

Introduction:

MSA's, PSSA's; no matter where you are from, most states have a standardized test in which students are evaluated for proficiency in reading comprehension, English, and math. These tests are not only catered solely to "the average" student, they also create an environment that sees students merely as a number. Standardized tests also determine how schools get federal funding. Socio-economic status is the number one indicator of standardized test scores. Schools populated by students with more money get better ratings, and thus get more money. The problem with this cycle is that better schools keep accumulating funds to improve themselves and their students. Schools with less funding are not performing to the level where they are getting the funds to provide students with better resources to make better students. Good schools are getting better. Less adequate schools are getting worse. Another problem with the current system is that students are not given the chance to show proficiency in other subjects. Just because a student is not above average in English or math, does not mean that they are not excelling in school overall. These tests are not catering to the whole student; the student who is a scientist, an artist, an athlete, a historian, a critical thinker. We propose that not only this flawed system of funding distribution should be changed, but that the system of standardized testing should be reformed in a way that where a student excels has a chance to shine through as well.

In 2001 the Bush Administration created No Child Left Behind. It proposed the idea of standards-based education reform, or the creation of a measureable, set standard for students to be expected to reach. NCLB mandates that each state develop assessments in basic skills. Technically these assessments are optional for states to develop and implement, however, the act asserts that any state that refuses to implement these tests will no longer be given federal funding

for education. There is no set national standard or exam, instead, each state was required to create their own standards and policies. While education is not technically under the jurisdiction or Constitutional control of the federal government, NCLB began a new era where the dominating player in education is the federal government. Local schools and school boards are controlled by the current national administration through standards of annual yearly progress, theoretically optional testing, teacher qualifications, and funding restrictions.

While the original purpose was to encourage schools to make sure students were performing at certain levels, the public school sector fell into many traps. Teachers started teaching to the test and abandoning traditional pedagogy. Our nation's educators were basing their methods on a fear of budget cuts and school closings. Also, although the intention of making a standardized test was to even the playing field for students, the reality is, the playing field is not even for schools. If a student starts out with a disadvantage because of their school, a factor over which they have no control, we cannot reasonably expect them to end up on an even level with those who have been given a serious advantage through their school.

In addition NCLB gave too much power to individual states. States created the test and created their own ranking, thus still creating an unfair playing field when state funding is distributed. The system became one that measured school and teacher competency solely by students' test scores. A school is considered successful if students score above proficiency, and virtually no other factors are taken into consideration. Schools are no longer rewarded for excellency, or for achieving a level of proficiency higher than what their economic situation would suggest. Each school's test scores are examined for Adequate Yearly Progress, which means either achieving proficiency or making a massive stride towards proficiency if it has not

been reached in that school. There are harsh penalties for not meeting AYP, including teacher replacement or eventually even school closing.

Race to the Top, created by the Obama administration, is a \$4.35 billion dollar contest in which schools could accumulate points by meeting certain standards in an annual professional performance review and thus gain funding. The breakdown for the way this system works is as follows: “State applications for funding were scored on selection criteria worth a total of 500 points. In order of weight, the criteria were¹:

- **Great Teachers and Leaders (138 total points)**
 - Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance (58 points)
 - Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals (25 points)
 - Providing high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals (21 points)
 - Providing effective support to teachers and principals (20 points)
 - Improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs (14 points)
- **State Success Factors (125 total points)**
 - Articulating State's education reform agenda and LEAs' participation in it (65 points)
 - Building strong statewide capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain proposed plans (30 points)
 - Demonstrating significant progress in raising achievement and closing gaps (30 points)
- **Standards and Assessments (70 total points)**
 - Developing and adopting common standards (from the Common Core State Standards Initiative) (40 points)
 - Supporting the transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments (20 points)
 - Developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments (10 points)
- **General Selection Criteria (55 total points)**
 - Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charters and other innovative schools (40 points)
 - Making education funding a priority (10 points)
 - Demonstrating other significant reform conditions (5 points)

