learn at each grade level. "In the 1996 Nation Education Summit, state governors, education leaders, and business leaders came to a consensus that use of standards will focus the education system on understandable, objective, measurable, and well-defined goals to enable schools to work smarter and more productively" (Education 388A). I agree. Having a statewide timetable of what should be taught when has advantages. For one, teachers in a particular grade level can see what needs to be taught that year, plan for the teaching of those content standards, and check off

standards once they have been taught and mastered by students; this provides a clear picture of where each student is academically and how their current and future teachers can continue meeting the individual student's needs. Also, students can know what they are to learn each year, and the reporting of mastery of content standards to parents is clear and to the point. I have seen the advantages of establishing clear standard objectives in my own classroom.

I had been hired to teach a second-grade classroom at Brentwood Elementary School in the Victor Elementary School District. Never having taught at this particular grade level I went straight to my school-issued State content standards, thick, three-ring bound notebook. It was there that I got a breakdown of what was to be taught in each subject for second grade. I was very fortunate to be working at a National Blue Ribbon (an award given by California to acknowledge schools who perform well on the SAT9) school this year, the experience of which was quite different from my previous two years of teaching at Greentree East, a school on the other end of the spectrum. Not only did I have the standards notebook, but also a timeline of when each objective would be taught according

to a long-range plan designed by the other second grade teachers in previous years. By following this plan I was sure to teach all of the standards, in a clear and successive way, during the school year (we even gathered as a grade level to review and make changes to the plan according to how the implementation of it last year had brought about results on the SAT9). Having grade-level standards made the objective of my job concrete and understandable; the other teachers were on the same page and we were able to collaborate on the means of effective instruction of those standards.

When the State Board of Education had the opportunity to review the progress of education in California, after the creation, implementation, and assessment of standards, they were united in the fact that setting a bar of achievement was effective, but questioned how high the bar should be set for "proficient" mastery of them. Susan Hammer, a member of the Board, "commented that is was a privilege to be a part of these momentous efforts. She advised the Board to be tough and relentless in support of standards-based education" (Final Minutes, 2). On this comment, everyone agreed. It was important to have uniformity of expectation for education across the state.

When the Board began talking about the degree of mastery of these standards students should be at to be considered "proficient," the members' opinions differed. You see, the state set its level of "proficiency" high, and students were having a difficult time reaching that bar. So, when the Board actually started to discuss what percentile would be considered proficient for the national report, there was concern that the intended level of proficiency would not be met, and the funds withdrawn. To the proposal that the bar of proficiency remain constant for both state and national reporting purposes, Reed Hastings, President of the Board, added, "The questions before the Board is whether using our state's definition of proficient for the federal AYP (Annual Yearly Progress) definition of proficient is setting too high of a bar" (Final Minutes, 12). In directly presenting the idea of too high of a bar, Hastings was bringing up a concern presented by the Liaison Team (a group compromised of professionals directly involved in public education). Suzanne Tachney, a member, "commented that if the Board follows the Liaison Team's recommendation (to set the national bar of proficiency lower, so as to be more attainable by 95% of student in the state by 2013—a goal

of the NCLB Act), it would be comparable to setting a goal of what is basic academic performance instead of a goal of proficient performance, which is the goal for all of our students" (Final Minutes, 12). Tachney spoke against the proposal of lowering the bar of proficiency by linking that move to settling for "basic" rather than striving for "proficient." In saying this, Tachney appealed to the Board's duty to ensure sufficient student learning. The Board ended up favoring Tachney's position over the Liaison Team's, and the motion was approved by a vote of 6-1-1" (Final Minutes, 13). It was through the comments of one politician that the concerns of a group of educators were silenced and the bar of "proficiency" set. No politician wants to be seen as one who settles rather than strives.

An important question was raised during this meeting: are the State's goals of proficiency attainable by the majority of California's students? The first question we have to ask is if the state standards are reasonable. We, as teachers, have a vast amount of standards we have to teach in a given school year, and the students have just as much to learn. W. James Popham, a professor at the

University of California at Los Angeles and a former test maker, has an interesting way of looking at the power that generated this circumstance:

> Much of the problem stems from the enormous number of content standards typically staked out by a state's curriculum specialists. Remember, these curriculum specialists are, in every sense of the term, specialists. And most specialists simply adore their fields of specialization. Thus, for instance, when a state-convened panel of 25 math teachers and math curriculum experts is directed to determine what mathematics content the state's students should master, you can safely predict that those specialists will want students to learn everything. That is, everything even remotely mathematical. And that's why many states have now approved literally hundreds of content standards to be mastered by students at given grade levels. As a consequence, there are still way too many curricular aims to teach in a given school year. (Trouble with Testing)

To top it all off, not only do we, as teachers, have the incredible job of making sure all of our students master each one of these objectives for our grade level, but we also have to assess whether or not students have mastered the objectives of the previous school year and, if not, teach those as well. This proves to be both taxing and discouraging, knowing that we had already accelerated the curriculum to get the current grade level standards taught.

I remember my second year teaching fourth grade at Green Tree East Elementary. In terms of reading, my students ranged from the first to third grade level. In math, they were just as diverse. When I looked at the standards, I wondered how I would ever get them to master all that the state had mapped out. I questioned why their previous teachers had not taught them all that was expected. In talking with a few, I found their task the previous years to be just as undaunting as mine. They were, what I would term very successful, to have taught and brought the students up to their current level of academic proficiency. Not only were they teaching students who had a tumultuous home life leading up to their entry into the public school system, but their home

lives continued to be not only unsupportive but also a hindrance to their academic advancement. Students were entering Kindergarten (if even they attended it at all) with no prior knowledge of colors, letters (or their sounds), and numbers. As the teachers madly scrambled to teach these basic skills, sending worksheets home for extra practice, nothing was being reciprocated; homework was left at home or returned untouched the next day in the child's backpack (or makeshift folder), parents did not attend conferences or return phone calls to discuss and work out a plan to help their child be successful, and teachers sat lonely during after school tutoring hours. This process continued in each grade level and gave me a good understanding of why my students were coming to me as they were.

