



# Rouge Forum

## Whole Schooling and Standardized Testing

By Michael Peterson

[Editors Note: The article below was prepared for a debate in which the Rouge Forum/Whole Schooling Consortium argued against standardization and high-stakes testing. The Michigan Business Leaders for Education Excellence and the Department of Treasury were there arguing on behalf of standardization and high-stakes testing.]

What is the purpose of schooling?

Two fundamentally different answers are being proposed.

In one, the purpose of schooling is to provide children with narrow technical skills and a mindset to do what they are told by people in authority, whether government or a boss, without question, to blame themselves always for the problems in their lives rather than blaming social injustice. For this approach to schooling, the MEAP does an excellent job. It marvelously sorts kids into two categories – one to keep and the other to throw away. It is not a surprise, then that the people here tonight speaking on behalf of the MEAP represent the Department of Treasury and an extension of the Chamber of Commerce.

In the second fundamental approach, the purpose of schooling is to help children develop as full human beings, to develop skills to be truly democratic citizens who can critically analyze our social situation and help create change to create a more equitable society. Such schools will help children develop technical skills but the key skill they will have is to think deeply, to ask hard questions. This is the approach represented by the Whole Schooling Consortium and the Rouge Forum, that Greg Queen and I represent in the meeting tonight.

For this approach to schooling, the MEAP is a travesty, moving to destroy quality teaching, to create cultures of fear, to abuse children in the name of education.

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## What We Can Know and When We Can Know It: Education Reform, Testing, and the Standardization Craze

By Kevin D. Vinson and E. Wayne Ross

There are few surprises in the sweeping education plan George W. Bush submitted to Congress his first week in office. Bush's plan carries important earmarks of conservative education causes—vouchers and a phonics-based literacy program—and the centerpiece of the plan is mandatory student testing. Bush's national plan is based on the education reform model used in Texas, with former Houston school superintendent Rod Paige in control at the US Department of Education to assure that the so-called "Texas Miracle" spreads to the other 49 states.

Democrats, while wary of Bush's voucher plans, have already heartily endorsed much of the new president's education package. The current Congressional bipartisanship on education policy is to be expected. Of all important public policies issues, education is the one on which Democrats and Republicans have most agreement, vouchers notwithstanding. In recent years, politicians and education

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# What I Learned the First 100 Days of School

By Adam Basar  
Mrs. Creech's Class  
Dort Elementary  
Roseville, MI

In math I learned about the 100th day of school. I learned about reading, writing and playing with a friend. I learned about putting your stuff away and doing good things not bad things. Mostly importantly do your work. Second most important listen to the person that's watching you. Never stop having fun with your family, Yep!

Don't bother anyone that's doing their work. Don't call names and don't butt into someone's business. If you want a friend, don't act cool. Help kids like first graders or kindergartners

or help yourself. Listen to the teacher and you'll learn. Be polite to others. Learn poems and cursive writing. Share your things to nice people but don't talk to strangers. Do not smack. Don't pretend to be sick. Be real and serious. Don't take other's opinions. Do your work instead of talking to your friend. Lightning, try not to get zapped by it. When you are done with all you work, read a new story and draw a picture in your mind. Do not steal. Do not kill anyone. When you don't get your math, practice at home in your house. Don't play until your homework is all done. Don't go home with a stranger. Don't break a promise. Don't take money from bad people. If you are lost, ask someone

who looks real nice. Don't ask a mean looking person, or..you could call someone. Do your job. Listen to who is talking. Listen to your mom. Don't watch R rated movies unless you are a grown up. Listen to the safety patrol. If you are dirty, take a bath. Don't be mean to your dog or it will bite you bad. Do not swear or sneak into a house. Some people like school. Some people want to get their work done. Help old people do their things. If you're someone's friend and the other wants to do something, do it with both friends. When someone you don't know says I got candy kid, do you go get it? You say no and go away from him or get the cops and do what they like. When you see a fire go get the fire department or you could call them.

## Behavior Rubrics

By Shelby Wallace  
Mrs. Creech's Class  
Dort Elementary

The students in Room 405 hope your classes will do a behavior rubric. It is easy to do. Students take a vote with your class. Please do it. Have your class think of a 1, 2, or 3 behavior. 3 is the best, 2 is good 1 is ok. Make your behaviors on the overhead first, then make it into a poster and hang it in your room. Thank you from Room 405.

1

1. I am trying hard to finish my work.
2. I try to listen to the teacher.
3. I am nice to others.
4. I will wait my turn to speak
5. I am patient.
6. I don't interrupt.
7. I tell the truth.

2

1. I do my work when I am told.
2. I stay in my seat.
3. I read books.
4. I listen to announcements
5. I am quiet when the teacher is talking.

3

1. I help others.
2. When I am done with my work I chose an appropriate activity.
3. I raise my hand.
4. I am polite.
5. I use a whisper voice.
6. I treat others the way I want to be treated.
7. I am responsible.
8. I walk to the carpet when called and sit quietly
9. I get my work finished
10. I remind others to do their work.
11. I put things away when I am done.



# Curriculum and Community

By William Boyle

As a teacher, I have wrestled with years with the notion of "curriculum." What really is a curriculum? Who determines it and what purpose does it serve? It has always been a struggle for me to look at a suggested, or assigned curriculum, and to somehow incarnate that for actual students in the classroom. It's difficult always to make a plan that someone else envisions for his/her own purposes, and to then make that plan come to life in the lives of actual, living, breathing adolescents. And if a curriculum cannot come alive in this way, then what purpose does it really serve? It seems to me that such questions come up for every teacher that cares about the lives of his or her students. In wrestling with questions such as these, I have come up with some contingent answers that have come to surprise even myself, answers which possibly subvert the whole concept of curriculum as we think of it.

## Curriculum: A Definition

First of all I would like to address what exactly we mean by the word curriculum. Normally it means the topic, books or ideas that will be worked with in any classroom. What the students do in terms of the intended learning is shaped by what the curriculum consists of. When we think of schooling, normally the vision is that of teachers doing their "curricular work" over the summer, either alone or in small groups determined by their discipline. In other words, it is done outside the context of an actual classroom filled with living bodies. Instead, curricular work is done with a concept of what the class will be

like, necessarily filled with abstractions of what the teachers believe the students are like. It is a fantasy full of abstractions. This is not necessarily a criticism. Important reflective work is done the same way. However, it is meant as a truth to be recognized. Curricular work is a vision based on a fantasy abstracted from reality. The prevailing stereotype of curricular work is that it is completed outside of the context of an actual classroom filled with real students. Parker Palmer, the educational philosopher/thinker, uses different language, which has some subtle, yet important, differences in connotation. He calls the subject to be studied the "Third Thing." And you can't have a Third Thing without having two other things. Already there is a relational view of curriculum occurring, a context that depends upon relationship in order to exist. There is no "curriculum" which is able to stand on its own outside of the context of an actual classroom. The other two things in Palmer's mode of thinking are the teacher and the students. None of these can exist outside of the context of the other two things. Is there really a teacher if there is no subject to teach? If not, what is the teacher teaching? And if there are no students, whom is the teacher teaching? When thinking of curriculum in this way (i.e., as subject and in relation to the other two things), then curriculum can exist only in the context of community. The binding force of the community, the purpose for its gathering, is the subject. But the subject can only truly exist in relation to an actual community. To think of it any other way is to fragment the whole, to imagine the community as

fragmented, to deny that the three things are not actual unless in community. The danger that occurs in speaking about curriculum as separate from community is that it creates a false dualism, as if curriculum exists on a piece of paper, as a plan, simply because a teacher writes it out (and in some cases, submits it to someone else, i.e. an administrator, for judgment). Thus curriculum is judged as "good" or "bad" as an objective reality before the other two things are even present!

## The Fragmented Curriculum: Source and Purpose

After defining what is meant by curriculum, we have to determine what we want for the community. What is the purpose of learning in this community and how will our purpose shape the community? Whether conscious or not, curriculum is always shaped by this question. And the question of purpose can never be determined without determining who shapes the curriculum, and who influences the shaping of the curriculum. I argue that the further away the source of the curriculum lies from the actual community (which consists of all three things), the more abstracted the purpose of the curriculum becomes from the real lives of the members of the community. In other words, the further away from the actual classroom's time and place the fragmented curriculum is developed, the less relevant it will be, and the chance that authentic learning will

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# WHAT'S WRONG WITH SCHOOLS IN DETROIT AND BENTON HARBOR?

THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE MICHIGAN BUSINESS LEADERS FOR EDUCATION EXCELLENCE SPEAKS OUT.

February 15, 2001 Flint, Michigan

[Editors Note: The Rouge Forum does not agree with the comments of Jim Sandy.]

On February 15, 2001, the Flint Area Public Affairs Forum sponsored a public debate to address the question, "Are MEAP assessments helping to improve student learning and school accountability?" Mark Leyda, Executive Director of the Michigan Merit Award, and Jim Sandy, Executive Director of the Michigan Business Leaders for Education Excellence, represented views supportive of the MEAP. Dr. Michael Peterson, Professor in the College of Education at Wayne State University and Co-Director of the Whole Schooling Consortium, and Greg Queen, high school social studies teacher in the Fitzgerald Public Schools spoke against the MEAP.

As the debate ended, lively conversa-

tion ensued among various groups of participants. In one of these, some ten individuals clustered around Mr. Jim Sandy. The group soon began to discuss the many challenges of schools who serve low income children. The participants were particularly interested in Mr. Sandy's views on this subject.

"When teachers teach well," said Mr. Sandy, "students will pass the MEAP no matter what problems they have in their lives outside of school." Some talked with Mr. Sandy about schools that "don't even have libraries."

"Such schools don't use the money well they have now," said Mr. Sandy referencing the billion dollars of bond money passed by Detroit voters that has yet to be used. One participant said to Mr. Sandy, "Yet the response of the state was to oust the elected school board, install a board with no

connections to Detroit which has done little."

Mr. Sandy responded by talking about Benton Harbor. "I can tell you about Benton Harbor," he said. "The schools there are terrible and the reason they are terrible is that people are not outraged at what is happening. The reason they are not outraged is that most of them are third generation welfare mothers who don't want to work and teach their kids that they don't need to."

Shocked, one participant said to Mr. Sandy, "I don't want to be disrespectful to you, but those words are some of the most disrespectful words to these people I have ever heard. What it says to me is that you don't know any of these women." Mr. Sandy was visibly angered and started to stalk off saying, "I'm not

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## Whether You Will Be The Hero Of Your Own Story Is Yet To Be Known!