- **Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools (50 total points)**
 - Turning around the lowest-achieving schools (40 points)
 - Intervening in the lowest-achieving schools and LEAs (10 points)
- **Data Systems to Support Instruction (47 total points)**
 - Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system (24 points)
 - Using data to improve instruction (18 points)
 - Accessing and using State data (5 points)

In addition to the 485 possible points from the criteria above, the prioritization of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) education is worth another fifteen points for a possible total of 500.^[1]

While this also has good intentions, it created a trap where schools that already had the money and resources were getting larger chunks of this reward because they are accumulating more points. Schools with less resources had fewer opportunities to gain points, leading to funding being much more difficult to obtain.

Background: Sarah Johnson

Under former President Bush's No Child Left Behind (NCLB), schools are evaluated based on whether or not they meet adequate yearly progress (AYP). This system was created by the Bush administration to determine how well schools are educating students and is determined by many factors including:

- State tests must be the primary factor in the state's measure of AYP, but the use of at least one other academic indicator of school performance is required, and additional indicators are permitted;
- For secondary schools, the other academic indicator must be the high school graduation rate;

- States must set a baseline for measuring students' performance toward the goal of 100 percent proficiency by spring 2014. The baseline is based on data from the 2001-02 school year;
- States must also create benchmarks for how students will progress each year to meet the goal of 100 percent proficiency by spring 2014;
- A state's AYP must include separate measures for both reading/language arts and math. In addition, the measures must apply not only to students on average, but also to students in subgroups, including economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, English-language learners, African-American students, Asian-American students, Caucasian students, Hispanic students, and Native American students.
- To make AYP, at least 95 percent of students in each of the subgroups, as well as 95 percent of students in a school as a whole, must take the state tests, and each subgroup of students must meet or exceed the measurable annual objectives set by the state for each year (Department of Education, 2001).

NCLB mandates that when a school does not meet AYP the state must hold them responsible. The consequences for not meeting AYP are detailed below.

“If the school's results are repeatedly poor, then steps are taken to improve the school.

Schools that miss AYP for a second consecutive year are publicly labeled as being "in need of improvement" and are required to develop a two-year improvement plan for the subject that the school is not teaching well. Students are given the option to transfer to a better school within the school district, if any exists.

Missing AYP in the third year forces the school to offer free tutoring and other supplemental education services to struggling students.

If a school misses its AYP target for a fourth consecutive year, the school is labelled as requiring "corrective action," which might involve wholesale replacement of staff, introduction of a new curriculum, or extending the amount of time students spend in class.

A fifth year of failure results in planning to restructure the entire school; the plan is implemented if the school fails to hit its AYP targets for the sixth year in a row. Common options include closing the school, turning the school into a charter school, hiring a private company to run the school, or asking the state office of education to run the school directly.

The act requires states to provide "highly qualified" teachers to all students. Each state sets its own standards for what counts as "highly qualified". Similarly, the act requires states to set "one high, challenging standard" for its students. Each state decides for itself what counts as "one high, challenging standard," but the curriculum standards must be applied to all students, rather than having different standards for students in different cities or other parts of the state."

As a result of these sanctions, the biggest financial penalties for schools are not losing a certain amount of funding, but being told how to spend their funds. While NCLB tried to address the achievement gap, they fell short of doing the task at hand. While on the bright side, good schools were embarrassed into improving subgroup scores; many Title 1 schools (schools with greater than 35% low-income students) have not had the same improvements. This is because the system they rely on compares apples to oranges. Studies show that the number one indicator of how well a student will do on a standardized test correlates directly with their socioeconomic status. In many of the failing schools, the majority of the students come from low-income families. Many of these students start off their educational careers at a disadvantage and the problem they have cannot be remedied as easily as NCLB requires. This is not aided by the fact

that many teachers at these schools admittedly teach to the test. If a student does not understand the alphabet and what sounds each letter is supposed to make, they will continuously struggle with phonetics. These same students are compared with high-income children who start off their educational careers reading at advanced levels. To make matters worse, teachers are unable to be effective with these students because in order to take the time out to address the base issue, they must forget about the test. As a result of NCLB, low-income students are ultimately forgotten and left behind while their wealthier counterparts continue to advance.

