



The

Phyllis Schlafly Report



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The Truth About National Testing

President Clinton is pressing ahead with his plan to nationalize public school curriculum through national reading tests for 4th graders and national math tests for 8th graders. Congressional opposition to national tests has been led by Senator John Ashcroft (R-MO) and Congressman Bill Goodling (R-PA), chairman of the House Education and Workforce Committee.

National testing would do nothing to give children a better education or teach them knowledge and skills. Its purpose is to consolidate Federal Government control over curriculum, bypassing parents, school boards, and state legislatures.

National testing would incorporate all the current education fads such as Outcome-Based Education, School-to-Work, Goals 2000, Political Correctness, nosy questionnaires about attitudes, and inputting personal information about every student onto government databases. The new mission of the public schools would be to coach children on how to pass the test. In the end, all children will get a passing score (so as not to damage their self-esteem) and none will be permitted to excel.

Why waste millions of dollars developing a new 4th-grade reading test when we already know, as Clinton told us many times, that 40% of third graders can't read? The problem isn't that children aren't *tested*, it's that they aren't *taught* how to read, write and calculate. Children should be reading independently by the end of the *first* grade and, if they're not, any talk about "high standards" is a deception because we've already succumbed to social promotion and grade inflation.

Clinton argues that math and reading standards should be the same in New York, Texas or Idaho. Not true! How to teach math and reading is highly controversial.

Testing for math is no longer as simple as asking what is 2+2. Will Clinton's national math test be based on Old Math, New Math, Whole Math, New-New Math, Algebra Lite, Fuzzy Math, or MTV Math? A bitter debate is taking place between those who believe that children should be expected to know the multiplication tables and those who argue that such skills are obsolete because students should be taught to rely on calculators.

In an Op-Ed article in the *Wall Street Journal*, Lynne

Cheney reported that Steven Leinwand, who sits on the committee overseeing President Clinton's proposed national mathematics exam, wrote an essay asserting that it is "downright dangerous" to teach students things like "six times seven is 42, put down two and carry the four." Leinwand thinks that, since some are able to master those computations and others are not, we must throw off "the discriminatory shackles" of computations. How can we have a national math test if those in charge think it is unfair for students to be expected to do arithmetic?

The gulf between the different systems of reading instruction is even wider and the passion of the two sides even more intense. Will Clinton's national reading test be written to test students who have been taught intensive, systematic phonics, or those who have been taught Whole Language?

"How Johnny Should Read" is the title of an article in the October 27th *Time* Magazine. It states that the National Assessment of Educational Progress reports that 44% of U.S. students in elementary and high school read below the "basic" level, which means they have "little or no mastery of the knowledge and skills necessary to perform work at each grade level." Remarkably, 32% of fourth graders whose parents both have college degrees also fail to reach the basic level!

The current scandal of illiteracy is due to the failure to teach phonics and the substitution of the fraudulent system called Whole Language.

The *Time* reporter visited a New York City school using Whole Language and found that the teacher covers up words in elementary school readers with Post-it notes and tells the children to guess the hidden words. Why does she do this? "So we can practice our skipping strategy," she replied. "That's your most important skill." (That may be a skill, but it's not the skill of reading.)

When *Time* asked the guru of Whole Language, University of Arizona Professor Ken Goodman, for research that confirms the value of Whole Language, he could not think of any. On the other hand, *Time* reports that "hundreds of studies from a variety of fields" support the value and necessity of "explicit, systematic phonics instruction."

The *Time* article does a good job of describing and illustrating the silliness and failure of Whole Language and of reporting that the only respectable, replicable research supports the urgent need to teach children intensive, systematic phonics. Thus, *Time's* illustration from a Whole Language book accurately shows how children are taught to guess at words from the pictures. The sentences are insufferably repetitious so that the child can "practice guessing" and "predict" what comes next; e.g.: "Green frog, green frog, what do you see? . . . Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see? . . . Yellow duck, yellow duck, what do you see?"

However, the author does not understand phonics or how it should be taught. This is not surprising since we now have a whole generation of adults who never studied phonics and teachers who don't know how to teach systematic phonics. *Time's* illustration of a phonics book published by Scholastic reflects this misunderstanding of phonics instruction.