But you sure could be the Hero of a story in the Rouge Forum News, especially if you write it.

You can see previous editions online at [http://www.pipeline.com/~rgibson/rouge\\_forum/](http://www.pipeline.com/~rgibson/rouge_forum/)

You can submit material for the Rouge Forum News by emailing Greg Queen at [rumbagarden@ameritech.net](mailto:rumbagarden@ameritech.net)

We are interested in publishing your work.



There are other ways to contribute to The Rouge Forum. The Rouge Forum is created entirely through voluntary efforts, including the printing costs. If you are interested in financially supporting the printing of the Rouge Forum, please contact Greg Queen at [rumbagarden@ameritech.net](mailto:rumbagarden@ameritech.net)

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listening to this.” However, he turned and said strongly, “The fact is I do know these people. My wife is from this area. I have been in these schools. These kids come up to me and tell me they have no future and so why should they study?”

“What *is* their future?” Mr. Sandy said

another participant. “What jobs are available for them? What might they see as a future?” Pausing momentarily Mr. Sandy said, “You are telling me that a Black kid from Benton Harbor with a College degree can’t get a job,” The participant said, “Maybe one, Mr. Sandy. But how many others will be hired by the companies your organization

represents?” Mr. Sandy stared and said nothing.

Later, out in the hall people were aghast at the blatant racist statements. “So this is what business leadership in Michigan really thinks of our most challenged schools and the children in them?” Indeed.

## Looking For Answers: My Night at the MEAP Debate

By Julie Hartman

“Benton Harbor has terrible schools because of poor educational leadership. That district can exist like that because it has nothing but third and fourth generation welfare mothers. One kid asked me, “why should I get an education?” They’re too used to being given everything. Just like Indians on reservations.”


These are the words of Jim Sandy, the Chamber of Commerce mouthpiece for the MEAP test, spoken after a public debate in Flint on February 15, 2001. I attended and was disappointed. The only information supplied is what is available on their web site. I had many questions about the MEAP; it is the subject of my research paper. I stayed to talk because a live person could not refer me to the website without an answer, unlike those who answered my calls to Lansing. Although none of my questions were answered, the above comment told me plenty about what is in the minds of the MEAP backers.

I believed the debate would answer my questions. It actually raised more so I stayed to ask them. I walked up to Mr. Sandy, who virtually ignored me. I had to interrupt him

to be acknowledged. During his part of the public presentation he said the state has done a poor job of communicating to teachers what their expectations are concerning the MEAP. So I asked what the state is doing about it now that the MEAP is a high stakes test. He said they must be doing something. I pressed him for the name of the plan and the name of who was in charge of its implementation. I received no answer. He resumed his conversation with another; I was definitely being ignored now. When the subject turned to abstract thinking in children, I asked him “Is the MEAP test reviewed by educational or developmental psychologists to assure the questions are developmentally appropriate for each age group given the test?” In lieu of an answer I was met with a stare. The conversation then turned to the issue of unequal funding. He replied with a spiel about the schools in Texas, adding that less money is spent per pupil than in Michigan and emphasizing teachers are paid less too (read as Michigan’s teachers are overpaid). He referred to visiting a Texas school with staff members from Ecorse. I asked, “If the Texas system is so good why isn’t the State bringing those experts here

**Are MEAP Assessments Helping to Improve Student Learning and School Accountability?**

But sweetie, you are going to need to know this for the MEAP!



But this has no meaning to my life!

A Flint Area Public Affairs Debate Program

**Thursday, February 15, 2001**

**7:30 - 9:00 p.m.**

**International Institute**

**515 Stevens Street, Flint**

**Speakers:**

- Jim Sandy, Executive Director, Michigan Business Leaders for Education Excellence
- Mark Leyda, Executive Director, Michigan Merit Award
- Greg Queen, High School Teacher, Clinton Township
- Michael Peterson, Professor in the College of Education at Wayne State University

**Moderator:**

- Dr. JoAnn Pastor, Associate Superintendent of Education and Learning, Genesee Intermediate School District

Co-sponsored by: Lakeshore College, Flint Community Schools, Flint Journal, Genesee Intermediate School District, International Institute, Peris, Inc., Genesee Middle School, Flint Community Schools, Lakeshore College, Michigan Business Leaders for Education Excellence, Michigan Chamber of Commerce, Michigan State University, Wayne State University.

to Michigan’s “failing” schools for training?” Again silence, this time I changed the subject.

I started to discuss the proper uses of an assessment test. He stated good teachers use the MEAP scores from one year to plan for the next. I agreed it was a proper use for the MEAP but had another question. If a good teacher follows through when does the state test again to measure the improvement and let the public know of it?” Again I was given a stare as a response. I went on to ask him why the State of Michigan does not inform the public of the limits of what

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# A Note To California Resisters About the Big Tests, School, and Social Justice

Rich Gibson

There are several interconnected threads going on and I want to try to respond:

In an increasingly inequitable and undemocratic, authoritarian and irrational society, to accept and promote curriculum standards is to create the scaffolding for the unreasonable high-stakes standardized tests that will invariably be imposed from the top in partisan fashion. The standards and the tests that are born within them will necessarily increase inequality and attack democracy, in the interest of elites. This is the social context of the tests and the specious, twisted, efforts to score them “fairly”—or to accuse the victims of this counterfeit project of cheating.

Outside this social context, nothing happens. That the government is not neutral, but a weapon of the wealthy, should be fairly obvious by now. What is developing before us is not a matter of which millionaire is in the White House, but the required maneuvers of a system that functions in the name of greed and fear, beyond human control. There is no significant difference between Gore and Clinton—or liberal and conservative leaders. Both are only personifications of competing elite interests within the processes of capital, and neither they nor their liberal or conservative allies have anything in common with most educators, students, or the mass of people who work or live in poverty—nothing in common but opposition. To descend from lesser evil to lesser evil in the political world is simply to feed the system, giving blood to the sharks, and to ratify evil in a more dangerous way—by supporting it, and stripping working people of the knowledge of the horrors ahead.

To address school reform without addressing, primarily, social and economic reform of the society that school is nested in, is like washing the air on one side of a screen door (Anyon). Today, to criticize standardized exams is to criticize, at some point, the processes of capital, its need for segregation, alienation, and profits. To stop short of that is to deal with only a small part of what is up, and to miss the reason for the standards and exams: to divide people and to regulate the substance of knowledge as well as the way people develop understanding. To stop short of a critique of capital is to assist in the construction of oppression.

**That the government is not neutral, but a weapon of the wealthy, should be fairly obvious by now.**

There is considerable criticism of the standards and testing that wants to address this as a matter of bad teaching methods, and nothing else. This is a dead end. It will eventually ratify the desires of elites, deepening segregation and promoting capital's needs, by using the modest power of some slightly more privileged districts to have standards and tests written more for their advantage—briefly. Once a lower rung on the social ladder is completely decimated, however, a higher rung is simply next. The lessons of the last century demonstrate rather clearly that an injury to one only goes before an injury to all.

To simplify, first poor and working class black people were hit—especially those in need of social services. Then the industrial working class as a whole was ripped apart. Now, school workers alone are centrally positioned to mount a

serious resistance that can reverberate back into communities and the working class—which holds, at the end of the day, more power. This means school workers need, on the one hand, to address questions of what people know and how they come to know it—resistance around curriculum and instruction

which would include matters of supplies, class size, and the tax structure—and to organize in new ways. To duplicate old methods of organizing will only lead us to where the working class is today—essentially defenseless, without a strategy or tactics that can win reforms or more fundamental change.

It is one thing to work within existing organizations like the NEA or AFT to try get the rank and file to take action for school/social change and to fight the standardization of the curriculum and tests. It is another thing to expect those organizations to adopt the fight as their own, rather than to try to divert it.

The top leaders of the teachers unions and the top leaders of their large locals are committed to preserving things as they are, for the most part, with few reforms here and there to make things a little better for themselves (many make more than \$300,000 a year now) and their constituents (teachers on the one hand, and elites—who can offer them better jobs and prestige—on the other hand). Kids are



# Let Them Eat Tests

By Monty Neill

With great fanfare, President George W. Bush focused the first week of his presidency on a plan to radically increase testing and institute vouchers through a new federal education program. While the voucher scheme is given little chance of passage in Congress, the testing proposals — federally mandated test score abuse — constitute a major threat to assessment reform efforts and will particularly harm poor children.

In the name of “accountability,” Bush proposes to require every state to test all public school students in grades 3 - 8 every year in language arts and math in exchange for federal funds. Students in low-scoring schools which fail to post test-score gains over three years would be able to use their share of federal funds to attend other public or private schools. Other sanctions and rewards could be imposed on those schools. The threat of federal funding sanctions will make state tests high-stakes, even where they now are not.

In promoting his plan, Bush lifted Children’s Defense Fund founder Marion Wright Edelman’s slogan “no

child will be left behind” — but in Texas, the primary model for his proposal, many students are left behind (see Examiner, ).

Though scores have risen on the state’s TAAS test, similar gains usually fail to appear on other tests.

Reading scores on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) failed to increase in Texas, while the score gap between minority students and whites in-

creased. Scores have increased on the state test in part due to intensive test coaching instead of real teaching, but also by classifying more students as special needs (and then not including them in the results) and by greatly increasing

Texas’ dropout/pushout rates are among the highest in the nation and have risen in reaction to the state’s high-stakes testing program.

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## I Do Not Support the TAAS

By Carol Holst

Springtime is almost here. After months of cold, nasty weather and short days, Texas children will finally have some time to go out and play with their friends, throw a ball for their puppies, examine caterpillars, and enjoy satisfying their natural curiosity about the world. Or will they?

You see, somebody has decided that our teachers and schools are not good enough, therefore they must be held accountable. All children must be held accountable for what they learn, so they must be tested. And tested. And tested. And of course, they must work very hard at school and at home to prepare for this test. Scores on the state examination entitled the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) have risen significantly, so this approach must be working very well. Or is it?

The accountability system in its current form has created a climate of fear for the children, suspicion for those who we entrust to educate them, and has opened the doors to discrimination against any child who does not meet the standard mandated by the state.

So TAAS scores are going up, and up, and up. More than

ever before, schools have earned the coveted Recognized or Exemplary status. But what has been done in the classroom to achieve these results? Is there really a “Texas Miracle” in education?