After much criticism of NCLB, President Obama's administration decided that schools needed to be more aggressive with their changes. President Obama came up with Race to the Top (RTTT) as an incentive to bring about this change. Each state was given the opportunity to compete for a \$500 million stipend to improve their schools. In order to receive the stipend, all school districts in the state must agree to meet all of the policies in RTTT. For example, schools must become more transparent with how they are spending their money. They must update websites monthly detailing how every single dollar is spent. While this seems like a good idea, schools end up paying huge lump sums on website maintenance. This money could be used toward buying books, computers, etc.

Race to the Top also changes the way in which teachers are evaluated. While in the past, teacher evaluations were determined mostly by their in-class performance, under the reform their evaluations are based off of student test scores. To make matters worse, their evaluations are made public for all to see, leaving teachers open to receive public criticism, or in some extreme cases, even death threats when their students do not perform well. Also, pay increases are directly correlated to student performance, which leads to an increase in teaching to the test. In

addition to this, consequences under RTTT will lead teachers to abandon lower performing schools for those where they believe will see more improvement.

RTTT requires that states alter their school systems to even be considered for money, however only Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Washington D.C. have received grants. For this reason, one of the biggest problems with RTTT is that the funding is almost impossible to receive.

Under these policies schools must live with the ominous threat of shutting down, restructuring, or becoming charter schools. All of this is determined by a single multiple-choice standardized test that assumes all children are the same and should be on the same level no matter the circumstance. The system is broken and is based off of Utopian ideals that don't pan out in the real world.

Distribution of Funds Policy: Rachel Sommer

Originally upon examining both No Child Left behind and Race to the Top it seemed as though the clearest solution would be to try to find a middle ground between the two policies. However upon further inspection it was determined that there was no reason to attempt to find a middle ground between two failing strategies. In order to fix the flaws with both plans we are proposing an entirely new strategy for the distribution of federal education funds.

As part of our research for the policy, we interviewed Dr. Sleeker, a Penn State professor an education division head who also happens to be leading the national civilian movement against standardized testing. One of our first questions was to ask Dr. Sleeker what his biggest

issue with the current system is. He replied that the main flaw with the system is that scores will never reflect the motivation or inherent intelligence of students nearly as much as it reflects the socio-economic status of the family that the students came from. Therefore as a nation he believes we have wasted three trillion dollars inventing and implementing a system to tell us one piece of information about students that we already know; their socio-economic status.

Almost all educational researchers who have looked at the phenomena of standardized testing have discovered the alarming fact that the number one indicator of scores on these tests is the financial status of the student (Kohn). The pattern continues up to the level of schools, with schools in affluent areas nearly always having a higher average on standardized testing than schools in poor or troubled areas. There are a variety of reasons for this. Perhaps the most glaring is that students in poor families have not had the same introduction to or emphasis on learning as students from wealthier families. People who are working three jobs just to put food on the table are not going to be able to buy workbooks and tutors for their children, and understandably so. Students from families like this might also have to sacrifice their studying and homework time to work and bring home income that the household needs to survive. A 2005 study by the RAND Corporation found that one in five children live in poverty, and that poverty has an incredibly high correlation to a lack of school readiness. The study found that children who live in poverty-stricken areas or who come from low-income families are at a much higher risk of entering the school system with an under-developed level of intellectual, emotional, and social readiness. The study also found that not only do students from these backgrounds enter school with a lower level of readiness, but they also progress at a slower rate. So these students begin with a patent disadvantage that only grows over time, leaving them with a development gap that gets harder and harder to combat as they get older (RAND).

