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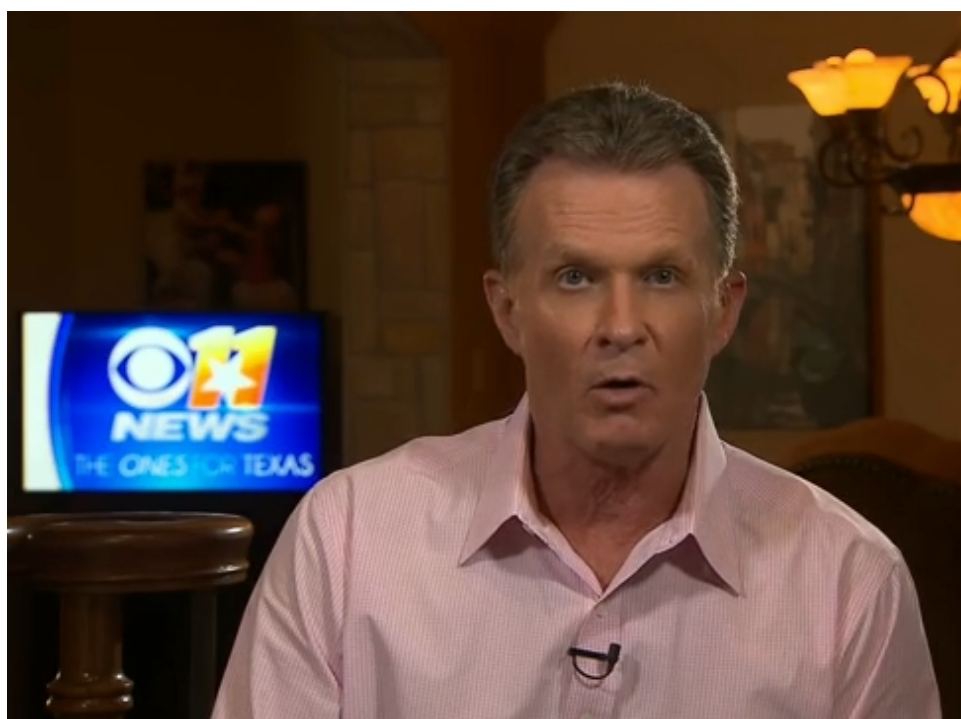
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Delaying Decision On STAAR Test Could Cost Texas Tens Of Millions

August 12, 2020 at 9:15 pm

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DALLAS (CBSDFW.COM) – While school districts are still figuring out how to operate this fall there is a debate brewing about standardized testing in the spring.

“There is widespread opposition to this,” said State Sen. Beverly Powell, referring to STAAR testing.

She is the latest in a string of lawmakers calling for the suspension of STAAR testing for the next school year.

"It's going to be an inappropriate measure of where we are," said Powell. "We are starting behind this year – we're going to be playing catch-up all year long."



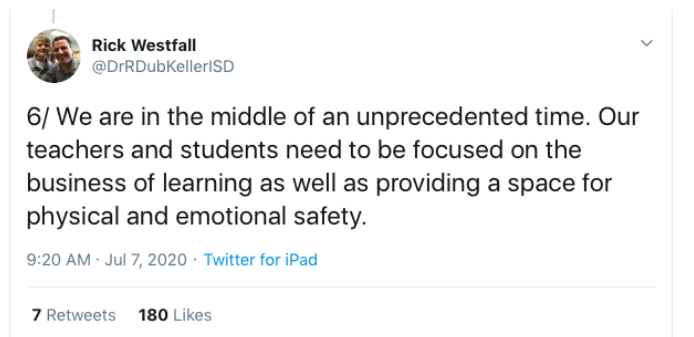
Keller ISD Parents, Students Face Challenges On First Day Back To School



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School leaders say the same thing. Dr. Marcelo Cavazos recently told the Arlington ISD school board while testing data is important, "our priority has more to do with our students getting back to learning and progression. No test should take away from that."

Keller ISD's Superintendent, Dr. Rick Westfall, sent a series of tweets echoing that sentiment.