Thus, the *Time* article falsely says, "In the 1970s, . . . students filled in endless phonics work sheets and read inane basals . . ." In fact, phonics disappeared from public schools back in the 1950s, and the "inane basals" used in the 1970s were the progeny of *Dick and Jane*. Basal readers used the earlier version of Whole Language, then called the look-say or whole-word method (e.g., "Look up, look down. See Dick run. See Jane run.").

Don't be under any illusion that the facts, the research, and the proven failure of current methods will cause the public schools to change their ways and start teaching phonics to children. As *Time Magazine* states, Whole Language advocates "hold powerful positions in teachers colleges and educational bureaucracies, [and] are fighting phonics with determination," accusing parents of being "pawns of the Christian right."

Much money and many jobs are at stake in the present failed system. If children are taught to guess at words by looking at the pictures and to memorize a few dozen words, then the publishers are able to sell a series of readers that use those same words over and over again, adding a few more words at each grade level. If children are taught to read by phonics in the first grade, the child can read any book and is not tied to the controlled vocabulary of one publisher's series.

If children are promoted to the third or fourth grade without learning how to read, then many jobs open up to staff the remedial reading bureaucracy. And don't forget the billions of dollars that have been wasted in Title I teaching of disadvantaged children, plus the extra cash that flows to the schools for the students labeled "learning disabled."

Parents who want their children to read should teach them at home — preferably *before* they are taught bad habits at school. Fortunately, *First Reader* is a wonderful system for doing exactly that. (1-800-700-5228, \$79.95 plus shipping) Parents who want to know whether or not their children *can* read should use my *First Reading Test* — it's easy to administer at home and takes only about a

half hour (available from Eagle Forum for a donation in any amount).

Clinton's proposal for national tests unearthed one more hot controversy: whether the fourth grade reading test will be given only in English or in immigrants' native languages, too. School districts in Los Angeles, Houston and El Paso, which have extravagant bureaucracies spending taxpayer funds for "bilingual education," fear that a national reading test will expose their failure to teach children to read English even by the fourth grade.

Control of Tests = Control of Curriculum

There is absolutely no way to have the national tests and the "real, meaningful national standards" that Clinton demands unless the students who take the tests have been taught the subject matter to be tested. That's why national tests inevitably require a federal curriculum, plus federal standards for textbooks and teachers.

National math and reading tests would become the control mechanism by which the federal Department of Education would determine the content of local school curriculum. It doesn't really matter whether the feds actually prescribe the content and the methodology, or whether the feds just write the tests and then the local schools "teach to the test." Senator John Ashcroft is correct when he says, "Once the Federal Government is using tests to shape curriculum, parental control through local school boards will be doomed."

"The National Standards for United States History" published in 1995 are a good example of how politics can control both standards and tests. Financed by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the U.S. Department of Education, these "standards" turned out to be so anti-American that they were denounced by the US Senate by a vote of 99 to 1.

These "standards" replace historical fact with multiculturalism (*i.e.*, a downgrading of Western civilization), leftwing political correctness, and radical feminism. George Washington is mentioned once, but Senator Joseph McCarthy 19 times (all unfavorably, of course). Paul Revere, Thomas Edison, the Wright brothers, and General Robert E. Lee do not rate any mention, but MTV, Madonna, Murphy Brown and Roseanne do. Students are instructed to study the National Organization for Women and to read *Ms.* magazine and books by Betty Friedan and radical feminist ideologues.

Even though these "standards" were devastatingly discredited, they are widely used by textbook publishers and school district curriculum committees.

How tests can be used for political indoctrination is further illustrated by the latest College Board Advanced Placement Examination in United States History. It requires the student to spend 45 minutes writing an essay based on six reading selections, two pictures and two cartoons, all of which toe the feminist line about how badly American women were allegedly treated from 1890 to 1925.

One of the cartoons shows a woman on the ground chained to a large ball labeled "Unwanted Babies." The

other cartoon depicts a bunch of cigar-smoking, pot-bellied men saying, as they point to a group of women going to church, "Let 'em sing an' pray — we got th' votes and make th' laws."