Another example is that students from poor families have a different set of priorities, where schoolwork simply cannot be their biggest concern. It seems a bit unrealistic to expect a student who does not know where their next meal is coming from to worry about how many puppies Sally has on a multiple choice math problem. Emotional disturbance or instability is also a major factor in the priorities of students, and this is regrettably more common in poorer areas (RAND). We need to recognize that students have more immediate and overwhelming concerns than their standardized tests or even their daily learning, and we need to address these issues as a system and a community. It is narrow-minded and irrational to expect that students will be able to overcome these crippling obstacles and simply brush all their disadvantages aside and rise above. One of the most successful school systems is the Finnish system, which makes an effort to look at the whole student and address their immediate needs before they can begin to try to teach and eventually test these students (Halinen and Jarvinen). Each school offers guidance and counseling services, as well as programs designed to support the physical and psychological health of all students. The system we have in place in this country currently is taking funds away from schools that have low average test scores, which correlates to having students with a low average family income. Instead of trying to give extra funding to the schools that could put it to good use by providing a free breakfast or healthcare to the students, we are taking away funding from these schools. This is quite clearly counterproductive if we are trying to raise test scores for all students. There needs to be a system that takes care of students and puts their priorities in perspective, instead of glossing over the fact that these students cannot help their status and expecting that they pull themselves up by their bootstraps.

In order to address the problem that the current system neglects the all-important aspect of socio-economic status, we have developed a tier system to distribute federal education funds.

The tier system will take into account the major aspects that affect a student’s performance on standardized tests and will stop punishing students and schools for factors out of their control.



Figure 1: Tier System

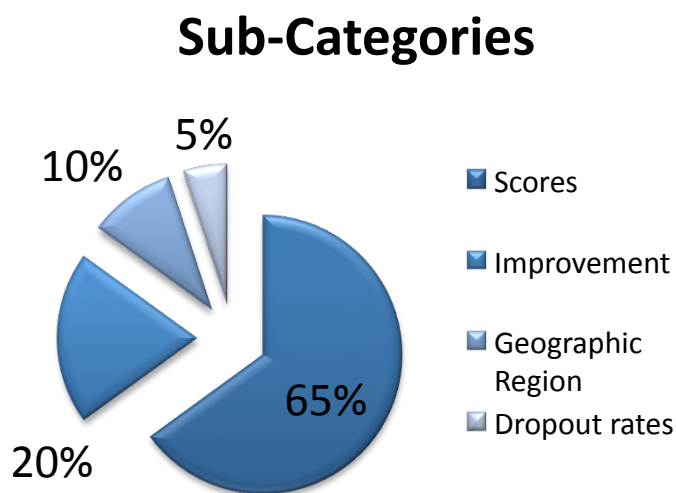


Figure 2: Individual Tier Breakdown

The two figures above show the breakdown of federal education funding in our new system. The figure on the left shows the tier system as it would be implemented nationwide, where schools would be placed into tiers based on the socio-economic status of the surrounding region and that of the families of its students. The figure on the right shows the breakdown of the way that funding would be distributed within each tier, so for example one could imagine the pie chart as corresponding to the breakdown within the lowest economic tier.

To elaborate on this breakdown further, imagine a group of 500 schools. Roughly 100 of these would be placed in to each of the five main tiers as shown in Figure 1 above. Each school will only ever be compared to the other 99 schools within their tier. In this way we can start comparing schools based on the biggest indicator of how they will do on exams and break the

vicious cycle of punishing less affluent schools for doing poorly which in turn makes them more poor and less able to perform on tests. Funding will stop ignoring pre-existing conditions and take a more fair route when judging schools based on the hard numbers of test scores. Each tier would be allotted a relatively similar amount of federal funding. The pie chart reflects how funding would be broken down within each specific tier, or among the 100 schools with a similar economic standing.