Dr. Rick Westfall tweet

The Texas State Teachers Association and the Texas PTA have released similar statements, but not everyone agrees.

"We have months to figure that out," said State Rep. Dennis Bonnen.

The House Speaker says districts need to stop worrying about the spring and focus on the next few months.

"I am offended that while we are trying to figure out how to keep teacher safe, how to have kids safe, how to get them back to learning, we are obsessing over a test that won't even be given until April," he said.

Governor Abbott made a similar statement to CBS 11's Jack Fink.

"We will not start cancelling things before the school year even begins, Jack. We need to allow the school year to begin first, see how it progresses and see how the COVID-19 situation progresses," Gov. Abbott said.

The CBS 11 I-Team has learned waiting to make that call could come at a cost.

After Gov. Abbott suspended the STAAR in March, the state still had to pay \$55 million of its \$75 million contract with the test provider.

That's because the company had already created the forms, printed the booklets and trained the scorers.

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Payee Name & ID: Educational Testing Service	Contract #: 3317
Payee ID: 1210634479	PO #: FY20: 39363
Division/Organization Code: 212	RFP #: 701-15-002
Project Name: Student Assessment - STAAR	Project ID: Multiple – See PO
Legal/Funding Authority: 86 th Legislature, H.B. 3	

**AMENDMENT #12 TO STANDARD CONTRACT #3317 BETWEEN THE
TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY AND
Educational Testing Service**

ARTICLE I. PURPOSE

This writing shall serve as amendment #12 (this "Amendment") to Contract #3317 between the Texas Education Agency ("TEA") and Educational Testing Service ("Contractor"), dated August 26, 2015, as amended on December 6, 2016, February 14, 2017, May 25, 2017, May 25, 2017, August 25, 2017, December 8, 2017, December 8, 2017, January 3, 2018, October 5, 2018, August 31, 2019 and February 10, 2020 (as amended, the "Contract").

ARTICLE II. CONTRACT CONTINGENCY

In accordance with Paragraph B of the Standard TEA Terms and Conditions, this Amendment, the Contract and all renewals and/or extensions, if applicable, are contingent upon the availability of funds to TEA as appropriated by the Texas State Legislature.

ARTICLE III. EFFECTIVE DATE

This Amendment shall be effective on the date of the final signature below.

ARTICLE IV. PURPOSE OF AMENDMENT

The purpose of this Amendment is to document changes to the Contract's Statement of Work included in Amendment 10 to the Contract caused by the force majeure event documented in that certain Notice of Force Majeure, dated March 18, 2020 from TEA to Contractor (the "Force Majeure Changes"). Attachment A to this Amendment replaces the budget currently included in the Contract. Attachment B to this Amendment describes the additional services required by TEA following the Force Majeure Changes.

ARTICLE V. PAYMENT UNDER CONTRACT

TEA shall pay Contractor in accordance with the attached Budget (Attachment A), upon Contractor satisfactory performance of services. Payment will be made by State of Texas warrant(s) or direct deposit to the account designated by Contractor. The potential total value of this Contract, incorporating all optional annual terms is \$451,704,600 ("Total Potential Value").

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The contract shows another \$73 million due for the 2021 tests – money the state will start spending as early as next month.

"It makes no sense to me why we should be taking tens of millions of taxpayer dollars and putting them into a standardized tests when the children have not been in school since March," said State Sen. Jose Melendez.

He believes those dollars should go towards the true needs of students and staff. "Why not allocate some of this money towards either distance learning, closing the digital divide or making schools cleaner."

The TEA is already providing masks, hand sanitizers, gloves and other supplies to districts.

For now, TEA Commissioner Mike Morath has publicly announced the tests will happen, though the results will not affect students' ability to advance to the next grade.

Morath declined the CBS 11 I-Team's repeated requests for an interview.

An agency spokesperson tells CBS 11 that the state will save some money by using the 2020 forms for the 2021 tests, but he did not elaborate on the amount of savings.