In talking about the teaching of standards, many do not take the student's home life into account; a teacher's job is to teach, and if they teach effectively, students will learn. What they fail to bring into perspective is that there are three players in each student's game: student, parent, and teacher. A teacher can know what needs to be taught, map out the course appropriately, put their heart into teaching the concepts, and still have

some students not master the standards. The student is in the classroom for about seven hours each day. (Depending on their home life, they might only be their physically, not mentally.) The teacher carefully introduces and instructs students on the given standards for that day, sending them home with practice worksheets to further instill the concepts. After the student leaves her classroom, the teacher has no control. I have had students tell me they were out with their parents and did not get back home until eleven o'clock at night and had to go to bed instead of doing their homework (it seems outlandish, but I have had parents consistently confirm these reports). Not only do they not get the time to practice the previous standards taught, but then they have to learn a whole new batch of them while they sit only half-awake (sometimes asleep) in their chairs the next day. Then there are the children who have to worry about what, or if, they are going to eat, if Mom, Dad, brother, or sister are going to jail today, or whether they are going to have time to play and do homework or be stuck babysitting younger siblings while their mom is out trying to find a job. There are many factors a teacher deals with; a student is not always a ready vessel to pour

information into. This is a difficult situation for teachers when, to begin with, they do not even have adequate materials to teach the students when they are physically present in their classrooms.

Assessing Standards

Aside from effectively teaching the standards, we also need to ask ourselves if we are assessing the students' mastery of standards fairly and accurately. Since the results of state assessment are a report card to the nation, and the nation's justification of a school system on the road to reform, this seems like a reasonable question. Are students mastery of state standards adequately measured by our current state assessment? Politicians argue that standardized tests are both accurate and cost effective in reporting student acquisition of State content standards. Oppositionists tout the inaccuracy and educationally narrowing power of such assessments. So far, California, as well as many other states, have chosen multiple-choice standardized testing as a means to report progress—but why?

The idea of assessment as a means to improve the quality of education in the United States began with this bill: "Each state plan shall demonstrate that the State has developed and is implementing a single, statewide State accountability system that will be effective in ensuring that all local educational agencies, and public (schools) make adequate yearly progress" (Sec. 1111, [b][2][A]). The decree that states had to assess students' skills through the use of a "single, state-wide accountability system" set the stage for multiple-choice standardized tests. What better way to assure unbiased consistency than through a single, company-created and tried assessment? By signing this into law, President George W. Bush and his constituents agreed that assessments, and increased accountability for the results of the assessments, would best bring about educational reform. Robert Linn has a few ideas why we, as a nation, chose this road to travel:

1. Tests are relatively inexpensive - compared to changes that involve increases in instructional time, reduced class size, training and attracting better teachers, assessment is very low-cost.

2. Testing changes can be implemented relatively quickly – other school reforms may take years to implement, and it may take even longer to know if they have improved schooling.
3. Test results are visible and draw media attention – poor results in the first year of a new testing program are usually followed by increasing scores in subsequent years, giving the appearance that schools are improving. ("Standards-Based Accountability")

Regardless of the perceived motivation behind making assessment the measuring tool for educational success in each state, the nation has made state assessment and reporting the means by which a state must demonstrate its students' mastery of proposed standards. So, has it worked?

Secretary of Education, Rod Paige, in a memo to editorial writers on March 11, 2004, noted much improvement in education since the implementation of this law:

> It is undeniable that in the two years since enactment, NCLB is having what I consider a transformative impact on our public education

> system. For the first time in history, every state has an approved accountability plan to ensure academic proficiency for every child. Achievement gaps are being identified and addressed. The success of schools is now being measured on the academic achievement of all students so that children who need help aren't hidden in averages. Under-performing schools are getting the assistance needed to improve. (1)

He spoke of an increase in the number of states complying with the law, an investment of "more than $500 billion in K-12 education (nearly doubling the previous national expenditures on education)," and an assurance that schools will receive enough money to cover the expenditures for carrying it out (1). Paige uses words such as "transformative" and "first time in history" to bring home the idea that what has been happening is momentous and worth our efforts and money. What he fails to address is the fact that the increase in expenditures is going towards funding the state assessments and the management needed to ensure each state's compliance: not into the classroom where the funds are greatly needed, but into the

pockets of testing companies and politicians stepping into management positions. Another thing Secretary Paige leaves out is the results of state assessments: the results demonstrating how many of the State's students are meeting what they term "academic proficiency." It seemed like a good area for me to look into considering the attempted demonstration of student's success is what this law is all about. After researching the results of California's state assessment, I could see why he avoided this topic altogether. Students in California alone are falling significantly short of the "proficient" bar set by the State Board of Education. Politicians decided to discount the concerns of educators on California's State Board of Education's Liason Team who argued for an attainable goal (labeled "basic" by Tachney) and rather strived for something that has so far been proven to be unattainable. Though the test results show students in general making gains over the past two years, they are continuing to perform far below grade level standards.

According to the California Department of Education's Fall Submission of assessment results of 2003 to the National Board, the majority of our students are failing to meet the "proficient" bar of standards mastery.

Table 1. Students Proficient and Advanced

Grade	Subject	Percentage of All Students Proficient and Advanced School Year 02-03
2nd	Mathematics	52.4
	Reading/Language Arts	36.3
3rd	Mathematics	45
	Reading/Language Arts	33.1
4th	Mathematics	45.5
	Reading/Language Arts	38.9
5th	Mathematics	34.8
	Reading/Language Arts	35.5
6th	Mathematics	34.1
	Reading/Language Arts	35.4

(4-8)

Despite this data, State Superintendant of Public Instruction, Jack O'Connell boasted, "Across the state of California, we are seeing encouraging signs of revival in our schools. Test scores are up, class sizes are smaller, more highly qualified teachers are in the classroom, and additional classrooms are being built" ("News Release"). If our government is perceiving success in education since the enactment of this law, then the state assessment results can mean one of two, if not both, things: 1) our "proficient" bar is too high and, for the majority of our students, unattainable, or/and 2) our means of assessing student's mastery of state standards is inefficient. Politicians and teachers alike agree that creating and implementing the teaching of standards is essential to education, but assessing the acquisition of them is where it gets a little sticky.