The test booklet makes it clear that "high scores" will depend on the student citing what the instructions call the "evidence from the documents." It is obvious than any student so foolhardy as to advance an opinion contrary to this so-called "evidence" would not receive a good score.

Widespread cheating is another problem connected with national testing. Recent big front-page spreads in both the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* revealed that cheating on tests is a national scandal, and that cheating is rampant not only among students, but among teachers.

The nation's biggest testing company, Educational Testing Service (ETS), confirms that large-scale cheating is going on but doesn't make any big deal about it. The *New York Times* reported that a 145-question test, with answers, had circulated freely among teachers ahead of time for several years, and ETS knew it.

In the face of widespread illiteracy, grade inflation, the teaching of self-esteem rather than knowledge and skills, and the dumbing down of the curriculum through Outcome-Based Education, Clinton is demanding that the federal taxpayers put up the funds for every student to have two years of college. Clinton makes emotional pleas on television about his goal of sending every teenager to college.

Yet, the Department of Education reports that about 29 percent of freshmen take at least one course in remedial reading, writing or math. Shockingly, 78 percent of all two- and four-year colleges offer remedial courses.

Why are we forced to pay the bills to send teenagers to college who can't do college work? One easy way to address this, as well as the testing problem, is for colleges to require entrance exams and refuse to admit students until they are ready to do college work. But colleges are not about to forfeit the immense revenue they get from federal student loans to students who must take remedial courses and then spend five or six years in college. Federal aid to colleges has resulted in a dumbing down of colleges just like federal aid to elementary and secondary schools has corrupted their curriculum.

National Tests Allow Brainwashing Students

President Clinton used veto threats to try to browbeat Congress into accepting national testing of schoolchildren because he knows that whoever writes the tests controls the curriculum, and his Administration's goal is, indeed, national control of classroom curriculum. Part of the curriculum plan has already been published by Clinton's Council on Sustainable Development in its 1997 Task Force Report called Public Linkage, Dialogue, and Education.

This report is explicit and straightforward. It calls for a "purposeful refocusing of the nation's education system," not merely to teach sustainability, but to use sustainability as a catalyst for the "restructuring of

educational institutions, curricula, and teacher training." Schools are to be refocused in order "to integrate the tenets of sustainability into our education institutions," which is defined as "a specific vision of environmental education." "Tenets"? Is sustainability some new religion?

The Council's plan for "curriculum development" calls for an "increased number of curricula, material, and training opportunities that teach the principles of sustainable development." Students are to be taught to deal with the "international factors" that affect our "transition to a sustainable society."

And what are those international factors? The premise of "sustainability" teaching is that Americans should feel guilty because we consume 25 percent of the earth's resources even though we are only five percent of the earth's population. We are expected to be embarrassed because one American uses as much energy as three Japanese, or six Mexicans, or eight American Indians.

To achieve "sustainable development," Americans are supposed to reduce our "resource consumption." And, since 35 percent of our resources is consumed in the home, households are expected "to make changes in the way they live."

"Resource consumption" is what makes American homes such pleasant places in which to live and work. We enjoy single-family dwellings that are heated in the winter, cooled in the summer, and equipped with electric lights and a dozen or more electric or gas appliances.

We achieved this high standard of living through hard work in a free society. It is outrageous to make schoolchildren feel guilty about it and believe that we should submit to taxes and regulations in order to redistribute our wealth to the rest of the world, but that's the aim of Clinton's Council.

The report traces the lineage of its sustainability notions from the 1972 Earth Summit in Stockholm, through the 1975 Belgrade conference that defined the goal of environmental education, and Agenda 21, which was adopted at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Agenda 21 commits all nations to set national goals to conform to exotic global plans for protecting the environment.

The Council lays out three specific objectives for its "sustainability" curriculum: to ensure that its notions about sustainability "become part of the mainstream consciousness," to ensure that its "dialogue" produces "consensus" (predetermined by the Council, of course), and to "organize groups to act on issues related to sustainability." As the report says, "education for sustainability must involve everyone."