**Texas Student Performance:
Outcomes Working Group**

May 2, 2018

SOURCE: TEA TESTIMONY TO SCHOOL FINANCE COMMISSION, MAY 2018

Assessment: Current Costs

	2016	2017	2018	2019	4-Year Total
STAAR 3-8	\$33,963,491	\$42,169,532	\$62,292,426	\$49,637,384	\$182,959,342
STAAR EOC	\$25,069,033	\$26,003,054	\$28,783,444	\$23,280,124	\$101,738,209
STAAR Total (10,479,082 tests; ~\$7/student)	\$68,918,215	\$78,604,370	\$98,230,497	\$83,360,190	\$326,310,823
STAAR Alt-2	\$3,665,163	\$3,671,074	\$5,784,583	\$5,837,492	\$18,958,312
TELPAS	\$7,119,603	\$8,233,618	\$9,522,347	\$8,571,575	\$33,447,143
TAKS	\$2,758,774	\$2,498,995	\$247,683	\$253,875	\$5,759,327

Assessment: Cost Breakdown and Potential Savings

INCLUSIVE COST OF ASSESSMENT

- Costs vary widely by district and campus, pending staffing structure and local policies
- Assume 1 District Testing Coordinator per district (% time), 1 FTE per campus for 4-8 weeks per year (pending grade band), testing proctors, some supplies [min. requirements]

POSSIBLE SAVINGS

- Eliminate non federally mandates assessments (8th gr Soc. Studies, Alg II EOC, Eng III EOC)
 - **\$3.3M SAVINGS**
- Eliminate the SSI Administration
 - **\$3.5M SAVINGS**
- Add SAT/ACT in lieu of EOCs
 - Reduction in EOC costs of ~\$24M (Spring only – excludes fall and summer admins)
 - Increase of universal SAT/ACT costs of ~\$24M incl. writing (Juniors only)
 - Decrease in district and/or parent out-of-pocket expenses (varies, min. \$20M+ savings statewide)

LOCAL // EDUCATION

Houston-area schools lost contact with tens of thousands of students during COVID, TEA data shows

Shelby Webb

Aug. 21, 2020 | Updated: Aug. 21, 2020 4:39 p.m.



Ms. Diana Banh waves and greets students in a dinosaur costume during a car parade for pre-K pupils and kindergarteners at Stafford MSD's Early Childhood Center Wednesday, Aug. 19, 2020, in Stafford. Students met their teachers from social distance of their cars.

Photo: Steve Gonzales, Houston Chronicle / Staff photographer

Sitting alone in her classroom at a Stafford Municipal School District's early childhood center on Wednesday, Cathrine Habervo felt lucky.

After schools statewide closed to help slow the spread of COVID-19 last spring, the teacher was able to maintain contact with all of her students, even if several didn't stay engaged the entire time. All 18 of the students assigned to her kindergarten class had already attended prekindergarten, and they were registered and ready to go when the first day of school began remotely Wednesday.

"I could tell how excited they were for their first day of kindergarten, because they were messaging me late into the night," said Habervo, who'd reached all of the families over about five days and nights. "I thought, 'I'm really blessed that they want to be engaged in their child's education online.'"

Other educators, however, haven't had the same good fortune.

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BY BRITTANY BRITTO, STAFF WRITER

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JACOB CARPENTER

Houston-area school districts closing ahead of Laura's arrival

EDUCATION

BY JACOB CARPENTER

'Felt like I was in a hurricane'

Across 38 school districts in greater Houston, schools lost contact with tens of thousands of students last spring, according to Texas Education Agency data.

The students who weren't engaged or in contact with their schools could suffer long-term impacts, said April Peters-Hawkins, an associate professor at the University of Houston's Department of Education Leadership and Policy Studies. Many of the students that schools couldn't reach were part of subgroups that were already struggling due to what Peters-

Hawkins calls an opportunity gap. Those students, especially from lower income, Black and Hispanic backgrounds, may not have had access to laptops or learning resources at home.

Those gaps may have been more hidden while students were in brick-and-mortar classrooms, but Peters-Hawkins said COVID-19 “ripped the veil off that.”