The 65% section of the chart reflects solely test scores. All of the 100 schools would be put in a list based on their overall test scores, and the schools with the highest scores of those 100 would be rewarded with a larger chunk of the funding. The 20% section of the chart is for improvement, and was created to reward the schools that do the best with what they have been given. For example, a school in the bottom tier might start out as one of the worst schools in the nation. Even if the school rallies as a community and shows significant improvement, they will likely still be relatively low on the list of scores. It is too difficult to pull a failing school up to the top of its class in one year, however we still want to reward this school for the work and effort it has put in. In order to recognize improvement in addition to overall standing, 20% of federal funding within each tier will be allotted to schools that show the most improvement. The benefits of this will be two-fold: students and teachers who go the extra mile will be given the praise and encouragement they deserve, and schools that truly show an ability to teach creatively and effectively will be put in the spotlight, encouraging the development of new and more effective teaching strategies. This idea has been shown to work in other countries where schools in particularly poverty-stricken areas were given new administration and direction and were told to reform their policies and methods. When the schools came back with significant improvement and better-prepared students, they also came back with new ideas about teaching and motivation

that were able to be implemented elsewhere, starting a positive cycle within the entire system (Kline).

The 10% portion of the chart is a geographic factor. While examining the flaws and shortcomings of the current system, it was seen that many students do not attempt to take the test to the best of their ability because it frustrates them. Students do not feel that the test is directed at them or written for them, and it is difficult to get them to care about something that they do not feel is relevant to their lives. One obvious example of why this might be the case is students whose first language is not English. In an area where many students speak a different language at home, such as the Southwest, one could imagine that math scores would be higher than reading comprehension. Different areas have different issues and needs, and we should recognize that the strengths of students are not the same across the board. Another example is that of the difference between extremely rural and extremely urban schools. It is immediately obvious that the son of a farmer in the middle of Illinois has a very different life and consequent learning needs than the daughter of a single mother in Detroit. As one of the education professors we interviewed put it quite colloquially: “Standardized tests are written by middle-class white people for middle-class white people”. The students who are taking these exams are far more diverse than the tests reflect. By breaking each tier into geographic region and level of urbanization and using this as a way to relist the scores of schools, the system can show that it recognizes the different needs and strengths of different regions. So within the 100 schools in the tier, say there are 5 schools that are in urban areas in the Southwest. These schools would be ordered based on scores and then 10% of the funding would be distributed based on how well each of these 5 schools did compared to one another. The system of course seems much more realistic and applicable when one considers the large number of schools in each region of the U.S.

The last portion of the chart is the 5% based on dropout rates. One of the worst unintended consequences of the current system is that dropout rates in certain struggling schools have soared (Amrein and Berliner). The reason for this is that standardized test scores now determine a major portion of teacher salary in addition to determining whether or not the school will still be open the next year. Struggling students used to be merely an optional project for teachers to attempt to help. Now they are a direct burden, an anchor that could pull down a teacher or a school. Teachers see students who have not yet met proficiency and know that if that student neither drops out or experiences a major change in aptitude that the teacher in question will probably not get a raise, or worse, not have a school to teach at the next year. It is both incredibly rewarding and difficult to raise a student from failing to proficiency, but teachers are no longer encouraged to try to help these children. Instead they are almost forced to look the other way while the system fails these students and they fall out of the system, in order to save their salary or their school. It is wrong to make our teachers live in so much fear of their students' test scores that they are kept from doing their jobs. By rewarding schools for keeping dropout rates low we can ensure that the highest ideal behind No Child Left Behind is finally reflected in our national education policy.

The current scheme behind the distribution of federal education funds is flawed at best and destructive at worst. In order to adequately address the issues with the current funding strategies we need to recognize the inherent differences between schools and the uncontrollable factors that affect test scores. Schools that have similar socio-economic statuses should be compared to one another, instead of blatantly disregarding this aspect and associating schools that are so massively different that they are beyond reasonable comparison. The tier system as

proposed above addresses both this issue with the current plan, as well as a few other flaws with comparing dissimilar schools that were discovered during our research phase.