The Council unabashedly plans to use the schools to recruit and energize activists for sustainability politics. The report makes no secret of the political objectives of its so-called work in the schools: "Mandates such as Agenda 21 must trickle down and be incorporated into formal and nonformal educational institutions through curricular and operational changes."

The sustainability curriculum has little or nothing to do with teaching science or factual information. The report makes clear that "environmental education departed from science education by calling for a strong social component."

The "social component" means teaching "attitudes, motivations, and commitments to work on problems." "Citizenship skills" are redefined as "skills to organize groups to act on issues related to sustainability."

The report makes clear that the goal of all this refocusing and restructuring of the schools is to indoctrinate students, "kindergarten through higher education," with the Council's views about "social equity." The benchmarks for how the sustainability curriculum interrelates with "social equity" involve setting so-called "voluntary standards," which would then serve as models for subsequent "requirements."

This Council report lays bare one facet of the federal curriculum which the Clintonian liberals are determined to impose on America's schoolchildren. It is blatant brainwashing in the classroom to promote Clinton's political agenda such as, for example, the implementation of Agenda 21 by the Climate Control/Global Warming Treaty he plans to sign in Kyoto.

Sleight-of-Hand by Semantics

The jargon used by public schools administrators is usually unintelligible to parents. Many expressions are deliberately used by educators to convey one meaning to their associates and a very different meaning to parents.

A prime example is "Outcome-Based Education," the most avant-garde public school fad during the last ten years. Don't we all want schools to identify outcomes and move forward to achieve them? The trouble is that parents expect outcomes such as being able to read independently by the end of the first grade and being able to recite the multiplication tables by the end of the third grade. The schools, on the other hand, project such controversial outcomes as "being an environmentally responsible person," "accepting diverse lifestyles," and "rejecting stereotypes."

When parents try to find out what their children are being taught, the schools respond with, "We're teaching understanding rather than facts" because "mere facts are soon outdated." A variation of this line is, "We're teaching children how to learn rather than what to learn." Or, we're teaching "learning to learn."

But a lot of facts are not outdated at all. Children need to be taught a great many essential facts if they are to develop understanding of the world around them.

The schools' curious animosity toward teaching subject-matter is further revealed in the slogan "We're teaching the child not the subject." Is there some secret difference, known only to people with degrees in education, between teaching Jimmy arithmetic and teaching arithmetic to Jimmy? Many parents have reasonably concluded that, under the prevailing ideologies, Jimmy won't learn any arithmetic at all.

Other buzz words that disguise the avoidance of

teaching facts and subject-matter include "critical thinking" and "higher-order-thinking" skills. But how can one engage in critical thinking until one knows some facts to think about? "Developmentally appropriate" is a slogan used to allay parents' concerns and conceal the fact that children aren't learning what they should be expected to learn at given grade levels.

"Progressive" is the word used to describe the philosophy that originated with John Dewey and the Columbia Teachers College at the start of the 20th century and has held sway ever since. Outcome-Based Education is completely consistent with the Dewey philosophy of making socialization the goal rather than individual achievement. How can something be "progressive" that has been in place for 90+ years with obviously declining results?

Those who want to learn more about how the public school system has failed disadvantaged children and thereby fostered social inequalities should read E.D. Hirsch Jr.'s book, *The Schools We Need*. The author of the best-selling *Cultural Literacy* has produced an impressive critique of our public educational system which, he says, is "among the worst in the developed world."

Hirsch explains and defines the public schools' deceptive vocabulary. He makes a broadside attack on the prevailing pedagogical fads that "process" should take priority over the acquisition of knowledge, that teachers do not need to know the subjects they teach, and that it is unnatural and unfair to challenge children academically through content-based curricula.

Hirsch argues that requiring children to learn a core curriculum, using methods that emphasize hard work, learning facts, and passing tests, is the best and probably the only way to reduce social and economic inequalities. Neither more money nor "school choice" will do the job. The children from disadvantaged families need a core curriculum with real content if they are to become successful citizens in the information-age civilization.

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<http://www.eagleforum.org>

eagle@eagleforum.org