Here is an excerpt from a mom’s letter ;

“I do not support the TAAS. It’s abusive and this is why I think so: In fourth grade my daughter came home for a solid month preparing for her writing. The assignment was to write an essay every single night for a solid month and here is a sample assignment for ONE night:

How to Wash a Dog

Opening: What you need to wash your dog...5 sentences

1st supporting paragraph: Washing the dog...15 sentences.

2nd supporting paragraph: Finishing washing the dog...15 sentences.

3rd supporting paragraph: Drying the stinking dog...15 sentences.

Concluding paragraph: 5 sentences.

My daughter was in tears for a SOLID MONTH.”

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# There's a Ship in the Faculty Room, and it's a Relationship

By Lil Hosman

In almost any organization today, there is someone, a boss, leader, teacher, learner, customer, salesperson, who is trying to get someone else to change. They may be trying to get them to change behavior, as is often the case with teachers or students. They may be trying to get them to change a point of view or to value something differently. They may be trying to increase productivity. Whatever the change we'd like to see, we often see it as needing to be done by someone other than ourselves. If we are in the business of asking for change, as most teachers, administrators, and school personnel are, we know that 'wanting the best for students' doesn't necessarily translate into students doing their best work, or demonstrating the most acceptable behavior. It doesn't even mean that students will take the most effective way to get their needs met. They may in fact confound us with their approach to school, homework, personal health, and socialization. Most of us, as educators, have found that we cannot demand that students do things our way. It just doesn't work.

At another level, many of us have worked on staffs where we are less than satisfied with the way the building operates. It may feel like there is no vision, like we just run in circles. Our staff meetings are boring, and the state standards seem more important than the kids. There is so much to do we barely get it done, much less have time to eat lunch with our colleagues. We go to work each day but often we find the solution for our dissatisfaction with the process around us is to hunker down in our own little world-our room or our department, and try to make believe the rest of 'them' don't exist. We find our colleagues sometime combative, sometimes ridiculous, sometimes lazy, sometime ineffectual or inefficient. We find a small niche of people we like, admire, or have history a with and there we stay. We seldom venture out because the venture is often met with - "nothing has changed"-and we retreat.

The dilemma is clear, but what is the answer, or is there one? Have you ever worked on a staff where you loved going to work and it was a fun

place to be? If it was a school, it is a given that you were working hard, but even with that, you enjoyed it.

Here's a little test for you to take.

## FIRST TEST

1. What are the continents of the world?
2. What are the provinces of Canada?
3. What is included in the US Bill of Rights?
4. Name the president of the United States?
5. Name the president of the United States, Mexico and the Premier of Canada?

## SECOND TEST

1. Name your favorite teacher and tell why?
2. Tell me about someone who has influenced your life.
3. Tell me about the first car you owned.
4. Share with me the strengths of your parents.
5. Tell me about the class in which you learned the most.

Which answers were easier for you to remember? I'd venture the second. Why is that? The reason is probably

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## Freedom to Teach, Freedom to Learn: Critical Literacy for Caring Democratic Classrooms July 26-29, 2001-- Chicago, Illinois

The Whole Language Umbrella has asked the Rouge Forum and Whole Schooling Consortium to co-sponsor the annual summer conference. This will be a terrific event that builds on the ideas underlying the Education Summit and will work to link issues of literacy, democracy, inclusive education, high-stakes testing, and more. We have an opportunity to build connections among these and other critical issues.

More information can be found at the following website.

<http://www.ncte.org/convention/wlu2001/index.shtml>



# Questioning Standardized Education: What is the Alternative?

By Kristen Fragnoli

The standards movement is sweeping the United States. From conservatives to liberals, so called 'higher standards' are viewed as the answer to many of our country's most urgent questions about the quality of education. Within New York State, the Board of Regents determined standards to be coupled with mandated state assessments, starting as low as 4<sup>th</sup> grade. These high stakes tests, as a rider to higher standards, have caused deep reservations among some educators, parents, and students.

The movement for statewide testing has been a mixed blessing. The statewide tests have been used as educational report cards to allow policymakers and the public to see how the schools are doing. Many believe that the demand for testing and accountability has increased measure-driven instruction. Tests have been composed mostly of multiple choice questions, which cannot assess a student's ability to come up with his or her own answers. Many believe that test scores are being used inappropriately, that many tests are not accurately measuring student progress, and that standardized tests damage school instructional qualities (A Guide to Testing Reform in New York, 1990).

Within New York State the Department of Education has mandated that students must take a series of assessments throughout their elementary school years. In fourth grade, students are required to take language arts assessment, science assessment and math assessment. In fifth grade, students will be required to take a new social studies assessment that will include third grade and fourth grade

curriculum. These tests are considered to be high-stakes tests since they are associated with important consequences for examinees and scores that are seen as reflections of instructional quality. The stakes vary depending on the context in which the testing takes place. For New York students, test results are used in a variety of ways: grade promotion, summer school, teacher evaluation, district evaluation, academic intervention services, and allocation of funds. With so much riding on how New York State students perform on these state assessments, teachers are pressured into guaranteeing high scoring students. In many districts, raising test scores has become the single most important indicator of school improvement. As a result, teachers and administrators feel enormous pressure to ensure that test scores go up.

This pressure plays out in the classroom in a variety of ways. Teachers feel pressure to teach to the test and cover only the material that will be tested. This is evident in teachers stopping the introduction of new curricular instruction early in the year and spending the rest of the school year reviewing information already taught, in preparation for the test. In the case of the pending fifth grade social studies test in New York State, to be administered in the month of November, 40% of the test will concentrate on third grade curriculum and 60% will draw from the fourth grade curriculum. Consequently, the teacher will put on hold the new curriculum, to review all third and fourth grade material, in hopes that the students will excel on the test.

# Why Do We Have to Prove Ourselves Again?

To the people of Wisconsin,

We 9th grade students from La Follette H.S. have done some research and have a few things to say to you and a few things to ask you. By now you should know that Governor Tommy Thompson will probably be leaving for a new job in Washington D.C. But before he leaves he will already have done his damage to education in Wisconsin. You are probably asking yourself, "What could that be?" Well it's called the High School Graduation Test. This test is one of the many criteria, which determines whether or not we graduate from high school. The new HSGT test for the Class of 2004 requires us to take 4 major tests in order to graduate from high school. But we already take final exams for all our classes.

At La Follette H.S., under the 4 block system, we take final exams in October, January, March, and June - four times per year. How much more of our learning time will be consumed by test taking? How much more pressure and stress is going to be placed on us? Think about your own children when you accept the State of Wisconsin adding four more tests every fall and spring of each student's junior and senior year. Think about your tax dollars when you see the \$6-10 million cost required just to create and grade fill the bubble tests.

Government officials say this test is meant to give more value to the high school diploma. Yes, this test may limit the number of kids who graduate, but what does that help? Students who

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# Deregulate the Libraries For Freedom and Wisdom

By Dr. Pip Muggins, PhD.

With new winds of freedom blowing from California to Washington, D.C., now is a good time to move decisively against the last bastion of Collectivist Socialism in the United States, the insidious regulation of the libraries through public funding. This remnant of the leftist literacy movements of the thirties can now be corrected, to the benefit of everyone. It is the duty of each literate American to free the books from the edicts of the library system bureaucrats, the bibliocrats.

There are two targets of this proposal: the unjust taxation system that allows no real choice for over-burdened taxpaying citizens who want to opt for what they themselves want to read, and the lock-step practices of the bibliocrats who have set themselves apart from the mass of citizenry and who hold covert power of how and what people learn, stealthily hidden behind the veils of respectability and stacks of unnecessary books.

We need to let the free market standardize the library systems through the invisible hand of peoples' choices. We need to let the free market also set firm accountability measures for the bibliocrats so they can no longer work their one-worldly magic behind the backs of Americans.

Consider this: why not user fees for libraries? On a scale more grand, why not offer vouchers to areas that want to have private libraries, and modest financial rewards to those who do not. After all, why should people who choose not to read, or to read privately

in the peace and quiet of their homes, be forced to pay taxes to government controlled libraries which choose books behind our backs—many of them never to be read, some to be read by an effete few? Why should the many be forced to subsidize the dubious choices of the bibliocrats? Why not user fees, allowing the market to decide the books which will be and are read?

For example, a double-tier user fee system: a fee per book read, and an additional small fee linked to the number of words (or weight/size) in



the books. That is only fair. Indeed, it parallels the proposed practice of some prestigious academic journals like *Theory and Research in Social Education*. If you want to enter the library and read a book, pay for it. If you want to read a big book or a lot of words, pay a little more. In the future, with our remarkable growing technological capabilities, we may be able to develop a fair and sophisticated formula which considers word-length, weight, size, pictures, etc. For the time being, however, this common-sense proposal will do.

We must make the bibliocrats answerable. This can be achieved through the

natural selection process proposed above, which will mean that books in the future will be chosen by their rankings of popularity, and a system of accountability/acceptability which will allow officials to move, or remove, those bibliocrats who do not stay within the bounds of the free market system—whose libraries fall out of compliance with the natural order of things described above. In short, librarians whose libraries test themselves out by undercharging or over-selecting will be reconstituted, removed without rights of transfer. The free market, naturally, has its own rewards as well. The judicious application of a method of rewarding good librarians, clearly measured within the scientific quantitative bounds described above, could be offered to those librarians who comply with appropriate joy.

There is one more concern: the institutional matter. By now it should be abundantly clear that the bibliocrats stand between the people and the books they desire, and the libraries themselves are uninviting institutions. It follows, that the worst of these libraries should be replaced, especially those libraries which are physically or fiscally decrepit, and those libraries which seem to only serve the twisted tastes of people out of the mainstream in book selection. Therefore, in order to deliver the best services in the most humane ways, it follows that the churches should, on a case by case basis, replace the libraries, receiving funding in the same manner that the bibliocrats do. It is time for the collec-

Continued from front page

## Whole Schooling and Standardized Testing

Having said this, let's be more specific:

1. The MEAP largely measures the income and wealth of children. The correlation is very high such that in typical statistics you could very accurately predict an individual child's MEAP score and certainly the overall average of a school by the income of the parents. Recent reports in the Detroit Free Press and studies comparing Detroit schools with MEAP scores from other schools show this.

For high income schools the MEAP is largely a nuisance. Their children could stay home for 3 years and do well and they know it.

In fact, large numbers of high income Oakland County school districts boycotted the MEAP in recent years. These high income districts tend to have the most students who pass the MEAP tests. It is clear that the reward monies for kids who pass the tests was a political move by the Governor to quell the resistance of such high income communities. As the Rouge Forum says, bribery is 19<sup>th</sup> Democratic value.