According to the NCLB Act of 2001, the yearly assessment has to be a single plan implemented state-wide. What easier way to meet this mandate than with a standardized test? It would easy to ensure that all students were being assessed evenly and without bias across the state, and the creation of such an assessment

would certainly be the most cost-effective. But does the implementation of it improve student learning and report accurately the occurrence of such?

Improving Student Learning

The fact that a standards-based assessment, with state and national accountability attached to it, will be given each year definitely motivates teachers to focus on teaching the standards. The creation and implementation of these standards, as discussed earlier in this chapter, has a positive effect on state uniformity and educating our children. While it is apparent that ensuring state standards are taught has its benefits, one has to question the pressure of state assessment, and its effects on education as a whole.

The weight of everything we planned as a grade level was geared toward the ever-looming reality of the state assessment. We knew the timeline: when our students would need to be ready for the assessment of their acquisition of the hundreds of standards. The assessment of a year's worth of standards would be given two months before the end of the school year, to allow for time of reporting scores. What this stark reality called for was an

accelerated and laser-focused teaching mentality. All of the objectives had to be taught by winter break so that there was time to review and master them in January, February, and begin test-prep in March. We concentrated on teaching, more intensely, the language arts and math standards, those that would be assessed in April, and kept other "superfluous" activities for the last two months of the school year. This skill was learned out of dire straights; we needed to increase our scores to meet the AYP goal set for our school. Our government has decided that test results should be used to measure an increase or decrease in student achievement and thus measure the success or failure of a school. What they failed to realize was that they were creating a volatile playing field with players who had much at stake. Teachers, who fear losing their job, or administrators eager to meet State API requirements, can easily adjust learning opportunities to ensure growth. Amrein and Berliner point out some of these opportunities school sites have:

> After a state implements high-stakes testing policies, scores on the state's assessments often improve. Students can easily be trained so that scores on the state tests go up. For

> example, scores can be made to rise by narrowing the curriculum. Art, music, creative writing, physical education, recess, ROTC, and so forth are all reduced in time or dropped from the curriculum when schools need to increase their scores on the state tests. (Amrein and Berliner, 37)

Test results do not directly reflect genuine student learning. The increase in scores can mean that more time was spent teaching how to take a multiple-choice test, how to best guess answers, or how to pick the correct answer on paper without really knowing how you got there. But, as players on the field, we do what we have to do to meet our growth goals, so the state can meet theirs, and the much needed federal dollars will come in to supply us with what we will need to teach next year. It is a vicious cycle. But are students learning in the midst of our political games?

Sure (speaking from five years of teaching in the midst of state and national assessment), they are continuing to learn despite our shenanigans. They are learning standards, but in an unbalanced and focused environment. They are learning to get by and zone out

instead of being engaged learners. They are learning that paper and pencil are good substitutes for real-life experience. And, sadly, they are also learning about feelings of insufficiency and failure, in connection to education, at a very young age.

Teachers are focused on what the state wants them to teach: academic standards. They are trying their best to teach in a manner that is both interesting and stimulating for their students, but have to narrow the central focus to the important items, the standards that are given the most weight of importance (in terms of the number of questions) on the state assessment. According to Dennis, a teacher interviewed for the NCTE's article concerning the Impact of the MCAS (Texas' standardized test), stated that "teachers' curricula are now being guided by the test, rather than the state frameworks: 'We look at the media standards, and we can immediately rule all that stuff out…You look and you say, all right, there are fifteen questions on similes [on the test], all right, let's concentrate on this kind of thing'" (qtd. in Luna and Turner). This allows the test companies, those not intimately involved in education, to dictate what is

taught in schools. This also causes a lean towards pressing these standards again and again, so that all students could master them, and results in higher students learning how to zone out, instead of being actively engaged in their education.

In addition to the implementation of standardized test having an influence on which standards get taught with greater weight, it also affects how standards are taught. Since students will be assessed on their acquisition of skills with a pencil and paper, that is the most effective (talking in terms of assessment results) way of teaching them. If you want concrete results, teachers must create concrete learning. Instead of having students learn about area by physically working within our three dimensional world, we must teach them to multiply height by length by width of a figure displayed on the sheet in front of them. Because we are so test-focused, we often neglect the opportunity for genuine curiosity and learning. "(Researchers) have found that high-stakes tests cause teachers to take greater control of the learning experiences of their students, denying (them) opportunities to direct their own learning. When the stakes get high, teachers no longer encourage students to

explore the concepts and subjects that interest them" (Amrein and Berliner, 34). In teaching standards this way (dependent upon assessing standards this way), we are creating a generation of students that perform well on paper but are lost in the real world.

Another problem with state and national assessment is that students are acquiring a fear of failure. By earning low test scores, students are learning that they are "dumb" (speaking in students' terms).

> The federal legislators who overwhelmingly passed this act into law apparently assumed that high-stakes tests would improve student motivation and raise student achievement. Because testing programs similar to those required by NCLB already exist in many states, we can put that assumption to the test. Unfortunately, the evidence shows that such test actually decrease student motivation and increase the proportion of students who leave school early. (Amrein and Berliner, 32)

On a small scale, I see this frustration in my students' eyes every year. They dread the idea that they are going to have to take that test again. The only thing I can

offer them as they look at me for answers to their pleas of, "I don't understand" in concerning questions on the test, is a reassuring, "Just try your best." They are trying their best, for the most part, and their best is still not good enough. They are overwhelmed with fears of failing, and some just give up as a result. Students are looking at themselves through the mirror of state assessment and we must question whether it is an accurate reflective tool.