“I definitely think that this pandemic — in spite of the best efforts of districts to get devices and wifi to students — if they don’t change the culture of opportunity too, students will continue to see these differences in achievement outcomes,” she said.

Teachers went all out to welcome Stafford's Pre-K & Kindergarten students with a drive-by parade. While those students showed up both in person and online, other schools across Houston struggled to keep their students engaged .

Video: Steve Gonzales / Houston Chronicle

On average, local districts lost contact with about 2 percent of their students, TEA data show. Another 9.3 percent were not engaged, meaning they were responding to school staff but not completing assignments. Nearly 87 percent were “fully engaged” on average, and campus staff were able to reestablish engagement with 2.4 percent of students.

Engagement gaps varied widely.

Only about 54 percent of students in the Columbia-Brazoria ISD, just north of Lake Jackson, remained fully engaged, according to TEA data, while more than 98.6 percent of students in Barbers Hill ISD, just east of Baytown, stayed connected. Among larger districts, Houston ISD lost engagement or contact, at least temporarily, with about 27.6 percent of its students, while that figure reached 39.5 percent in Aldine ISD.

The TEA did not release the specific number of students in each category in response to a Houston Chronicle public records request, but the percentage breakdown combined with districts' enrollments fill in some gaps. For example, Houston ISD reported that it completely lost contact with about 4.8 percent of its roughly 210,000 students, meaning about 10,000 students dropped off the radar.

Now, as a majority of local districts either have started online-only instruction or plan to start virtually in the coming weeks, officials are working to find those who've become disconnected and make sure more students log on than did in the spring.



Drew Reynolds, 5, kept his eyes on his cheering teachers during a car parade for pre-K pupils and kindergarteners and first graders at Stafford MSD's Early Childhood Center Wednesday, Aug. 19, 2020, in Stafford. Students met their teachers from social distance of their cars.

Data questions

Some districts disputed the TEA's tally, saying their local figures reflect a different reality.

The differences lie in how districts interpret TEA guidance, said Dawn Ayers, chief of strategic initiatives and accountability for Aldine ISD. She and her colleagues in other districts were asked to collect eight sets of data, but some of the categories seemed vague or contradictory. For example, she said TEA asked districts to report how many students were "fully engaged" from the time campuses closed until the end of the school year.

"What they said is a student is considered fully engaged if they're engaged a majority of the time. But your definition of 'majority' may be different from my 'majority,'" Ayers said. "They said engaged students are responding to requests from administrators or teachers and are completing assignments. But was that one assignment? All assignments?"

TEA reports that about 7 percent of the 67,000 students in Aldine ISD were not contactable, but Ayers and others in the district believe that number is closer to 4 percent.

TEA officials said staff tried to clear up those issues in weekly calls to superintendents. They said that while tracking the participation of students in real-time instruction like Zoom calls was easier, districts in which students were learning at their own time and pace may have struggled more to define engagement. Generally, they said, a student in that situation would be fully engaged if they're communicating with teachers regularly and turning in work daily, versus students who may turn in a handful of assignments one day a week.

TEA did distinguish between students who were not contactable (meaning students and their families were not responding to requests from their schools) and those deemed not engaged (meaning students or their families would respond to their schools but the kids weren't completing assignments).

Their data report shows four categories: students who were fully engaged; those who had no contact or had lost contact with their schools; those not engaging with assignments; and those whose engagement was "recovered."

In Sheldon ISD in northeast Houston, recovering engagement took on a variety of forms at Michael Null Middle School.

Principal Katrina White used almost every tool at her disposal to establish contact with the school's nearly 1,300 kids. She posted funny videos on TikTok. She checked in with all of her teachers weekly to see how they were keeping up. She asked that they call, and if the students' contact information was incorrect in her system, she asked a Community in Schools worker to knock on doors. She changed the message on the electric sign outside the school, asking families to call in. Staff tucked work packets and letters into meals that were still being distributed by the school.

"It's almost exhausting listing it all," she said.

Some success flowed from students' relationships with staff. One older student seemed to vanish in the spring, but White heard through others that he had started to attend summer athletic practices at the district's high school. She contacted that coach, who told the student to check in.