2. For schools that serve working class and low income children, there is enormous pressure to 'raise the test scores' that helps create a culture that

destroys real learning.

Such schools may spend up to 40% of their instructional time teaching test-taking strategies, focusing on specific skills they think are on the MEAP and counseling certain kids out of taking the test who will bring their scores down. An interesting side note, the federal special education law now says that all children with disabilities are to have the same opportunity to take state exams like the MEAP. However, the law did not specifically say that their scores have to be counted in the totals. So schools exempt these kids systematically. It's not about raising learning for all kids, it's about winning.

We see efforts that build the entire schooling process around the MEAP

- pep rallies to "beat the MEAP"
- exempting low performing kids from taking the test
- spending substantial amounts of teacher time 'aligning' their entire curriculum with the test
- narrowing down frivolous and fun activities to spend all their time focusing on 'what will be on the test'
- putting pressure on teachers to 'not be slackers'
- creating exams schoolwide that 'look like the meap' rather than involving kids in real demonstrations of learning.

High income schools tend to have more teachers who involve kids in active learning, real thinking, project-based learning - strategies that we know promote substantial learning.

Low income schools, even without the MEAP, tend to have more teaching that is driven by narrow worksheets, unengaged learning, etc. The MEAP makes this worse.

I know two schools who have

had similar experiences. Each developed a truly model program where real learning is promoted for children, some 60% of whom are on free and reduced lunch. This school is visited from high and low income schools all over the metro area as a model of what can be done in real learning for children. They are an inclusive school with one of the lowest special education rates in the entire state. However, their MEAP scores are lower than desired. The principal was threatened with her job, enormous pressure has been put on teachers to do away with these strategies and focus in on worksheets about what will 'be on the test.' Multi-age teaching, an exemplary program at this school is also under scrutiny.

3. The great horror, however, is what the MEAP does to children.

Robert, "You are too stupid to take the MEAP."

Holly's son. needing therapy, Feels the stress from the MEAP because he is one of the high achievers in the school. Increased drop out rates.

Kids know for sure this is not about learning. It is about adults and real estate values.

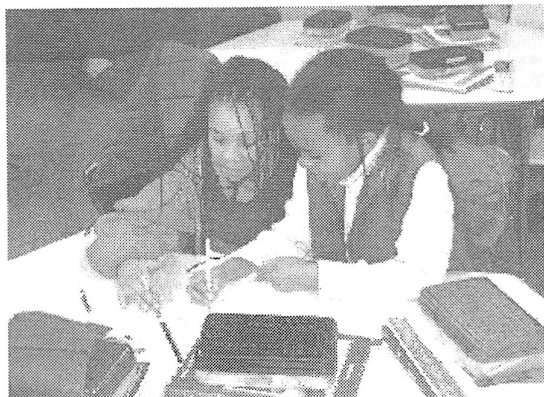
4. You might say this is all worth it if it led to something. However, the very foundation of the MEAP is worthless as the foundation of creating real learning for children.

All across the nation the 'standards movement' has sought to identify 'what children should know.' While this makes sense at first, when you look again, it makes no sense at all.

First, who was asked about what should be known, about the purpose of schooling, about what we want for children? Parents, community members, students themselves?

Not a chance.

The ones who set these supposed standards were (1) CEO's of compa-



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## Whole Schooling and Standardized Testing

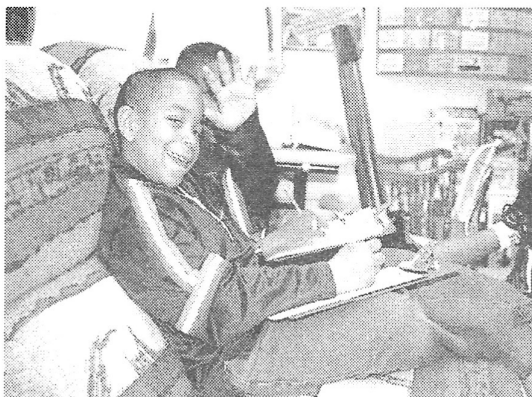
nies and (2) representatives of the various disciplines – reading, social studies, science. Not surprisingly, what we got out of the charade was a set of standards that (1) outlined narrow technical skills and ‘facts’ to be known and (2) impossible quantities of information.

Go look at any MEAP test and try to take it yourself. What you will find is this:

-Many questions to which you don’t know the answer.

-Answers that clearly reflect an interpretation of the world. A test that becomes a tool of indoctrination rather than an assessment of fact.

For example, on the social studies MEAP, students are presented information about a social situation in a local community and they are to write a response following very specific technical guidelines – they have to respond, draw information from facts given to them, and identify a core democratic value. The scoring guide illustrated online suggests that students often lose points because, instead of giving the precise technical format required, they instead “try to suggest solutions to social problems”. In other words, the social studies MEAP



doesn’t want kids to talk about solutions, but just to respond to technical directions in a formulaic way.

5. We can clearly see that the MEAP is simply designed to sort communities, put pressure on children, push away from teaching that helps children think and learn. What makes this most clear is that there is simply no discussion in any real way about the impact of this great and dangerous experiment.

There have been no evaluation studies conducted and none proposed that would provide an independent look.

What research and evaluation that has been done reinforces and validates all that I have said here tonight.

The only validation of this test and the political strategies used to insure that the populace takes it is power and force.

Teachers are threatened with punitive action if they want to tell parents that they have the right to exempt their children or want to even question the validity of the MEAP. What holds the MEAP in place is not research, not good practice, but sheer use of power by an alliance of people who run corporations and who hold positions of power in government.

With the election of President George Bush, of course, this will continue and get worse if his plans for fostering more ‘standards’ and more tests on schools are successful. From the man who has already brought us statements like . . .

“One reason I like to highlight reading is, reading is the beginnings of the ability to be a good student.

“I want it to be said that the Bush administration was a results-oriented administration, . . . teaching children to read and having an education system that’s responsive to the child and to the parents . . . will make America what we want it to be—a literate country and a hopefuller country.”

“They said, ‘You know, this issue doesn’t seem to resignate with the people.’ And I said, you know something? Whether it resignates or not doesn’t matter to me, because I stand for doing what’s the right thing, and what the right thing is hearing the voices of people who work.”

Like Michigan’s MEAP, the Texas TAAS is fostering harm on millions of children, increased drop-out rates, all unquestioned. The man who brought us the brilliance of these statements will soon be joining his colleagues in Michigan to create even more damage in our schools.

However, if we live in a democracy, then power is in the hands of people who care and will speak and the time to speak and act is now.

There are alternatives to the educational travesty based upon the ‘lots and lots and lots o facts curriculum’ and tests that sort kids by color and prepare them for the unemployment lines of corporate downsizing.

We can intentionally create schools that seek to be places of joy, growth and discovery, where part of ‘assessment’ is to create the best conditions for learning we know possible and watch what happens. Rather than the arm of power and force standing over a child and saying the equivalent of ‘Prove to me you have learned and are worthy,’ standing over teachers with a club or gun in hand saying, “Prove to me you have been teaching,” we can instead have community celebrations where children show products of their learning through portfolios, where in individual courses kids get to develop complex projects working as groups, where we look for and discover the unexpected learning.

Barb McKenzie is the parent of a remarkable child who carries a label of mental retardation. She has been included in a school that has bucked the tide and engaged kids in real learning. Here is what she says about her daughter’s learning, “Who would



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## Whole Schooling and Standardized Testing

have thought that..."

The Whole Schooling Consortium was formed in 1997 to provide a child, family, and community centered alternative and voice to fight against the repressive, regressive educational agenda being foisted on schools by people in fiscal and governmental power. We found our work on five basic principles which organize a host of specific schooling practices, all aimed at having children of real difference learn well together – Empowerment in a democracy – really, not just fake.

Including all in learning together. In truth illustrating that all children can learn, and learn together.

Authentic, multi-level teaching – kids challenged in real learning at their own level with support.

Building a caring community for learning.

Rather than segregate kids by ability and language, Support teachers and students with specialists who help enrich the regular classroom.

Partnering with parents and the community, linking school and community learning.

A critical start will be to hold schools and teachers accountable for how well they implement these types of practices which have deep and wide research bases.

A more fundamental start will be to hold business and government accountable for providing resources and support to make these practices possible – to provide equitable funding for schools, to insure that children have enough to eat and a decent place in which to live, to insure that teachers

are respected and have support in constant learning and growth.

Fortunately, there is a growing resistance movement to the child abuse fostered by the MEAP and other similar tests throughout the United States. It is led by courageous teachers and parents against the power phalanx of business and government. In Michigan, many have protested individually and some have done so collectively. The Rouge Forum is one network of parents, teachers, and community members promoting good teaching, democracy and the demise of the MEAP.

On May 5 at 11:00 AM in Detroit, a rally against the MEAP will be held. This will be a place to make a public statement against Michigan's plan to destroy real learning for its children and it will be a place to speak out for true democracy in schools. Come join us.

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## Community and Curriculum

actually occur decreases. The easiest way for me to draw examples of this is in my own field, English. Often times curriculum is developed by those far away from any particular classroom for very abstract purposes. Thus, the purpose of learning reading and writing becomes to know how to write for college, to score well on the verbal portion of the SAT, or to write well for the Michigan Educational Assessment Program. All of which are fine goals when looked at individually, but as purposes for the study of English literature, reading and writing, they seem to me to be weak to the degree of blasphemy in terms of the actual intentions of real readers and writers. One of my favorite quotes in relation to this is by Robert

Coles, who says that all literature addresses the great moral question, "How ought one live a life?" If all literature in some way works with such a compelling question (And who among us doesn't struggle with the same question to varying degrees? How can literature ever become irrelevant to the lives of adolescents if this question is the basis for its study?), then why form curriculum for the purpose of scoring well on a test, or knowing how to write a 5 paragraph essay? All too often the design of curriculum avoids the issues that the writers of literature put as the central themes of their work, the kind of questions that come to life naturally, without any curricular intention on the part of anyone in the life of a living community.