Examining Test Results

As we enter an era of state assessments, the results of which determines who is meeting the educational needs of all students in their state and gets federal funding in subsequent school years, it is important that we adequately measure our students' mastery of the state's standards. It is important that they reflect the academic proficiency of our students.

California has regularly changed its course in terms of picking a state assessment. For grades 2-6, last year our state tried out the STAR and CAT6 assessments, both under the blanket title SAT9. The STAR was added to the assessment barrel to better assess, directly, the

California state standards. The CAT6 was a normed-reference test; its purpose was to measure and compare California's students with their counterparts nationwide. Both were created by ETS (Educational Testing Services), the same company that created the junior high and high school yearly assessment and high school exit exam; it was a test-creating monopoly. After just one year of administering the CAT6, it was cut. This year, the students will be given only one main assessment: the STAR. As politicians continue to try to find the best means of assessment, students, teachers, schools, and district play on the field that is under construction.

It was just another school day. There were two diligent, hardworking secretaries busy at their jobs that could easily be divided among ten average working individuals, students filing through on their way to their home-room classes, and parents scheduling a change of transportation for their children in the afternoon, or picking them up early for a doctor's appointment. But the sounds of ringing phones, pencil taps, inquiring parents, and excited children couldn't drown out the anxious feelings surrounding the school. It was apparent. Just opening the aqua-blue office door could give you first

hints to something being out of the ordinary. Parents and secretaries were a little more on edge, highlighting the urgency of the situation, students seem to bounce off of the walls as they made their way through the crowded corridor, and the principal anxiously addressed the questions of teachers and secretaries while his mind apparently loomed elsewhere. This was not just another school day; it was a school day in May.

Success on the assessment was measured by a school's API. This way of reporting was different from what the students, parents, and teachers were used to. The API was shown in "percentile" points rather than "percentage." Instead of the students receiving a +89/100 score (percentage), they were placed, with the number they got right, on a linear scale. When all of the students in the state were placed on a scale, they were divided into groups and given a number representing their placement on the line (percentile). The score then served to tell the students where they stood on the line, compared to every other student taking the test, rather than their actual score on the test.

When all of the percentile scores were computed for each grade level, they are then sorted to the different schools and compiled together to represent the entire school's overall student performance on the test. From this base score each year, the state makes API goals for the next school year, increasing the score, previously attained, by a few points. So, each year the schools are expected to score better on the test than they did the year before. Attaining the API goal means your school is being successful, and teachers, schools, and districts are rewarded with money; falling short means you've not done your job. And now, under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, falling short means you suffer the consequences. The consequences include, after the 3rd year of not meeting the API goal, having to pay for the transportation of students who wish to go to another, better performing, school. After the fifth year of failing to meet the API goal, the state will intervene, taking over some or all of the school's decision making ("Program Improvement").

We are making monumental decisions based on the outcome of one state assessment and need to question whether it is fair and accurate in its dealings. As a teacher, I cannot discuss the content of the test, or my

direct dealings with it under punishment of losing my job. I can, however quote other's printed views, and so will take this opportunity to do so. Susan O'Hanian reported,

> A teacher, frustrated by threats of losing his job if he reveals what he knows about the inconsistencies and outrages of the SAT9, posted research findings on a test resistance website. His work indicates wildly inappropriate reading levels. He also points out that students taking the Graduate Record Examination or the Law School Admissions Test are given more time per item than is given to a 6-year-old taking the SAT9. ("Test Resistance Trail")

It makes one wonder whether this type of assessing is fair or accurate. A student who is concerned about the time she has to answer a question cannot fully devote her mental energy to answering it. And what about the student who has only five minutes to answer twenty-five more problems and so bubbles in answers at high speed—does that reflect her mastery of content standards?

The State chose to measure student's performance this way because it was streamline and concrete, not necessarily because it was efficient in assessing skills

and coming up with interventions to re-teach them. If you want a true assessment of students' skills, you must have several different means of assessing them: not just a one-type, one-shot deal. I have had students come to school distracted by things happening at home, tired, and/or hungry on testing days. I knew before they even started taking the test that it was not going to be a true assessment of what they had learned that year; one day to assess what was taught over several months? The idea itself seems outlandish. W. James Popham, a professor and former test maker, commented, "To pretend that a few tests, administered in an hour or two, can satisfactorily measure a state's myriad curricular aspirations is little more than assessment hypocrisy" ("Trouble with Testing"). Either one wants to know what students have learned and one creates a testing environment conducive to assessing them adequately, or one gets caught up in the politics of assessment and fails to seek counsel in how to get more accurate results. California is caught up in the politics. As it is, the time allotted for testing is a detriment to adequately assessing students' skills. By the time my students hit day four of the eight testing days they are spent. Their eyes start to glaze over and I

know, just as with physically exhausted athletes, accidents are just waiting to happen. Some would have you believe that all this effort is spent trying to see where the students are academically and how we can best meet their needs.

When the assessment results are returned to the districts, school sites, and teachers, we look at them to decipher where we were strong, where we fell short, and how we can better instruct our students in the upcoming school year. It gives us a good overall picture of how we are doing, but it falls short of giving us, and parents, a detailed picture of where students are individually: "Standards-based tests currently do not provide teachers, students, or students' parents with the sort of standard-by-standard results from which appropriate instructional decisions can be made" (Popham). I find this fascinating since the whole motivation behind this educational reform effort was to meet the needs of the individual student.

Maybe what California needs is a reform of state assessment. It is interesting to me that "the law does not specifically mandate standardized tests, so a few states plan to use local assessments, including classroom-based information, rather than state exams. This opens up

the possibilities of strengthening teachers' assessment capabilities and ensuring far richer information than can be obtained through one-time tests" (Neill). The law does specify, however, that the assessment needs to be uniform state-wide. To come up with a plan for accurate and precise measurement of our students' acquisition of state standards would require a concentrated effort of teachers, schools, districts, and politicians. This, of course, would mean the cost of assessment would increase dramatically, and then we would have to question whether we had enough money to begin this type of massive reform. Our concentrated efforts are needed, however, if we ever expect to genuinely assess and meet the academic needs of our schools and their students on an individual basis.