Background: Maggie Cardin

Distribution of funding for education based entirely on the outcome of a school district's standardized test scores is a recipe for disaster. Although the financial aspects of funding need to be given much attention, society must also address the other half of the issue: the standardized tests themselves. Standardized testing in the United States is inherently flawed as it stands today.

“My students were asked to draw inferences based off of different animals,” said Christie Silphies, teacher in a failing school district in Philadelphia. “They’ve never heard about a majority of these animals, let alone have seen them.” Undoubtedly, the concept of standardizing assessment tools was created to ensure all students were tested in an equal and fair way, but the educational world has fallen dramatically short where equal is concerned. Our current testing system is only addressing student’s weaknesses and not capitalizing on their strengths.

A major flaw with our current standardized testing system is that we are not addressing a majority of what is being taught in the school system. The major focus areas in our current standardized testing system are reading and math. Mastering reading and math skills are extremely important building blocks to a student’s academic success, but they are not the only skills that our students need to succeed in the world. Being able to pass a series of questions about a literature passage or scoring at the proficient level on a math section are not the only true indicators of how far a person will go in their lifetime or how effective a school is at academically preparing their students.

Furthermore, within the subject areas that are currently being tested, we are not testing our students correctly (Popham). To explain, let's take a closer look at the math portion of a standardized test. The math section may include a 50-question test in a one-hour block of time. Most would suggest the flaw being that students may not be able to demonstrate what they know in this period of time but there are other flaws that are not as apparent. For instance, students are tested in all different grades and tested so that they meet certain state standards. Teachers are required to teach all standards in their classroom, but not all standards are addressed on standardized exams. Student A may struggle with complex word problems but be advanced in simple equations. Student B may struggle with simple equations, but be advanced in complex word problems. The standardized test that they are given may weigh heavy on complex word problems; therefore, student A will not appear to be successful.

School motto's ring in the ears of many teachers...although all different in wording, they all have the same basic meaning. That being, the purpose of schools is to address the whole student. The emotional needs are just as important as the academic needs. By testing students on two subjects only, those students who do not excel in these subject areas never get a chance to showcase their individual talents. That way, their gifts are never fully assessed and will never get proper credit within the state and federal funding educational rubric.

Our current testing model is fostering a sense of external motivation. External motivation leads to students driven by performance motivation in their approach to education (Steinberg). By only allowing students to be tested on such a small sector of what they actually learn in school, we are neglecting to fully recognize our students and all of the skill sets that they possess. Intrinsically motivated students are far more likely to succeed in performance tasks because they are not worried about the reward. Their reward lies in the chance to gain knowledge

and understanding of new subject matter. By having standardized testing weigh heavy on performance, we are putting our youth at risk for a lifetime of reaching for rewards instead of knowledge.

This ultimately could result in a “me, me me” culture. The current generation of youth is constantly being blamed for this, but maybe it is no fault of their own. Drastic measures need to be taken to address problems with current testing methods. Although a form of standardized testing still must be in place, the current form should and needs to be altered.

Catherine O’Connell, Park Forest Middle School teacher, in the State College Area School District, stated that “I’m not against standardized testing in general, but looking at other methods is also good. There is so much more that goes into the making of a student than a percentile ranking.” Right now, that is not the case. Our society is consumed with percentile rankings and quantitative data and to what avail? We are a numbers society. We like something we can track. We like to know that we are making improvements. More than anything, we like to know that our money (what little money is being dealt out to education) is being used in a positive way and will ultimately create a better tomorrow. “Broadly speaking, it is easier to measure efficiency than effectiveness, easier to rate how well we're doing something than to ask whether what we're doing makes sense” (Case Against Testing).