### Community and Curriculum

If we take Palmer's notion of the Third Thing seriously, then any meaningful look at curriculum can only take place from within the context of community. In other words, standardized testing is a waste of time to the degree that it imposes abstractions upon a community through curricular assumptions. Such a way of imagining what goes on in schools necessarily limits learning and the transformational potential of community. Instead, we need to look at curriculum as it really occurs when it lives. That is, we need to know that the kind of curriculum that leads to authentic learning always exists as within the dialogue of com-

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## Community and Curriculum

munity members. If the Third Thing provides the purpose of a community, then it also must be realized that a community continually reassesses, reshapes, re-envisions, and reforms its purpose through dialogue. This dialogue occurs between teacher and students, but mostly between teacher/student and subject. How quickly a class learns a curriculum by whatever measure always determines pace, which content material is learned and when. This is a simple example that reflects current reality. To take this further, I imagine a learning community in which curriculum is determined in the present. There is no plan that happens without negotiation. There is

no reading that is done without critical dialogue about its purpose, its relevance to teacher and student, individually and communally. Thus curriculum would never be static, but always evolving. The health of the community (and health here includes necessary feedback/confrontation) requires flexibility in relation to the subject and our approaches to it. There would not be an artificial ceiling to what is learned based on the content of any standardized test. (Anyway, tests such as these are developed far away from the context of particular classrooms.) The nature of a healthy community leads organically to the evolution of its own particular curriculum, a curriculum which has relevance built into its establishment, driven by authentic questions, leading to authentic learning and the habits of deep questioning and thinking. Isn't this

much closer to what actually occurs in any classroom that is alive, that is driven by the passion for learning that living a full life requires? Curriculum must be firmly grounded in the particulars of any given, particular community. When we develop curriculums to be bought and sold, usually because of their application to standardized tests, we deaden possibility. When we impose an external vision upon any particular community, we fragment and cheapen the existence of that community. We teach children that life (like our curriculum) exists as a given. That the world can't be shaped but must be settled for. Instead of developing a passion for learning we develop the habit of conformity to externals which students have no choice about. I want no part of such a vision. We can refuse to allow ourselves to be limited by the imagination of others.

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## Looking For Answers

can be ascertained by the MEAP test and why they do not release that information to the public when it releases the annual scores. Again, no direct response. The conversation changed again and the young teacher we spoke with had views she wanted heard.

The quoted comment at the beginning of the story was made during our discussion of the sad state of the school buildings throughout Michigan. When I heard the comment I told Mr. Sandy that I was offended (I have relatives on reservations) and he tried to backpedal. I asked for witnesses for verification of what I heard. I had three. Through my numbness, I heard Mr. Sandy claim his basis for expertise in matters pertaining to Benton Harbor's inhabitants: his wife lived in

the area at one time. By the same token I surmise his expertise on Native Americans accumulated from being the president of the Chamber of Commerce in Mt. Pleasant. Believe it or not, even after being so poorly treated I wanted to stay longer to further question this man, but I had to leave. Perhaps I had heard enough.

The two men supporting Michigan's standardized test, the MEAP, never answered a single question I had concerning the MEAP test. They did not address or even acknowledge the concerns or experiences of the educators asked to debate them. When asked to cite evidence or a study that proves the MEAP test is improving education in Michigan, one was so arrogant he said they didn't need one. I left the debate full of anger, and not only because I was victimized by an ignorant remark. I

resent the State of Michigan's Department of Education claims that educators need to be held accountable while those in the MEAP office collect handsome salaries to continue an expensive testing program without having to prove its worth. The very least the state could do is acknowledge the limitations and negative effects of the MEAP, and make sure it is used in the proper manner. I challenge the state to remove ignorant business executives with no experience dealing with or educating children, and hire some real experts. They do exist, but the powers that be must look beyond their own political cronies to hire them. Finally, I challenge the men from the Flint debate and their cohorts to really put children first. May I suggest their first step be to stop their parasitic feeding from the public trough created for them by the MEAP. The money could be better spent elsewhere.

## A Note to California Resisters

rarely in this relationship, especially not poor and working class kids. This is why both unions are still taking out full page ads in the NY Times demanding grade retention and more testing—in conjunction with the US Chamber of Commerce. Despite limited statements opposing the tests, what is true of the NEA and the AFT is also true of most of the professional organizations. And the structures of all of these organizations are set up to ensure that they cannot be fundamentally changed—however, they can be used as bases for making change.

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Teachers in the US are better positioned to make social change than any other organized group.

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Teachers in the US are better positioned to make social change than any other organized group. The teachers unions are the largest unions in the country, and unlike the other unions, they are growing. The reason the AFL is so eager for an NEA merger is, in part, because the AFL bosses desperately need NEA dues income (2 ½ million members). They also want to wipe out the few remaining democratic protections that exist only for NEA members (NEA is not part of the AFL) and to get the entire NEA to adopt the position of national unity, the unity of labor/business/government, that is a centerpiece of the AFL outlook—and the corporate state. It is difficult to discuss the developing social situation, and the tests, without mentioning fascism.

Teachers, for the time being, not the

industrial working class, represent the hope people might have to struggle for a civilized democratic society, both in theory and practice. Teachers are not only well positioned structurally, but they are also in a remarkably strategic position to understand what enslavement is, and ways out.

However, partially because of the makeup of the work force, partially because of the vetting process which seeks to eliminate the troublesome, but primarily because of their class position, most teachers will probably not take part in the fight for democracy and equality—in school or out.

Teachers see themselves, not necessarily incorrectly, as in the middle, and they vacillate between elites and the working class, usually tilting toward elites. At some point, vacillation becomes choosing sides, and those who make the choice to be missionaries for the privileged earn their own slavish fate.

There is no history that I know about of any majorities of the teaching force leading social change toward democracy and equality. There is plenty of history of teachers doing otherwise. In 1930's Germany, most teachers, overwhelmingly most, became Nazis—voluntarily.

Even so, some teachers, perhaps even many, will take up the task of fighting on the side of their kids, particularly the poorest and most labeled among them. There is plenty of history of some teachers playing leading roles in social change, in school and out, in organizations that sweep aside, go beyond, the traditional organizations that are designed to maintain injustice, not fight it. Still, one does not need the permission of the unions to go act in their names. But an organization that

operates both outside and inside the unions, that seeks to unite people in the communities, students, and school workers in an internally democratic yet action-oriented way, is key to building a social movement. That is why the Rouge Forum was founded. Organizing is just about everything.

Of course, there is an element of confrontation in this. There is violence in the tests and the standards. They are written to promote racism, the imperial gaze, and the practice that follows. The story of the History Standards should be enough evidence. The fellow who wrote them did so, he claims, because he was afraid a right-winger would do it. Then, the right-wing congress told him to go rewrite them. He did, took his millions, and complained about being abused.

Kicking the labeled kids out of school to set up high test scores is a form of violence. Demeaning children for failing to perform on tests that are written to ensure class differentials is violence. The tests are written in part to prepare the unthinking soldiers for the next oil war, soldiers who the elite hope will not desert and shoot their officers, as they did the last time the enemy fought back—in Vietnam. Stripping people of the critique of tyranny is violence. Responding to that is self-defense, which I am not suggesting should be done whimsically.

As capital grows more desperate in its search for cheap labor, markets, raw material, and Quislings; schools everywhere are likely to get worse, more regimented, segregated and irrational, not better. The ANC had a response to this: first make the schools ungovernable, then shut them down, replacing them where possible with Freedom Schools. One model of Freedom Schools they used was the schooling in Mississippi during the Civil Rights struggle. There are areas in the

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## A Note to California Resisters

US where this possibility is becoming 'thinkable,' if not likely.

If economic and social reform must accompany school reform, and if school reform not only addresses economic change but what people must know to forge a more democratic society, as well as how they need to come to know it; it follows that school reform can, at least temporarily, spark larger social reforms. This happened in France in 1968, but the links between students and the working class communities were weak, the leadership of the movement was immature, unable to grasp the need to carry reform to thorough-going democratic and egalitarian solutions.

Why the people who write and promote these exams would feel they can go home and not see pickets in their driveways, go to church and not have people rise up to denounce them, go to academic conferences and preside as if they are civilized people without facing rowdy disruption, go shopping and park their cars without discovering leaflets urging their children to censure them, why they should ever feel comfortable in the community—that is beyond me.

But in most areas we are a long way, from making life miserable for testistos, shutting down schools for long periods of time (remember though the Oakland strikes for 'schools not jails,' the massive Ontario Canada teacher strikes, Detroit school walk-outs and strikes etc.) and leading a social upheaval that restructures the way we live.

The gap between what is and what should be is what we need to fill. But that gap cannot be completely filled,

either by the vigorous negativity that grows with critiques of society and education, nor by our utopian ideas about a better world. It is the partial emptiness, I think, that keeps the desire aloft that will make change possible. Still, to move from one place to another, we need to consider what actions might be taken that could link us with more and more people, in order to both become more powerful and more wise.

So, what can we do?

We can insist on teaching well, in exploratory ways that address the personal *and* the structural (the make-up of the child, the student, the educator, the particular school- and capitalism) and not abusing the kids: love over ego. That means fighting the tests, and racism, everyday.

It also means considering what we know about how people learn, when the project is that they become self-conscious, self-activating, class-conscious people. We can link our teaching with life, with the struggles for production, reproduction, and rationality. Teachers nearly alone, I think, are prepared to understand that the failure of past revolutionary efforts was not just the failure of a few corrupt leaders, or just the failure of a bad analysis of what capitalism is, or a failure caused by external forces; but it was a failure of, significantly, education—people were never (rarely) addressed in ways that would not only tell them what was wrong, but offer them methods to understand what else might be wrong—or taught in ways that made them self-actualizing and conscious of the processes of capital, and to be able to perpetually reevaluate their own interests as a class in all of that.

People were never taught the confidence that they themselves can comprehend and act on the world-and methods to do it that grasp that analysis is always open, incomplete, as things change-but analysis is often complete enough to motivate action. Indeed, action is key to analysis.

It was always assumed that the leaders knew what was wrong with capital, and that if they just told the people, the people would understand. Missed almost entirely was the authoritarian psychology built into the hierarchical structures that capital also needs. People were never taught the confidence that they themselves can comprehend and act on the world-and methods to do it that grasp that analysis is always open, incomplete, as things change-but analysis is often complete enough to motivate action. Indeed, action is key to analysis.

At the least, we can do analyses of the tests, who wrote them, what is on them, who is segregated from the testing rooms and how, what the class/race implications are of the form and processes of the tests, what the results do, and so on. We can historicize the tests, in short, and then we can get the details on who wrote them and who promotes them and make those names and addresses and phone numbers and email addresses public for people to use them as they choose. The analysis of the tests holds a special promise in that it clearly demonstrates all the aspects of capital: the need to mask the interconnection of all things, the need to hide the key role of labor, the magical acceptance of the ownership of natural resources, the pretense that



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## A Note to California Resisters

the rule of the few over the many is natural and democratic.