The NCLB Act calls for educational reform across the nation. It requires each State to come up with reasonable standards, determining what it considers to be "proficient" mastery of those standards, and assess student individually to either commend them for meeting the bar set, or provide additional assistance to help them achieve success. California created its standards, raised the bar, and assessed student's progress in meeting the set goals. The politicians have followed the law, setting

overseers of each department to make sure we are in complete compliance so that federal funds are not withdrawn. According to the NCLB Act of 2001, this type of compliance should produce a set of expected outcomes. We have increased monies spent in education nation-wide to meet the cost required to create, implement, and report on state assessment of content standards. So, are we on the right track? In chapter four I will explore whether the game plan of reform is working, from both our politicians' and teachers' points of view. According to politicians, funds directed to creating and assessing state content standards has been money well spent. They support the NCLB's drive to get highly-qualified teachers into every classroom (believing that good instruction results in substantial academic progress), to have 100% of students master 100% of the standards (according to objective and efficient tests) by 2013-14, and to assess each student in order to identify and address areas in which they are academically deficient. While agreeing to the importance of ensuring student achievement and success, teachers question how productive our current reform efforts are and make suggestions as to where state and federal dollars could be better spent.

CHAPTER FOUR

EXPECTED OUTCOME, PERCEIVED RESULTS, AND WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

Our nation, in passing the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, sang out in unison that our educational system was failing its students. In fact, we were ready to take incredible steps in our efforts to save it. It makes sense that the government was willing to begin expecting certain criteria from states and holding them accountable for growth considering their voters supported drastic measures. Shortly before the NCLB Act was passed, on a "2001 Phi Delta Kappan Survey-Question: What the public favors to do for schools not making progress to reach state standards, 32% said they would withhold state or federal funds, 54% favor not renewing the principal's contract, and 49% favor not renewing the contracts of teachers" (Dietel 4).

In light of the need to reform, politicians, in creating and signing the NCLB, made their recommendations, and expected outcomes of such, to improve education across the country. On its website, on the topic of NCLB, the

U.S. Department of Education argues that teacher certification makes better teachers, good instruction ensures substantial academic progress, state testing and national accountability helps students achieve academic proficiency, state tests are an objective means of showing student achievement and progress, tests adequately assess academic achievement gaps between disadvantaged and other students, and its goals of student mastery of state standards are fair and achievable (100% master of standards by 100% of the students - testing 95% of all groups - by 2013-14). However, one gets a unique, but limited point of view sitting in political chairs and meetings to discuss what steps can be taken to improve the quality of education; I do not think one can get an accurate picture without stepping into the classroom. Therefore, to balance the view, I have asked teachers to speak on each of the issues as well.

Teacher Certification

One main goal of NCLB is to get highly-qualified teachers into every classroom. States must fill a teaching position with someone who has been state-certified (that is, they have gone through the mandated

training, classes, and tests that prepare them to teach in a classroom). If districts fill them with non-certified teachers, they must ensure those teachers will be certified shortly after accepting the position. In California, to be certified, one must take approximately one year of schooling beyond their Bachelor of Arts degree, which entails classes on standards, classroom management, ethnic diversity, research, and lesson planning. In addition to taking these classes, the enrollee must also participate in student teaching: a time when she chooses a master (certified) teacher to work in a classroom with and learn under. During their tutored time in the classroom, they are also assigned a supervisor who observes and evaluates the student-teacher's performance within the classroom. In addition to this year of classes and practice, the enrollee must also take and pass the CBEST (California Basic Educational Skills Test) and, if she desires to teach in grades K-6 and her BA was not in liberal arts, CSET (California Subject Examination for Teachers) and RICA (Reading Instruction Competence Assessment).

I remember finishing my Bachelor of Arts degree in English and looking forward to becoming a teacher. I heard of people getting hired for a teaching position having just graduated from college and passed the CBEST and, if needed for teaching grades K-6, MSAT (now renamed CSET). I had passed these tests and, with the lure of receiving a paycheck, jumped into my own classroom with both feet. I was issued an emergency credential and began my journey as a teacher. Not only did I have the stress of learning the ins and outs of this new career, but I also had a full plate of requirements that led to my full teacher certification. It was during this first year teaching that I also took all of the credential classes, completed my student teaching (in another classroom), and passed the RICA. Moving towards complete certification this way provides a stressful situation, and I understand why the federal government is steering the states away from such madness.

Due to the overwhelming numbers of teachers entering the field of education under similar circumstances, the federal government, in the NCLB, has required that states take steps to assuring full-certification of all its teachers by the end of the 2005-2006 school year:

> No Child Left Behind requires local school districts to ensure that all teachers hired to teach core academic subjects in Title I programs after the first day of the 2002-2003 school year are highly qualified. In general a "highly qualified teacher" is one with full certification, a bachelor's degree and demonstrated competence in subject knowledge and teaching. The act also calls for all teachers of the core academic subjects to be highly qualified by the end of school year 2005-2006. (U.S. Dept. of Ed.)

With this goal in mind, Secretary Rod Paige spoke for the assessment of teacher's knowledge, but spoke against the teacher's workload of classes in teacher certification programs.

> To raise academic standards, the (Meeting the Highly Qualified Teachers Challenge: the first annual report to Congress of the state of teacher quality nationwide) report "calls on states to require prospective teachers to pass rigorous exams in the subjects they plan to teach" and "calls on states and institutions of

> higher education to revamp their teacher preparation programs and eliminate many of their rigid certification requirements, such as the massive number of methods courses. ("Report to Congress")

As we take a more detailed look at each step of the process of certification in California, the particular requirements of teacher certification will become clearer. We, as a nation (and the state of California), have elected government officials that have mandated the placement of highly-qualified teachers in every classroom. These officials have determined what it takes to be termed "highly-qualified" and set out guidelines for colleges to follow. I think it is important that we, as a nation, are aware of what is being expected of our teachers: the reality of them being overworked and their personal monies tapped before they even step foot into their classrooms. Let us begin by looking at teacher assessment.