"He was more engaged in summer than in spring," White said. "I guess when you put it all together, we tried to exhaust all possibilities for contact."



Students and parents waved and enjoyed meeting their teachers during a car parade for pre-K pupils and kindergarteners at Stafford MSD's Early Childhood Center Wednesday, Aug. 19, 2020, in Stafford. Students met their teachers from social distance of their cars.

Size matters

Some students were harder to reach than others, according to the TEA data, especially among students in some subgroups.

Statewide, about 85 percent of students considered economically disadvantaged were able to stay fully engaged in the spring, compared with 95 percent of their more affluent peers. Black students were fully engaged about 83 percent of the time, compared to 87 percent of Hispanic students, 94 percent of white students and 96 percent of Asian students.



Ms. Marlene Oropesa welcomes students during a car parade for pre-K pupils and kindergarteners at Stafford MSD's Early Childhood Learning Center Wednesday, Aug. 19, 2020, in Stafford. Students met their teachers from social distance of their cars.

However, district officials in greater Houston said geography may have played a more prominent role than demographics. Friendswood ISD schools were able to keep nearly 98.6 percent of their students fully engaged, and in spring, officials reported that only two of the district's 6,200 students could not be reached.

Superintendent Thad Roher said several factors helped. They had extra laptops on hand because they were coincidentally in the middle of replacing their old devices with new Chromebooks when COVID-19 began sweeping across the nation.

"We're a tight-knit community. When we have parent-teacher conferences or open houses, we have to run shuttles because we have so many attendees. Football games sell out every Friday night," he said. "People are here for the schools in Friendswood."

Although only a handful of Friendswood ISD's students are from lower-income households, small districts with higher rates of poorer students also had success.

Officials in Stafford MSD believe their 7-square-mile size helped them keep 94 percent of their students fully engaged. About 74 percent of their students are considered economically disadvantaged by the state, and more than 88 percent are Black or Latino.



Ms. Diana Banh has her photo taken by Ms. Marlene Oropesa before a car parade for pre-K pupils and kindergarteners at Stafford MSD's Early Childhood Center Wednesday, Aug. 19, 2020, in Stafford. Students met their teachers from social distance of their cars.

That community's enthusiasm for school was on full display Wednesday morning at the district's early childhood center. About 100 hundred vehicles were lined up at 7:30 a.m. for a car parade in front of the newly refurbished school. Parents painted their students' names on poster boards and decorated their vehicles with balloons and ribbons. Teachers, dressed for a Jurassic Park theme, held up their own homemade signs and walked up to greet students sitting in car seats.

Both Savannah McCarty, 4, and her Teddy bear, Mr. Snuggles, wore matching face masks as a group of teachers waved and yelled over the roar of car engines about how excited they were for her to join them. Her mother, Tiffany, said the preschooler had been eager to go to "real school" since she learned a few weeks ago that she would be going. McCarty said registering online wasn't difficult, and that she had been chatting with Savannah's teacher before the big day. Registration is still open for this school year.

Even though Savannah knew she was starting her school career online, her brown eyes gleamed with excitement.

Clutching Mr. Snuggles to her chest, she said, "I want to come to learn."

shelby.webb@chron.com

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Education in Two Worlds

Gene V Glass attempts to make sense of an institution trapped in a political struggle.

Thursday, August 20, 2020

Why Bother Testing in 2021?

Gene V Glass
David C. Berliner

At a recent Education Writers Association seminar, Jim Blew, an assistant to Betsy DeVos at the Department of Education, opined that the Department is inclined not to grant waivers to states seeking exemptions from the federally mandated annual standardized achievement testing. States like Michigan, Georgia, and South Carolina were seeking a one year moratorium. Blew insisted that "even during a pandemic [tests] serve as an important tool in our education system." He said that the Department's "instinct" was to grant no waivers. What system he was referring to and important to whom are two questions we seek to unravel here.