We can organize by listening to peoples' problems and trying to see how our analysis, and the methods of our analysis, might be useful to them—and if it is not at all useful to them perhaps we need to reconsider it entirely.

We can work and point out the contradictions: inequality and democracy, the employee mentality of test-takers and the claims for citizenship education, growing unities of production and exchange, exacerbated disconnects via nationalism, racism, and segregation, the split of those who work and own, etc.

We can fight back, creatively, sometimes joyfully, sometimes ferociously. Boycotting the tests is great in some places. In others, having masses of kids deliberately fail is even better. Rejecting the bribes that are attached to the tests seems crucial to me—and possible. In California, entire schools are rejecting the payoffs. In Michigan, there is a growing movement of students and parents turning their backs on the money the state promises middle class kids for taking the tests.

We can grasp the relationship of reasoning and power. One can lead to the other, but at a certain point material interests override. For example, it is key to reason with students and parents, and sometimes with principals and other administrators. But there is little reasoning with most state legislators or superintendents. They need to see the power lurking behind the argument. And that power, in our case, is going to be located in the ability to mobilize masses of people in direct

action-aimed at a vital joint. For instance, in Detroit, to close a school for a march for “Books, Supplies, Lower Class Size—and a democratic curriculum” would be terrific. An even better march, built over a long time, might aim at the downtown casinos (the antithesis of everything that school stands for), what elites see as key to their recapture of the city.

We can understand the difference between altruistic solidarity and missionaryism. The former, solidarity, might be well exemplified by the upper-middle class school districts which took the lead in boycotting the state standards and the tests, in part because the students, parents, and educators recognized that the tests would wreck the schooling they mostly enjoyed, but also because many of them realized that the testing was aimed like a weapon at poorer districts, which did not have the power to initiate early resistance. The upper-middle class districts then set the stage for what later became broader resistance. The next move, which I am not suggesting flowed directly from the first, was the massive wildcat Detroit teachers' strike in which the rank and file swept aside a state law which everyone claimed had halted teacher strikes forever, and their union leaders who opposed the strike. The Detroit teachers had reciprocated in kind, demonstrating the even greater power of those who are directly tied to the most exploited sectors of the population. Missionaryism, in contrast, is the arrogant motive of the test-writers, the missionaries of the privileged, who have determined that people must adopt their vision, and they must allow the missionaries to interpret that vision, at the mere cost of one's soul.

We can carefully analyze our own situations, understanding that our situations are more similar than different, but that the differences are sometimes key. We can understand that every organizer always hears a litany from locals about why things are so special here that nothing will work, and the organizer goes and gets things to work-through the people who claim it cannot.

We can understand that there are interesting relationships between organizing and education, and that in our present situation, they are inseparable, with the organizing side often being the main thing to worry about.

In addition, we can recognize that the standard methods of redress, the remedies offered to us by the status quo, are actually designed to put us on avenues that separate us from our base of potential power. For example, union grievance procedures exist to physically move the struggle away from the workplace and into ‘reasonable’ pathways where the grievant, the union rep, and the bosses try to find compromises. But between workers and bosses, there are rarely compromises. There are winners and losers. While we are not powerful, we may have to use these procedures, not with any faith that they will work, but as a method to organize to the point where we can exercise enough control of the workplace to say, “I am not going to file a grievance. My friends and I are going to shut this place down until you concede.” Much the same can be said of the court system, electoral work, etc. At issue is the

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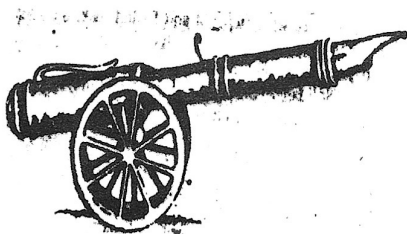


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## A Note to California Resisters

relationship of building a base for the serious exercise of power, and the methods of organizing around the temporary reform desired. This issue is not going to be resolved in the courts, in the press, in the electoral process. It can only be settled by offering up a sufficient amount of social unrest that the process of standardization and testing becomes too costly to pursue.

Lastly, for this grows too long, we can demonstrate that the same reason most people send their children to school, hope, is written into history-not something we whip up out of nothing. The structures of capital itself are driving us together through systems of production and exchange, while the ideology of capitalists seeks to drive us apart. Our task is to reach out for the golden ring that really is there-the material potential for equality and democracy, and world wide social consciousness. Hope is equivalent to social justice and I see that as the democratic and egalitarian struggle for what is true, an inexorable battle that is threaded through all of history. Only the oppressed have an interest in the truth. In short, we can win. We will win. At issue is simply how much we will lose, in terms of our humanity, before we do. And that decision is up to us. What we do counts, more than ever.



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## Let Them Eat Tests

grade retention and the dropout rate.

Texas' dropout/pushout rates are among the highest in the nation and have risen in reaction to the state's high-stakes testing program. Houston schools, headed by Education Secretary Rod Paige until January, has one of the highest dropout rates among all urban districts in the nation. In fact, seven of the 20 urban districts in the nation with the worst dropout rates are now located in Texas. At the same time, the number and proportion of students entering college needing remediation has increased and SAT scores have not risen as fast as they have in other states, even when taking account increases in the number of students taking the college admissions exam. Nationally, nine of the 10 states with the highest dropout rates have graduation tests, while none of the ten states with the highest graduation rates have such a policy.

In defending his testing proposals, Bush has falsely implied that opponents of his plan are "racist" for supporting "low expectations." But as the evidence from Texas shows, it is his testing proposals that will really harm minority and poor children. Increasingly, research is making clear that it is misleading to act as though schools by themselves can overcome the effects of poverty, even though they often can and should do more than they now do. However, many schools lack the resources to make the difference they should make. Bush's scheme will not only fail to address these problems, it will distract attention from these more fundamental realities by focusing on testing.

### Unwanted mandates

Currently, only 13 states test all students in both English and math in grades 3-8. Sixteen states test those subjects only twice in that grade span.

The rest fall in between, with about 10 only testing 3 of the 6 grade levels and the rest divided in various combinations. In short, half the states test less than half the amount the Bush proposal would require. Clearly, many states will have to drastically increase the amount of testing local policymakers have determined is appropriate.

This unnecessary and unhelpful federal intrusion into the process of school reform will force more states to direct resources toward turning schools into test-prep programs. Yet research has demonstrated that the states which administer the most tests and attach the highest consequences to them tend to have the weakest education programs (see Examiner, Winter 1997-98). Why should federal policy

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States with the most testing are also most likely to have the weakest, lowest-level exams.

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be based on states such as Alabama which do the worst and are less likely to show improvement?

Several independent studies have found that most state tests fail to measure the higher learning standards on which they claim to be based. Only a handful of states meet the mandate of the federal Title I program to use multiple measures. (Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, ESEA, is the major federal public school support program, and it now includes state testing and accountability elements; see Examiner). States with the most testing are also most likely to have the weakest, lowest-level exams. Rather than have states do

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# Let Them Eat Tests

assessment properly and fine-tune Title I, the Bush administration will push for more testing, which will probably further weaken the quality of exams as another consequence.

The Bush administration claims it is necessary to assess each student's progress annually to determine who is falling behind. However, this does not require standardized tests. Evaluating each child's progress should be a school and district process, perhaps with some state oversight, as the Massachusetts Coalition for Authentic Reform in Education recommends in its proposal for an authentic assessment system (see Examiner and FairTest website).

Given the inadequacy of most exams, more testing will hurt, not help or even be neutral. As the outgoing chair of the House Education Committee, Bill Goodling, said, "If more testing were the answer to the problems in our schools, testing would have solved them a long time ago."

Under the Bush plan, an expanded NAEP — testing reading and math every year in grades 4 through 8— would be used to evaluate state progress, thereby making NAEP a test worth teaching to. This would undermine NAEP's use as a neutral monitor. If states align their tests to NAEP, schools will therefore indirectly align their curriculum to NAEP, bringing a national curriculum in the back door without any real public discussion.

The Bush scheme also proposes to increase testing while reducing other federal regulations, many of which provide important safeguards for vulnerable students. Implicitly, the Bush plan says that the only accountability needed is found in test scores. There is simply no good evidence to

support the assumption that as long as scores go up, education is better for all.

## Fighting Back

Though the proposal existed only as "talking points" when it was unveiled, the Bush Administration hopes that detailed legislation can be passed by June. Bush's proposal will become intertwined with Congressional reauthorization of ESEA.

Assessment reformers, many civil rights activists and some educators have begun collaborating to stop the Bush proposal. FairTest initiated and led a coalition which stopped George H.W. Bush's national testing plan and also helped stop Bill Clinton's similar effort. However, "W's" plan would have the federal government work through mandates on the states rather than have one national test, making it appear less of a federal intrusion and potentially weakening opposition among "local control" Republicans. Nonetheless, the mandate which fails to answer any real world problem or need; the inevitable distortions of curriculum and instruction, particularly for low-income and minority-group students; and the distraction from real improvement are all issues which will be brought to Congress.

Other bills on education accountability have been introduced, including one in the Senate by Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) and one in the House by Democrats George Miller and Dale Kildee. Neither would expand testing, but both would affect how tests are used for accountability purposes.

— More up-to-date information and detailed discussion of these issues is on the Fairtest website at [www.fairtest.org](http://www.fairtest.org).

# Tell Them You Are From the Rouge Forum

By Greg Queen

On March 1st and 2nd, several of us attended the Michigan Council for the Social Studies (MCSS). Like many education centered organizations, the MCSS tended to emphasize the importance of standardized testing, curriculum alignment, etc in education reform. Last year, the Rouge Forum and the Whole Schooling Consortium sponsored a booth and a group of us offered an alternative position towards education and education renewal. We discussed the role of unions in the current movement towards standardization and critiqued the impact that high-stakes standardized tests are having upon students, teachers and communities. It was a success to the degree that the pro-standardized group had to deal with an opposition and those looking for an opposition found one. We were unable to person a booth this year but we still had some exciting moments.