In order to get or keep her job, an elementary teacher must take two, if not three tests. (Since the federal government is taking measures to encourage people in other professions to become teachers, I will discuss this subject in terms of three tests, considering those

other professionals probably did not get a BA in liberal arts.) Like me, many aspiring teachers will have to take the CBEST, RICA, and CSET. The CBEST is a "basic skills" test comprised of math, reading, language arts, and writing objectives. While some pass this test the first time, the majority have to retake certain sections until they get a passing score. The RICA assesses a teacher's ability to instruct her students in reading. While I see the need to ensure teachers have these "basic skills," I wonder if these assessments are any more efficient than any other standardized test. Many intelligent and successful (determined by their supervisors and/or their students' results on our state's assessment) teachers have feared losing their jobs because they could not pass one or both of these assessments. The same principle goes for the CSET, though the CSET is most assuredly the mother of all tests.

The weather was beautiful the morning I drove to the college site I was assigned to take the MSAT. All I knew was that it was going to be a long test: two hours of multiple-choice and three hours of essay covering all of the standards I was to have learned during my sixteen years of schooling. I could say at that point I was a

little skittish, but my true fears didn't materialize until I reached my destination one hour early, with enough time to talk to fellow test takers. They spoke of not passing one of the sections by one point and/or having to take one, if not both, sections several times before passing, each time having to pay over $200. It did not take long for me to realize I did not want to listen to anymore stories, and was thankful when the doors opened into the classroom where I was going to spend the next five hours of my life. I cannot speak about the test in detail, but if one could imagine how much information had to be assessed to keep an educated person in a classroom, completing a multiple-choice test, for two hours, one might be able to get an idea; the test covered all academic areas: reading, writing, math, science, social studies, art, and physical education. After that, I was given a ten-minute break only to return for the three-hour short essay section. When I handed in my test and walked out of the classroom, I did not have the emotional energy to care whether I passed or not. I had a hard enough time concentrating on my driving so that I could get home safely. My intellect had been spent.

While passing these tests did allow me bragging rights for the rest of my life, did the process assure that I was going to be a great teacher? In fact, I know of many who did not pass these tests who are just as good, if not better, as the teachers who did. Then why are is the government requiring those who desire to become teachers to spend exorbitant amounts of money and time on taking these tests? I expect it is a direct result of politicians trying to find an easy, concrete, and low-cost way of assessing teacher's academic "proficiency." The federal government made a mandate, and California found the easiest way to meet it. The problem with this action is that it is costing both districts and teachers more money. In implementing the NCLB we have created another avenue of spending; this money is not being directed to the classrooms short of supplies, but rather into the pocketbooks of management. State educational funds are being directed to district officials whose time is spent trying to ensure teacher certification. More teacher money is being spent trying to take and pass state assessments.

Besides being assessed intensively by "basic skills" tests, teachers must also attend classes and participate in the student-teaching process. In order to have a teacher credentialing program in California, a university has to create and submit a plan of instruction required for its students to obtain a credential. Since these plans differ slightly from each other, I will use the school I attended for my credential as the platform of reference: Chapman University. To obtain a teaching certificate, students must have/take four prerequisite courses, a total of twelve credits, as well as take an introductory block (nine credits), content area block (twelve units), capstone course (three units), and directed field work (twelve units) for a total of forty-six to forty-eight units (Chapman University College Catalog). The NCLB boasts that the process of teacher certification, all of the work and money paid for by enrollees, provides our schools with more qualified and prepared individuals.

When I began my credential classes, I was looking forward to becoming more "qualified." I was forewarned by fellow teachers not to expect too much; they told me that the most useful information I gathered would be from my

experiences in my own classroom. They told me that the classes were just another hoop I had to jump through; sadly enough, this turned out to be true. I spent four hours a night for each class listening to student presentations, watching videos, or discussing the text assigned for homework. I gleaned bits and pieces of applicable information, but surely not enough to warrant the hours I put in. I had to resign myself to the fact that my time, money, and desire to learn was being wasted on "seat time" (required attendance) and bureaucracy. Most of what I have learned about teaching has come from my sink-or-swim experience of being thrown into the classroom and collaborating with other teachers. We are asking teachers to invest time and money in certification classes and we need to question whether the outcome is worth our efforts.

When I asked fellow teachers whether they felt their "certification" made them better teachers there was a mixed reaction. While the majority (75%) of them felt that it did not, 25% felt it did. Some who spoke in favor of the process remarked on how it was an opportunity for them to get their feet wet and give them a baseline of knowledge and expectation for their students (teacher

interviews). Those who spoke against it said the classes were a waste of time and money, they did not take anything away from it, and that the things they learned didn't apply to the classroom (teacher interviews). Both sides spoke in favor of directed teaching (being a student-teacher), saying hands-on learning was the most helpful in preparing them for their own classrooms.

When I asked these teachers what suggestions they might have to improve the process to certification in California, they were not at a loss for answers. Some remarked that the state should work towards getting students into successful classrooms and schools in their directed teaching courses and having more control over who could be titled a "Master Teacher" (a certified teacher who opens her classroom for a student-teacher) (teacher interviews). Another comment made is that we should give student-teachers more opportunities to be in front of students; they should be at school for key points of the school year, such as the first day of school and parent conferences (teacher interviews). They also suggested that classes be more curriculum-specific and related to pertinent information, such as how to handle a classroom or write long-term lesson plans (teacher interviews). All

we would need to do is re-direct funds. Monies could be funneled to school sites where the fostering of student teachers would be taking place. Instruction to student-teachers could be given on an individual basis within the context of a classroom, students would benefit from having an aspiring educator in the classroom to aid in instruction, and the money spent on teacher certification would be given directly to the school site and filtered into the classrooms.