Without question, the "system" of the U.S. Department of Education has a huge stake in enforcing annual achievement testing. It's not just that the Department's relationship is at stake with Pearson Education, the U.K. corporation that is the major contractor for state testing, with annual revenues of nearly \$5 billion. The Department's image as a "get tough" defender of high standards is also at stake. Pandemic be damned! We can't let those weak kneed blue states get away with covering up the incompetence of those teacher unions.

To whom are the results of these annual testings important? Governors? District superintendents? Teachers?

How the governors feel about the test results depends entirely on where they stand on the political spectrum. Blue state governors praise the findings when they are above the national average, and they call for increased funding when they are below. Red state governors, whose state's scores are generally below average, insist that the results are a clear call for vouchers and more charter schools – in a word, choice. District administrators and teachers live in fear that they will be blamed for bad scores; and they will.

Fortunately, all the drama and politicking about the annual testing is utterly unnecessary. Last year's district or even schoolhouse average almost perfectly predicts this year's average. Give us the average Reading score for Grade Three for any medium or larger size district for the last year and we'll give you the average for this year within a point or two. So at the very least, testing every year is a waste of time and money – money that might ultimately help cover the salary of executives like John Fallon, Pearson Education CEO, whose total compensation in 2017 was more than \$4 million.

But we wouldn't even need to bother looking up a district's last year's test scores to know where their achievement scores are this year. We can accurately predict those scores from data that cost nothing. It is well known and has been for many years – just Google "Karl R. White" 1982 – that a school's average socio-economic status (SES) is an accurate predictor of its achievement test average. "Accurate" here means a correlation exceeding .80. Even though a school's racial composition overlaps considerably with the average wealth of the families it serves, adding Race to the prediction equation will improve the prediction of test performance. Together, SES and Race tell us much about what

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Gene V Glass

Boulder/Scottsdale,
Colorado/Arizona, United States

Follow Tweets @GeneVGlass.
Lecturer at Connie L. Lurie College
of Education, San José State
University; Emeritus Regents'
Professor at Arizona State
University, and Senior Researcher
at the National Education Policy
Center at the University of
Colorado Boulder.

[View my complete profile](#)

is actually going on in the school lives of children: the years of experience of their teachers; the quality of the teaching materials and equipment; even the condition of the building they attend.

Don't believe it? Think about this. The free and reduced lunch rate (FRL) at the 42 largest high schools in Nebraska was correlated with the school's average score in Reading, Math, and Science on the Nebraska State Assessments. The correlations obtained were FRL & Reading $r = -.93$, FRL & Science $r = -.94$, and FRL & Math $r = -.92$. Correlation coefficients don't get higher than 1.00.

If you can know the schools' test scores from their poverty rate, why give the test?

In fact, Chris Tienken answered that very question in New Jersey. With data on household income, % single parent households, and parent education level in each township, he predicted a township's rates of scoring "proficient" on the New Jersey state assessment. In Maple Shade Township, 48.71% of the students were predicted to be proficient in Language Arts; the actual proficiency rate was 48.70%. In Mount Arlington township, 61.4% were predicted proficient; 61.5% were actually proficient. And so it went. Demographics may not be destiny for individuals, but when you want a reliable, quick, inexpensive estimate of how a school, township, or district is doing in terms of their achievement scores on a standardized test of achievement, demographics really are destiny, until governments at many levels get serious about addressing the inequities holding back poor and minority schools!

There is one more point to consider here: a school can more easily "fake" its achievement scores than it can fake its SES and racial composition. Test scores can be artificially raised by paying a test prep company, or giving just a tiny bit more time on the test, looking the other way as students whip out their cell phones during the test, by looking at the test before hand and sharing some "ideas" with students about how they might do better on the tests, or examining the tests after they are given and changing an answer or two here and there. These are not hypothetical examples; they go on all the time.

However, don't the principals and superintendents need the test data to determine which teachers are teaching well and which ones ought to be fired? That seems logical but it doesn't work. Our colleague Audrey Amrein Beardsley and her students have addressed this issue in detail on the blog VAMboozled. In just one study, a Houston teacher was compared to other teachers in other schools sixteen different times over four years. Her students' test scores indicated that she was better than the other teachers 8 times and worse than the others 8 times. So, do achievement tests tell us whether we have identified a great teacher, or a bad teacher? Or do the tests merely reveal who was in that teacher's class that particular year? Again, the makeup of the class – demographics like social class, ethnicity, and native language – are powerful determiners of test scores.