The Whole Schooling Consortium and the Rouge Forum declared and is organizing a May 5th demonstration at Wayne State University in Detroit against Michigan's form of standardized tests called the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP). The demonstration will be held during the weeks that the high school form of the MEAP is administered. Our goal is to make a unified public statement that "Enough is Enough!" We demand real structural reform as spelled out in the

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## I Do Not Support the TAAS

Teachers are often required to throw out their lesson plans and teach TAAS testing strategies. Never mind that the children haven't learned about the United States Constitution or read the "Little House" series of books or had a hands-on science lesson in two months. The curriculum must be narrowed to what can be measured on a bubble-in sheet.

It seems clear that high-stakes testing is creating at least ten new problems to every solution it provides. All of our children are expected to reshape themselves to fit into a single narrow mold. Is this right? Obviously the answer is no, but should we expect the testing to just stop? It would be nice, but it's not likely to happen for at least four years, so we have to insist on changes that could make the accountability system friendly to our kids and their teachers.

If we must test our kids, then we should use the scores for diagnostic purposes only. If we continue to reward or punish schools based on test results, the pressure on our children will get even worse and we will continue to lose excellent teachers.

We should also stop making major decisions based on the outcome of one test. One test score is only a snapshot of what a child can do or learn. The requirement that students should pass a specific test to receive a high school diploma is unethical. It is also unethical to require children to pass a specific test to go on to the next grade. Even the testmakers agree this is not right, but it's what the new policy on social promotion will require. This is very bad news for children and teachers.

Parents should be informed about test development and scoring procedures before allowing a child to participate in the accountability program. We should also be allowed to see our child's answer sheets without having to go through state agencies or a school district dog-and-pony show. We have a right to know what kind of data is being collected on our kids, and why it's being done. They go to school to get an education, not to provide information for Big Government, Big Business, or Big Brother.

Now, the Texas situation won't improve right away just because we want it to. In fact, it's going to get worse and spread to all of the other states unless we unite and make our voices heard. Standardized testing has a history of being

used to sort, separate, and segregate people. Do we want to leave the door open for this to happen? Think about it. Latino people. People of African descent. Asian people. Native American people. People of different religious faiths. People with disabilities. People from low-income or single-parent families. Reducing a person's identity to a test score is wrong and so is depriving children of the opportunity to hear songs in different languages, taste other foods, see different styles of dress, touch different fabrics, and learn about different ways to move or communicate. We cannot allow this to happen. Parents, it's up to us. Grassroots action is what will stop the advance of test-centered curriculum in our schools.

There is a group of Texans called Parents United to Reform TAAS Testing. We started out in May 2000 with two moms who were introduced via e-mail and then decided to meet for lunch in Houston. Since then we have created a web page ([www.taasblues.com](http://www.taasblues.com)), presented testimony at local and State Board of Education meetings, started an e-mail discussion group ([taasblue@yahoo.com](mailto:taasblue@yahoo.com)), and talked to many concerned parents, teachers, students, and reporters. Currently we do not require anyone to sign a piece of paper declaring his or her membership. The reason for this is that teachers are very likely to be considered insubordinate if they speak out and we do not want to get them into trouble. Hopefully this situation will change soon.

The new year has been exciting for us so far. We were invited to speak at the Latinos and Equity in Education forum, which took place at the University of Texas on January 26. The response from the audience was very encouraging. We also protested in Austin the following week. We began these two events with about 150 buttons stating "No Mas TAAS," "Standards Schmandards," and other appropriate slogans. We now have only a few buttons left, which are the ones we've kept for ourselves to wear in public.

Speaking of public, the library in my small town has also given us permission to start a reference section dedicated to our efforts to educate other parents. Grassroots people know that there is something strange about all of this accountability business, but many do not know the specific cause of their unease. If this statement describes your feelings concerning this issue, I urge you to contact the Center for Fair and Open Testing ([www.fairtest.org](http://www.fairtest.org)) and find your state coordinator. S/he will be happy to help you in your efforts to learn about this threat to democratic, inclusive schooling. There is something we can do.

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## There's A Ship in the Faculty Room

because the second answers have value for you in some way. If content or experiences have value for us as human beings we find it much easier to retain the connected information. The operative word here is connected.

How does 'community' fit into the idea of connectedness? What is the value of focusing on relationships? Relationships allow us the gift of influence. If you have ever tried for very long to coerce, cajole, bribe, threaten or punish others into doing or being the way you want them to, you probably realize that doesn't work very well in the long term. Generally we don't change our behavior for someone who coerces, punishes, shames, complains, nags, whines or blames us.

If our goal is a school where we feel professionally fulfilled, where people treat each other with respect and positive regard, one avenue toward achieving that goal is to work with intentionality on staff relationships. We wouldn't dream of expecting students to pass tests without having taught them the basic information being tested. We teach with intention and with the goal that our students will acquire knowledge, gain skill, learn concepts and ideas and demonstrate that array in a summative evaluation. Often as educators, we use the cooperative learning model with our students. The first thing we teach them is the 'process' of working together, then we teach them the content. In the same way, if we want school staffs to work well together, we must intentionally focus on the process. A truly collegial staff is willing to spend the time to increase relationships, not so that everyone is lovey dovey but so that people have an opportunity to respect others, to interact, to focus on how they are alike, as opposed to how they are different. Being a congenial staff precedes being a collegial staff. We must get to know one another before we can begin to have lively discussions where it is perfectly reasonable to disagree and share points of view. If people are going to work in a group they will interact but they will not always agree; they will put out energy to function in the group. How much easier it is to put out positive energy than negative? Today, public schools offer us much opportunity to choose either negative or positive. Building staff relationships is both a way to relieve the stress that is so apparent in schools today and a way to change negative energy to positive. If we must dig a hole it is easier done with a shovel than a teaspoon. If we must work together it is easier to do it with intention and positive energy than haphazardly and with negativity. If I'm aware of a problem, I get to choose whether to be part of the problem or part of the solution.

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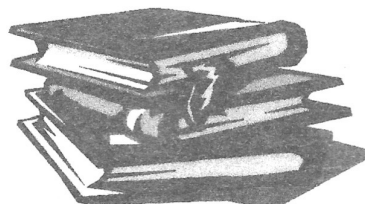
## Deregulate the Libraries For Freedom and Wisdom

tivists to stop standing between the people and the people who best serve them, those chosen with the way and the word. History shows that books are well-kept by the churches, and that the chosen select carefully as to which texts are truly deserving.

Who will favor this modest proposal? Well, surely the booksellers and the publishers will see the wisdom in all of this, allowing them to gear their presses and bookshelves to the natural processes of the market. For the citizenry, this is a badly needed and sensible tax cut, allowing appropriate expenditures to be directed where they are sorely needed: missile systems for instance.

In addition, we already have the agreement of key leaders of the bibliocrat unions, who see the wisdom in this as being in the national interest, that is, a natural unity of business, government, and labor around our patriotic design. We have also consulted the "Small Library Consortium," which sees the sagacity herein, and realizes that this shift to accountability and deregulation will better serve the citizenry with small libraries. The Rethinking Libraries group seems to be unsure of our proposal, but their close personal relationships with the library unionists, the chance for elected positions if they do not stand in front of our bandwagon, and a growing budget won from their Rethinking The False Claims of Class Struggle Hidden in Dickens, seems to be moving them in our direction. Of course, churches representing all races see the light in this proposal. And we have the support of significant parts of the professorate who are quite aware that this vital shift will open possibilities for the publication of significantly thicker textbooks, each to every deserving student without the interference and privacy danger of holding a library card.

Now is the time that tests the souls of men and women who want to stand up for the natural bond of the free market and knowledge. This is the day to take action. To the libraries! For Justice and the Free Market!





## Why Do We Have to Prove Ourselves Again?

pass this test are going to be the same students who are passing their classes! As for the ones who don't pass it, they will lose a lot of self-esteem and will very likely say, "The heck with high school" and dropout as soon as they can.

"Standardized testing has swelled and mutated, like a creature in one of those old horror movies," said by Alfie Kohn. So, the goal of having more students completing high school will be lost as the dropout rate goes up.

Will this test make high school graduates "smarter" as some suggest? That probably won't work because a test doesn't make you smarter. Learning in class and thinking for yourself makes you smarter, a test does not. This is a multiple choice based test, which means you're not giving us the chance to think for ourself, but that is how we've been taught. In all the years of school we have been taught to think for ourselves, to know important facts and to recognize how to use them. We have learned how to read and think, but from the sample test questions I've seen, the test does not test that. If there are students who can not read at grade level, why don't you spend \$6-10 million teaching them to read instead of testing them over and over to prove they can't read?

Recently, the UW Board of Regents Education Committee decided that all Wisconsin Public high school graduates would have to have taken the HSGT and pass it in order to be accepted at any of the UW campuses. These include students whose parents decided that learning is more important than testing 8 times a year and have opted out of the test. Many are probably the parents of very achieving students. All of those students will have already taken the ACT or SAT, met UW requirements and graduated in the top 15-20% of their class! If the ACT or the SAT are worthy tests, then why can't we just submit that score instead of taking the high school graduation test and wasting tax payer money? To ignore this option does not make any sense to me or many other clear thinking people.

The money used for this test could be used for many other things: building more schools in over crowded areas; buying new desks and supplies for schools; giving more pay to the teachers because we all know they should get more for putting up with us. These are just a few of our

ideas. There are lots of things you could use this money for that would make this state better then it already is. All you have to do is think about it. Our suggestions make a lot of sense.

Clearly there are many unanswered questions from both students and parents, but the biggest one is "Why Do We Have To Prove Ourselves Again?" We work all year, studying hard, passing our classes and getting the ever increasing credit that we need to graduate. We take final exams 4 times a year, and now you want to make us prove, in still another way that we are worthy. We have already shown you that we know what we have learned and have done so in many ways. To many people that's fair and that's enough. Wisconsin high school students are already tops in the nation. It seems that it's easy to sit in your big old desk and say, "Kids don't know anything."

We suggest that you should not have exclusive control over our futures. We need a voice in our future. In a democracy, we learn to make our own choices and whether they're good or bad, that's up to us. So let us go through high school, learning, studying, proving ourselves, not being scared of this test. Let us live our teenage years in happiness. Let us be ourselves.

Your future,

Josh McDermott & Students in the class of 2004





## Questioning Standardized Testing

Many educators believe that the testing practices used in the classroom influence what and how information is being taught, and, consequently, what students learn. In many cases teachers feel so much pressure to produce high scores, they use the test as curriculum and teach not only the content but the format (ex. multiple choice) of the test.

