

LWGLC Unit Meeting, Education Study Committee Work: NM State and Federal Government Regulations

Topic: Mandated Testing of Students *Presented by Erika Graf-Webster*

- Federal funding for education established in 1965's "Elementary and Secondary Education Act" (ESEA)
- Testing mandated in 2001, in "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB), a re-authorization of ESEA
- Every student – grades 3-12 – to be tested annually via standardized tests; results reported to US Dept. of Education
- Tests are developed by **each state**, based on federal guidelines
- Tests are multiple-choice, computer-scored
- When used to make life-impacting decision, are termed "high stakes testing"

Uses of Standardized Test Results

1. Ranking of students, identification of "high" performers, "poor" performers
 - a. Pros – practical and objective rating of students, sets expectations for students, promotes improvements in teaching the core skills of math and language
 - b. Cons – does not take into account individual student characteristics that affect test performance: socio-economic background, disability, test anxiety, language difficulty, ...; poor performers are punished; does not identify improvement made by student
2. Identification of good schools, bad schools, schools that "need help"
 - a. Pros – makes schools accountable, enables comparisons among schools
 - b. Cons ("high stakes" testing) – poorly performing schools are punished – resources taken away, sometimes schools are closed altogether
3. Evaluation of teachers
 - a. Pros – essentially NONE
 - b. Cons - lots of factors go into making a "good" teacher, student performance on standardized testing is a very small factor; affects negatively how and what teachers teach

Standardized Testing and the US Education System

- Only math, language and some science knowledge is tested
- Testing highlights "failure" of schools, teachers, students – failure has emotional toll and is punished
- Affects curriculum: Schools are incentivized to concentrate on math and reading, drop other subjects that would develop critical thinking, problem solving, creating good citizens
- Teachers feel strong pressure to "teach to the test", or even to cheat (Atlanta scandal – 178 teachers and principals accused of cheating)
- Tests only test knowledge, do not test ability to think or problem solve; promote "rote" teaching, eliminate creativity in the classroom
- Assessment of the progress of students and schools over time would be a much better measure than yearly standardized tests of math and language skills (LCPS use of "Measures of Academic Progress" tests)
- In the aggregate, enables comparison of US education system to that of other countries
- Movement towards more balanced testing – knowledge plus task performance (essays, etc.) by US – Obama administration vision of testing, consortium of state governors adopting "Common Academic Standards"