But wait. Don't the teachers need the state standardized test results to know how well their students are learning, what they know and what is still to be learned? Not at all. By Christmas, but certainly by springtime when most of the standardized tests are given, teachers can accurately tell you how their students will rank on those tests. Just ask them! And furthermore, they almost never get the information about their students' achievement until the fall following the year they had those students in class making the information value of the tests nil! In a pilot study by our former ASU student Annapurna Ganesh, a dozen 2nd and 3rd grade teachers ranked their children in terms of their likely scores on their upcoming Arizona state tests. Correlations were uniformly high – as high in one class as $+.96$! In a follow up study reading, followed by math, here are the correlations found for 8 of the third-grade teachers who predicted the ranking of their students on that year's state of Arizona standardized test:

	Number of Students	Rank Order Correlation, Reading	Rank Order Correlation, Mathematics
Teacher A:	26	.907	.867

Teacher B:	24	.950	.855
Teacher C:	22	.924	.801
Teacher D:	23	.940	.899
Teacher E:	23	.891	.831
Teacher F:	27	.893	.873
Teacher G:	24	.890	.835
Teacher H:	24	.895	.837

For the larger sample the lowest rank order coefficient between a teacher's ranking of the students and the student's ranking on the state Math test was +.72! Berliner took these results to the Arizona Department of Education, informing them that they could get the information they wanted about how children are doing in about 10 minutes and for no money! He was told that he was "lying," and shown out of the office. The abuse must go on. Contracts must be honored.

Predicting rank can't tell you the national percentile of this child or that, but that information is irrelevant to teachers anyway. Teachers usually know which child is struggling, which is soaring, and what both of them need. That is really the information that they need!

Thus far as we argue against the desire our federal Department of Education to reinstitute achievement testing in each state, we neglected to mention a test's most important characteristic—its validity. We mention here, briefly, just one type of validity, content validity. To have content validity students in each state have to be exposed to/taught the curriculum for which the test is appropriate. The US Department of Education seems not to have noticed that since March 2020 public schooling has been in a bit of an upheaval! The chances that each district, in each state, has provided equal access to the curriculum on which a states' test is based, is fraught under normal circumstances. In a pandemic it is a remarkably stupid assumption! We assert that no state achievement test will be content valid if given in the 2020-2021 school year. Furthermore, those who help in administering and analyzing such tests are likely in violation of the testing standards of the American Psychological Association, the American Educational Research Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education. In addition to our other concerns with state standardized tests, there is no defensible use of an invalid test. Period.

We are not opposed to all testing, just to stupid testing. The National Assessment Governing Board voted 12 to 10 in favor of administering NAEP in 2021. There is some sense to doing so. NAEP tests fewer than 1 in 1,000 students in grades 4, 8, and 12. As a valid longitudinal measure, the results could tell us the extent of the devastation of the Corona virus.

We end with some good news. The DeVos Department of Education position on Spring 2021 testing is likely to be utterly irrelevant. She and assistant Blew are likely to be watching the operation of the Department of Education from the sidelines after January 21, 2021. We can only hope that members of a new administration read this and understand that some of the desperately needed money for American public schools can come from the huge federal budget for standardized testing. Because in seeking the answer to the question "Why bother testing in 2021?" we have necessarily confronted the more important question: "Why ever bother to administer these mandated tests?"

We hasten to add that we are not alone in this opinion. Among measurement experts competent to opine on such things, our colleagues at the National Education Policy Center likewise question the wisdom of a 2021 federal government mandated testing.

Gene V Glass
David C. Berliner
Arizona State University
National Education Policy Center
University of Colorado Boulder
San Jose State University

The opinions expressed here are those of the authors and do not represent the official position of the National Education Policy Center, Arizona State University, nor the University of Colorado Boulder, nor San Jose State University.

Posted by [Gene V Glass](#) at [7:23 AM](#)

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