One thing both government officials and teachers agree on is, for the most part, good instruction results in substantial academic progress. The NCLB cites this as the reason to insist highly-qualified instructors are in each classroom by the end of the 2005-2006 school year. Of the teachers interviewed, 63% said that effective instruction will ensure learning for every child while 37% noted the outside factors that impact a student's ability to learn. Either way, I think all would agree that students benefit academically from having qualified teachers in the classroom. Instead of taking the government's and state institution's individual view on what makes a "qualified" teacher, we need to organize a board of successful teachers, administrators, and

government officials to determine what steps California should take in making the certification process a beneficial experience rather than a waste of time and money.

State Assessment

Due the perceived failure of the public schools to meet the needs of individual students under the accountability and direction of the state, the federal government has required that states, receiving federal funds, be held accountable by the reporting of standard-assessment results. On the topic of state assessment, the U.S. Department of Education website, on the topic of NCLB, makes some interesting points that inspire reflection: state testing and national accountability helps students achieve academic proficiency, state tests are an objective means of showing student achievement and progress, tests adequately assess academic achievement gaps between disadvantaged and other students, and its goals of student mastery of state standards are fair and achievable (100% master of standards by 100% of the students - testing 95% of all groups - by 2013-14) (U.S. Dept. of Ed.).

It is implied by the NCLB Act of 2001 that national reporting of the outcome of state assessments will result in students becoming more academically proficient; required state report cards will ensure that there are a set of standards taught and assessed at each grade level and students will benefit from the consistency and reinforced concepts of the tests. Laura Bush comments, "You are giving a test so you'll know what you need to do. You can't solve the problem unless you can diagnose it" ("First lady defends"). While accountability and concrete objectives create a clear and uniformed vision, standardized tests, written by companies not familiar with the classroom and balanced assessment, create a shift of educational practices. While you can argue that the assessment "holds teachers accountable for teaching the state standards," you also have to ask how this type of assessment affects the teaching of them (teacher interviews). "You are not teaching proficiency, you are teaching concepts. Test focused is not student focused. The test gives you a starting point but it does not prove proficiency" (teacher interviews). In fact, 88% of the teachers I interviewed do not believe the test itself ensures academic progress, but they do cite certain

benefits of it. If the results of the test are handled correctly, it is "helpful for instructing students in small groups," as they are grouped by determined ability, and "helps guide instruction" (teacher interviews). However, they also speak of detriments to education, such as having standards "crammed down your throat with so much hanging on it," "classifying students and teachers by one assessment," "stress level and format skew(ing) results," and the pressure that federal funds are dependent on the outcome of it (teacher interviews).

If so much is riding on the outcome of this assessment, we have to ask ourselves the test itself is "an objective means of showing student achievement and progress" (NCLB, U.S. Dept. of Ed.). This was a difficult question for the teachers I interviewed: some would say no, but then give reasons in support for its objectiveness, while others would say yes, and also cite ways in which it could be more objective. A few liked that standardized tests "left no room for teacher interpretation" and that this created an "unbiased report of students' abilities" (teacher interviews). One argued that "it is anglo/caucasion based" and the tests are "not written at grade-level ability" (teacher interviews). Others spoke of how the

"testing environment is a different atmosphere and not conducive for kids to show what they have learned," and that the tests "do not actually show what the child is capable of. It is mostly to show how teachers are not doing their work" (teacher interviews). Most agree that "it should not be the only means to measure progress and success" (teacher interviews).

I then asked for suggestions they had to improve the objectiveness and efficiency of the tests. They suggested that the test-creators "know the social demographics of the school they are sending the tests to" (teacher interviews). If they want a true assessment of students' skills, they should not make cultural differences another hurdle for the students to jump. Others suggested assessing student application of skills through a more "hands-on or open-ended questions" and having students demonstrate their knowledge, showing their work and the thinking process" (teacher interviews). They also suggested having teachers create and grade the tests, "making sure only the grade level standards are assessed," and giving the "tests at the end of the year instead of three-fourths of the way through" (teacher interviews).

The federal government created the NCLB because they wanted to make sure each student's academic needs were being addressed, and that no child would be left behind. They want each individual child to be taught, assessed, and brought to grade level standards: most importantly, the disadvantaged students. According to their website, the state tests "assess academic achievement gaps between disadvantaged students and other students" so that they may be identified and rectified (U.S. Dept. of Ed.). While the teachers agreed that the outcome of these tests for disadvantaged students are relatively accurate in showing the academic areas in which they were high or low, they did not think it was a complete and accurate assessment of their individual skills. "The test is just a piece of paper that shows at, above, or below standards. It does not show thinking process. For ADD and ELL students, they get overwhelmed and give up" (teacher interviews). The overall thought was that RSP students were not given enough time and allowances, and ELL students had the disadvantages of their language barrier/difficulties in completing the math sections. As a result, we are spending tax dollars to inadequately

assess the skills of disadvantaged students instead of using the money to buy the time and resources we need to better instruct them.

As we stand on this unstable and ever-changing ground of state assessment, the 2013-2014 school year quickly approaches. By that time, the federal government expects the state of California to have 100% of its students at 100% mastery of the standards - testing 95% of all groups (U.S. Dept. of Ed.). To the question as to whether this goal is fair and achievable, the teachers answered with a resounding, "No," sometimes in the disguise of "absolutely not" and "hell no" (teacher interviews). "Our state's standards are too high for that sort of thing," remarked one teacher. "If they want that, there's too much for a teacher to teach in 180 days. Kids come in behind and they're suppose to catch up? You have to build from where they start" (teacher interviews). In the light of these facts, it will be interesting to see how California is going to attempt to jump the bar they have set. Other states, already, are talking about making their goals of "proficiency" more attainable. "Either you're dumbing (the test) down to make it achievable or some

fail. You're not allowing people to be people." "There's not one business that performs at 100% with 100% of their staff" (teacher interviews). If the goal is unattainable, we are spending frivolously. Not only is our money being wasted paddling upstream, but we are not even supplying the paddles. Districts, site officials, and teachers are madly slapping at the water with their bare hands, thankful for the boat that is keeping them afloat, and we as a nation are losing ground.