It comes as no surprise that we are addressing No Child Left Behind and Standardized testing. After interviewing a cross-section of individuals in the education field that included students, teachers, principals, school district administrators and professors, a conclusion was drawn that standardized testing results do not reflect the gifts and abilities of the whole student, and therefore, a child never has the opportunity to have all of their talents recognized.

Teachers are also falling in the trap of teaching to the test instead of teaching so that a student truly learns. Teachers cannot be blamed for falling into this trap because the fate of their school is ultimately dependent on the score of one test. On average, teachers spend their entire school day teaching so that their students perform at or above a state's mandated tests proficiency levels. That type of classroom environment does not allow for creativity from teachers and does not allow teachers to address the many different learning styles that exist within their classroom.

Alternative Testing Policy: Veronica Vigilar

There is room for major improvement to NCLB as it stands today. We propose a policy to supplement current standardized testing with an alternative testing form. This would help to address students whose gifts and talents are in less traditional fields, beyond math and reading. Our alternative testing policy is modeled after Virginia's assessment option of portfolio testing. Virginia allows special education students who have learned the grade level material but can't work with the SOL's testing accommodations, such as a student who has serious text anxiety, to opt out of their standardized test (SOL-standards of learning test consist of a short essay test for writing and multiple choice tests for math, reading, science, and social science/humanities.) and be assessed through portfolio testing-Virginia Grade Level Alternative (VGLA) (Pyle). Students are holistically tested in five categories: reading, math, science, history/social sciences, and writing (Pyle). For VGLA testing, a student will be assessed by COE-Collection of Evidence (student work samples) (VDOE). COE binders are compilations of a school year's worth of worksheets, quizzes, and other schoolwork to serve as evidence of a student's understanding of the grade level required material in each category (VDOE).

Portfolio testing is a more favorable type of testing because it is more individualized and flexible in assessing a student's skills and knowledge of the grade level content than the SOL's multiple-choice assessment (Pyle). Portfolio type testing is meant to assess student performance as a whole. This portfolio is meant to dissuade teachers from teaching multiple choice type testing ("Procedures for Participation of Students with Disabilities in Virginia's Accountability System"). An example of multiple choice type testing is teaching students to recognize that they should bubble the answer Thomas Jefferson when given a question about the third president of the United States. Even though students should be taught to know that Thomas Jefferson was our third president, it is far more important for a student to be able to have a deeper understanding of these type of topics. A student who "might not correctly choose "Answer B: The third U.S. president" for a question about Thomas Jefferson but could describe Monticello or what Jefferson did, and demonstrate understanding of the complexity of how he promoted the ideals of freedom, yet owned slaves," would be given more credit on the VGLA than on the SOL's multiple-choice exams (Chandler).

The VGLA is flawed because having this portfolio testing option available resulted in a massive increase in VGLA testing, especially for VGLA math and VGLA reading (Page). This increase showed a positive correlation with student pass rates. So many students were being allowed to replace the SOLs with the VGLA that more students were passing the VGLA than the SOLs (Page). This demonstrated that too many students were being allowed to take the VGLA in replace of the SOL because it resulted in higher passing rates and was an easier means to secure school funding (Page). Standardized testing like the SOLs promotes teaching to the test, which made schools accountable for proficient test scores. And the increase in VGLA testing resulted in decreased school accountability to even teach students the standard grade level

contents, which set the schools' overall grade level standards even lower than the SOLs already had ("Procedures for Participation of Students with Disabilities in Virginia's Accountability System").

