

The future of assessment

Standardized testing now taken as a given in American education is an arcane form of information technology, a relic of the early years of the twentieth century. It was developed at the time when the mechanical hole punch and manual sorting with pins was state of the art information processing technology. While the statistics used for tallying and reporting results have become highly sophisticated, the multiple-choice technology of standardized testing has not changed since its invention. Among the more formidable obstructions to change in assessment policy is a belief, widely shared in this society, that whatever the deficiencies of standardized testing, there are no other practical ways to document educational progress, sort students, and evaluate teachers.

However, contrary to this widely held belief, there is no shortage of systematic evaluation methods for documenting and assessing teaching and school learning and for gauging the quality of academic and other forms of school learning. The digital microprocessor and desktop computer technology developed over in last fifteen years has transformed our technological capacity to collect and document students' writing, math, art, and a wide range of educational achievements without reducing them to a set of multiple-choice test scores. Though technology cannot replace human judgment, digital information technologies have enormous and as yet untapped potential for the development of information systems that foster democratic decision-making, and responsive, systematic, and locally conducted assessments. The current educational assessment policy, federal and state, must be reversed if we are to have a system of public education that serves our children, parents, and our communities, and strengthens rather than undermines our democratic institutions.

V 1.0 March 24 Drafted by Harold Berlak [hberlak@yahoo.com] a senior fellow at the Applied Research Center, Oakland CA [www.arc.org] and a fellow at the Educational Policy Unit, Arizona State University [http://educationanalysis.org/] May be reproduced and circulated.

Parents cannot exempt their children from CAHSEE and there are minimal legal exemptions for students with special need education or disabilities. Legal challenges of CAHSEE as a requirement for diploma are continuing. Students are not legally obligated to take the exit exam though the pressures are strong. Students who fail or do not take CAHSEE are eligible to attend adult school, or if over 18, a community college. They cannot transfer to a degree program or gain entry to a *state* college or university without a high school diploma. Students can take the GED to earn a high school diploma.

Mass refusal or boycott Difficult to pull off but very effective if widely supported by teachers and parents. Teachers who encourage waivers or refuse to administer the STAR tests may be subject to disciplinary action. The likelihood that districts will seek disciplinary action in any given instance is uncertain.

Parents and community members are free to advocate.

Should significant numbers of teachers, parents and students engage in a massive refusal or boycott of STAR or CAHSEE, local, state federal officials, and the press will certainly take notice, and respond.

An affirmative message

We favor educational assessment policy that:

- Supports and improves student learning and growth by helping teachers teach.
- Raises standards but does not impose a federal or state approved view of curriculum, pedagogy, learning, language and culture.
- Combats structural racism and enhances educational opportunities.
- Is developed collaboratively by teachers, with participation by scholars, writers, artists, parents, and local community members.
- Encourages development of school and community level initiatives for creating, locally appropriate context-sensitive assessments.