According to highly-qualified teachers in California, this attempted reform, for the most part, is not living up to its own expected outcomes. If our desire is for our educational system to create a learning environment in which every child can succeed, our government needs to turn its ear to the professionals in the field of education.

Proposed Avenues of Reform

The United State's educational system needs reform and we need to find an effective means of bringing it about. While our federal and state government(s) have generated ideas of how to revamp the system, they have neglected the opportunity to collaborate with current

teachers, districts, and site officials. California needs to begin by "put(ting) effective teachers in the legislature. The people making the rules do not know what is going on in the schools," what are attainable goals, "or how to assess them to see if they are making those goals" (teacher interview). If you wanted a freshly baked cake for your party, you would not go see the butcher. Our road to reform needs to begin by seeking the council of those whose specialty is in the field of education, and who put their hearts into it on a daily basis. If we would turn an ear to these voices, we would hear them speak of local, even school-site based accountability, and the need for more resources, parental involvement, and smaller class sizes.

Who would better know the academic and social needs of its students than each school district or site? It would make sense, then, to give the power of creating the assessments of both teacher and student performance to local educational agencies. Teacher's performance could be assessed by the principals' visits to classrooms. "Make teachers accountable on school-site basis. Have principals visit classrooms and give feedback, instead of having people who are not even in the classroom or in the

field of education telling teachers you're not doing a good job" (teacher interviews). In addition, student's performance could be assessed by standards-based tests created by the collaborative efforts of teachers in each district. Monies would be directed to creating effective assessments of students' skills, those that are sensitive to the cultural and social diversity of a given area, while still concrete in assuring state standards are taught. District plans of assessment and their results could be created and submitted to the state, who, in turn, could submit it to the federal government. Money would no longer be spent creating inefficient assessments and so could be directed to classroom resources.

If we want state standards taught, we must be given the means to teach them effectively. Teachers should not have to wait until they have been teaching for five years to get adequate materials for their classrooms. Students need to be supplied with the basic materials and resources needed to learn each state standard. To accomplish this, officials at the district level who make financial and curricular decisions should be comprised of successful teachers who are rotated back into the classroom every two years. This will assure the insider's voice is preserved

and decisions made on the basis of classroom efficiency, not personal status or financial gain. To work towards the academic success of each individual student, we must work collaboratively and unselfishly.

We also need to look at the extent of parental involvement in each student's academic life. This topic held points of frustration and desired resolve in each teacher interview I participated in. Some spoke of the need of parenting classes in learning how to deal most effectively with their kids on both a social and academic level, "mak(ing) parents read with kids and help with homework" (teacher interview). Districts could offer early evening classes for parents to attend with their children to foster tutoring with homework and build up the family as a social unit. Many times I have met parents who shy away from being involved in their child's education because they feel uncertain about their ability to be successful in assisting them. Why not channel our monies to provide an environment that fosters learning. If the fear of failure were taken away, more parents would be involved. If there were a greater overall parental

involvement, teachers would be less involved in discipline problems and able to direct their energies to the class as a whole.

One other area in dire need of adjustment is class size. I have had parents come into my room and ask, "Are these all yours?" and "Don't you have an aide?" The amount of students per teacher, especially in the lower grades, is alarming.

> In 1996, California began a class size reduction program. Then-governor Pete Wilson announced that primary schools would receive $650 annually for each student (an amount later increased to $800) if they would agree to reduce class sizes in the early grades from the statewide average of more than 28 students to not more than 20 students in each class. (16)

This plan has since fallen to the wayside. There was a significantly marked increase of academic achievement of the students when there were twenty of them to one teacher, so why have such successful efforts been surrendered? Districts discovered there were not enough funds given by the state to support this type of program.

California followed the leading of Tennessee's project STAR and Wisconsin's SAGE program. "STAR investigators found that the students in small classes were 0.5 months ahead of the other students by the end of Kindergarten, 1.9 months ahead at the end of 1st grade, 5.6 months ahead in 2nd grade, and 7.1 months ahead by the end of 3rd grade" (16). The students in this program showed additional academic achievements as they progressed through school, including better grades, less drop-outs and retentions, an increased interest in foreign languages and college prep courses, and being included among the top 25% of their class (16). In Wisconsin's SAGE program, "their achievement scores are roughly comparable to those from Project STAR" and, as with the other study, "African American students have made relatively larger gains" (16). Where California fell short was in the amount of money it dedicated to this reform: only $800 per student as compared to the funding of SAGE's program at $2000 per student (16).

If we want true reform of our educational system, we need to think proactively and invest our money in teaching our students rather than spending it on large-scale, and inefficient assessments and reform efforts. Classrooms

must be supplied with at least the basic materials needed to instruct every student in the state's content standards. We should also direct our efforts and monies to providing these students with genuine learning opportunities and not squelch the natural desire to learn that is within each one of us. If we want to ensure highly-qualified teachers in every classroom, we need to invest our money in adequately training, retaining, and duly compensating the teachers who are already in the classrooms of the public school system. In the area of teacher certification, we need to direct teacher training, and the money for such, to school sites. The federal government's steps in assuring accountability for teaching the State's standards and full teacher-certification is a direct reflection of its citizens' voices; we have lost faith in the educational system. This loss calls for increased community involvement in the educating of its young citizens. We need to bring parents, teachers, school districts, and state officials to the table for discussion, because each is responsible and must be held accountable for the current state of our educational system. Let us stop wasting our energies and finances in trivial pursuit of who is to blame, and use them instead

to help carry the load, create effective programs that will fully diagnose and educate our students, and allow each to discover what it means to live in the land of opportunity, with all of its hopes and, if properly funded, attainable dreams.

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