This increase in numbers of students who opt to take the VGLA instead of the SOL is also largely because the criteria for special education students is loosely defined and controlled ("Procedures for Participation of Students with Disabilities in Virginia's Accountability System"). To restore school accountability to teaching the set standard grade level content, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) is currently phasing out VGLA math and replacing it with VMAST math this school year (2011-2012) (Pyle). Next school year (2012-2013), VGLA reading will be replaced by VMAST reading. VGLA reading will only be available for students with a limited English proficiency ("Phase-Out of the Virginia Grade Level Alternative (VGLA) for Students with Disabilities"). VMAST-Virginia Modified Achievement Standard Test is an online multiple choice test. The content being tested is not modified from the standard grade level content tested for in the SOLs. But the testing methods are modified (less answer choices, key words are highlighted in the question) ("Virginia Association of Elementary School Principals"). Evaluation of these aspects of Virginia's testing system indicate that it would not be beneficial to test students with just the SOL, or just the VGLA, or just the VMAST assessment.

Our solution is to have a mandated standardized testing form similar to Virginia's SOLs in addition to a portfolio testing form similar to Virginia's VGLA. All students, with or without disabilities, would be tested in five subjects: math, reading, writing, science, and social science/humanities. Each student's overall score would be comprised of two evenly weighted portions-standardized test portion and portfolio test portion.

For the standardized testing portion, every student would be required to take the standardized essay test for writing and the standardized multiple choice tests for math, reading, science, and social science/humanities. The overall standardized test portion score would be comprised of all five standardized test scores. For the portfolio component, every student would be given the choice to portfolio test in two of the five subjects (math, reading, writing, science, or social science/humanities). Each of the two subjects would have a collection of evidence binder (COE). Each COE binders would consist of graded student generated work for each of the student's specified portfolio testing subjects from the entire school year. These binders would demonstrate the skills, knowledge, and content addressed in the standardized test above the required level of the standardized test (VDOE). The overall portfolio portion score would be comprised of the two portfolio subject scores.

COE binders can include written, audio, video, or interview evidence of the student's work from the entire school year pertaining to the specific subject being tested. All evidence must be graded and student generated. Evidence must clearly indicate the student's correct and incorrect answers, and can be graded with a letter grade, numerical grade, or evaluative comments by the student's specific subject teacher. All information in all evidence samples must be clearly verified as products of student's individual work or contribution. COE binders do not include chalkboard/dry-erase boards, texts, computer work, take-home tests, open book tests, homework, work with examples or directions with hints, work with prompts with answers, or a group assignment with unclearly verified student contribution. Scorers would ignore any evidence that does not meet these requirements ("Virginia Department of Education") (VDOE).

COE binders would be graded by teachers that have no affiliation with the student whose binder is being graded or the student's school. COE binders would be graded on a scale of 0-4.

A score of 0 means the COE showed no evidence that met all evidence criteria or demonstrated the student's individual accomplishments for the subject being tested on. A score of 1 signifies that the student displayed basic and minimal skill and understanding of standard grade level content, and/or the majority of the evidence is incomplete or inaccurate. A score of 2 signifies that the evidence demonstrates partially sufficient evidence of a student's individual skill and knowledge for standard grade level content and/or the majority of the student's work is incomplete or inaccurate. A score of 3 means the evidence sufficiently demonstrates the student's skill and understanding of the standard grade level content. A score of 4 means the evidence demonstrates the student's skill and understanding past the expected standard grade level content (VDOE).

The standardized testing portion would hold schools accountable to holding school-wide grade level standards, but the portfolio testing would reinforce that students are more than just a single quantitative test grade. Portfolio testing would also provide an opportunity for students to be more fairly assessed on subjects that they excel in. It will also provide the opportunity for students to demonstrate a much deeper level of understanding of their standard grade level content in a specific subject than they would be able to demonstrate in the standardized testing portion. Therefore, this testing solution would encourage teachers and students to strive for excellence in true education, and not just proficiency in test taking.

Both policies outline a problem in the educational world and a plan on how to address the problem. Distribution of funding should be tailored so that every school can achieve monetary reward for achievement, this could be made possible by our proposed policy using the tier system. In addition, there is room for an alternative testing form to supplement current standardized testing methods.

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