“A meta-analysis of research on test preparation showed that the effect of coaching students on items that parallel those on the test had a .23 to .45 standard deviation effect on the test taken” (Smith and Fey, 2000, p.339). Teachers can inflate scores of students up to six months, making steadiest appear half a school year ahead (Smith and Fey, 2000, p.339). The question then remains – are the students learning more or learning how to take a test? This research goes hand in hand with statistics showing the first go of standardized tests results in low overall achievement scores. By the second year of administering the assessment scores are starting to rebound. Take New York States 4<sup>th</sup> grade English Language Arts Assessment debut in 1999, more than 50 percent of the state’s 4<sup>th</sup> graders were deemed at risk of not graduating in the year 2007 (Brooks & Brooks, 1999, p.20). By the second year of testing NYS students and teachers had made miraculous strides in raising test scores.

This tendency for teachers to center instruction on the form of questions contained on the mandated test in hopes of guaranteeing high scoring students, can be tied to teacher professional development which centers on teaching teachers to teach to the test. This becomes evident when viewing the NYSCSS annual conference brochure. Thirty-five sessions offered new assessment material or specifically mentioned DBQ or primary document analysis material. The use of primary material or data based questioning can be a very effective form of assessment and instruction. However, to implement DBQs within a program solely for students to score higher on a test, and not for students to see the historical or sociological significance of the material that is being analyzed, is educational malpractice. Although data based questions have merit, on the fifth grade NYS assessment, students will only have to answer one DBQ question, worth 30% of their grade. Consequently, these same fifth graders will have to answer 50 multiple choice questions, worth 50% of their grade, thus sending the message to teachers and students to teach and memorize what is being tested.

Knowledge should not be viewed as an end in itself. This

view of education leaves no time for extending student knowledge by applying it to the lives of people and their social conditions, proposing solutions to societal problems, or recognizing responsibility to their community. It becomes evident with the establishment of high-stakes testing that district results are more important than the discourse which is necessary to instill agency within our students in hopes that they can work towards the betterment of society.

Many believe that despite all of this, tests will provide a system to improve our schools by measuring them against each other and objective criteria. However, one must also be aware that the criteria of comparison may *seem* objective on the surface, yet these assessments do not take into consideration the existing differences in race, class and resources. In addition, one needs to be aware of the Lake Wobegon effect, coined this by Dr. Hohn Jacob Crannell, when he researched the puzzling reports from school districts across the country reporting that their students were above average. Carannell discovered, “More than 90 percent of the fifteen thousand elementary school districts and 80 percent of the secondary school districts in the nation reported scores above the national norm, instead of the expected 50 percent.” He provided a variety of explanations; students who sit for a norm referenced standardized test are compared with a norm group. This norm group is tested cold without any preparation on test questions. This means that the school district may have scored higher than the norm group, but not necessarily higher than the average of all students taking the test (Smith and Fey, 2000, p.339).

Education which is based on test score comparison and promotes a learning environment dependent on test prep packages sold by textbook companies, that does not allow for teacher input, creativity or student interest cannot bridge the gap between real life and learning. Just as research has shown that children learn by trial and error, we as educators have to be willing to take chances and break away from the existing parameters and styles to try out new methods and content. We need to be willing to let the students run with an idea or question and not be halted by the standards or high-stakes testing.

This new view encourages teaching methods, such as, interdisciplinary approaches, which will ease the pressure of covering large bodies of information. It takes the onerous off the almighty test and allows children to be self-initiating and self-evaluating in their own learning process. The ability for a child to experience personal meaning in the

# Questioning Standardized Testing

learning process is much more valuable than the accumulation of facts.

Educators must offer students a chance to demonstrate that they possess sophisticated knowledge and understanding that go beyond their skills of reading and writing and center on the child's uniqueness and life experiences. It is through these life experiences, their situatedness, that one needs to assist children to view the world with their eyes, heart and mind open. Dewey wrote, "The self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice of action (Greene, 1995, p. 177)."

Incorporating material that relates to different students' situatedness would empower them in a variety of ways. This is enforced by the belief that they get to know not just about the family they were born into, but about their extended identity as well: who they are, what their place in the world is, and what they can claim as their personal cultural heritage. Currently, students who are in much need of capturing and rejoicing in their identities are taught rote factual information, which kills their creativity and creates passive learners. This has resulted in schools that reinforce the separation of curriculum from the child's life experience. The challenge for the teacher, then, lies in deciding what aspects of important content match up with elements of students' lives. The most important way of personalizing education lies in the connection students make with their own families and experiences. In this way students will be able to critically question, continually discover new meanings, and to feel comfortable in acting creatively.

The basic theory justifying such tests-

that a student can demonstrate the knowledge of a discipline by completing a multiple-choice test - has little support. If researchers, educators, and parents find fault in the premise behind high stakes testing, and its costs are so severe, then why are states across the country accelerating the creation, administration, and value placed on test scores? Tests have become the chosen means in the evaluation of students and school districts because they are cost effective and the general public believes schools and students should be accountable for outcomes as measured by tests. In this way tests can be regarded as vehicles for advancing

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The challenge for the teacher, then, lies in deciding what aspects of important content match up with elements of students' lives.

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political ambitions and unstated ideological ends. This quick, cheap, and ineffective plan for accountability has stolen the limelight from other issues in education - what is being taught, what is not being taught, and what are the political motives behind these decisions?

Teachers are handed the New York State standards and are expected to teach from them. To insure teacher compliance, these standards are followed up with a series of high stakes tests. Many educators have jumped upon the standards train while it was leaving the station, before reflectively viewing where this train would lead the institution of education. Teachers and local communities have lost their ability to view curriculum and assessment according to and for the

sake of their unique student population. This crucial role of education has been usurped by politicians that promote the beliefs and policies that the same curriculum for all is equal and that a test score can measure true assessment of learning. To actually succeed in changing the structure of education this hegemony has to be altered. The whole society has to view the purpose of education in a different light. As millions of elementary students across the country sit down to take a series of state mandated assessments, we as parents, educators and community members need to raise ideological concerns about the control of knowledge and its social consequences.

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## What We Can Know and When We Can Know It: Education Reform, Testing, and the Standardization Craze

reform advocates from across the political spectrum have rallied around education policies that rely on high-stakes tests as the engine for what is known as standards-based educational reform. Indeed, US public education is in the midst of a standardization craze. Standardization advocates are working to produce, promote, and implement a host of standards-based policies, which coupled with mandatory, high-stakes tests effectively police the classroom work of teachers and students (as well as the involvement of parents in educational decisions). This standardization craze poses a further threat to parents, teachers, students, and local community members by undermining their efforts to define their own interests and desires.

### The Liberal-Conservative Consensus on Standards-Based Education Reform

Standards-based educational reforms should be understood both within the context of neoliberalism and against the establishment of such present-day novelties as the “compassionate conservative,” the “new Democrat,” and the Blair-Clinton project of a neurotically “centrist” Third Way. In each case historically liberal and conservative principles coalesce, morphing into a nearly indistinguishable “muddle in the middle”—a singular caricature of democratic political machinations and populist rhetorical ideals.

A hallmark of the standardization craze is its remarkable capacity to unite seemingly disparate individuals and interests around the “necessity” of national and/or state educational standards—the standardization imperative. Ostensibly strange bedfellows, including for instance E. D. Hirsch, Jr., Diane Ravitch, Chester Finn, Gary

Nash, Bill Clinton, IBM chairman Lou Gerstner, the leaders of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Education Association (NEA), most if not all state departments of education, and a majority of governors (Democratic and Republican), join to support standards-based reform and its concomitant “need” to implement systems of mandated, high-stakes testing. Somehow these “divergent” educational leaders manage to pull together around standards-based reform as the medium for “real” public school improvement.

(In the past two years the Education Excellence Partnership, which includes the AFT, NEA, The Business Roundtable, US Chamber of Commerce, National Alliance of Business, Achieve Inc., National Governor’s Association, and US Department of Education, have sponsored over 50 full-page advertisements in The New York Times promoting the standards agenda and, in particular, the use of high-stakes tests as means to both “motivate achievement” and retain children in grade. It should also be noted that the use of tests in these ways contradicts what we know from a large body of educational research, which tells us that grade retention only damages children’s chances to succeed educationally and that high-stakes testing reduces students’ motivation to learn.)

Education policy is being crafted in a milieu distinguished by the pro-standards consensus among an array of both liberal and conservative players. Accordingly, the commitments of the political-pedagogical right—public school privatization, the reduction of national financial support for public education, the promotion of US global corporate hegemony, “creationism,”

socio-cultural homogenization around a few dominant “moral” themes, anti-immigration, the assault on organized labor, school prayer, and so on—blend with those of the left—equality, expanded democracy, economic opportunity, social justice, diversity, and so on—to create a clever though fundamentally confusing admixture of multiple contradictions and inconsistencies. (Consider for a moment the mind-boggling implications of an [oxy]moronic assertion such as standardized diversity within a setting of White-European-Christian-Capitalist-centrism.)

Nevertheless, the pro-standards bandwagon rolls on, though undoubtedly it has been relatively more successful in some content areas than others—compare, for example, the broad-based and generally favorable cohesion of educators around the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics’ math standards to the deep-seated and heated divisiveness of the national history standards. The tendency among the educationally powerful has been to rally around a few key official pronouncements by professional education groups, academic societies, and teacher unions, and by such “reform-minded” states as Maryland, Virginia, Ohio, and New York. Over time these various frameworks (and the textbooks with which they develop a mutually reinforcing relationship) fuse so as to constitute in essence a nationally standardized curriculum.

At its core the pro-standards consensus can be characterized by its commitment to a relatively few defining principles. Advocates argue first that

## What We Can Know and When We Can Know It: Education Reform, Testing, and the Standardization Craze

standards-based reform is necessary vis-à-vis school improvement because the current educational “crisis” is rooted in the inability or unwillingness of “failing” schools to offer the same “high quality” programs provided by more “successful” schools. Since the identified purposes, selected content, teachers, and modes of evaluation must be better in some (usually wealthy and majority white) schools than in others (usually less wealthy and majority Latino/a and African American), the implications are unmistakable. Elite educational leaders and policymakers are saying that “other” schools can indeed improve, but only to the extent that they become more like “our” schools. Hence, the one-sided standardization imperative and the subsequent normalization of whiteness, wealth, and exclusionary forms of knowledge.

In short, the standardization alliance argues, in most cases without any evidence, that: (1) today’s students do not “know enough” (no matter how know enough is defined); (2) curriculum and assessment standards will lead to higher achievement (although arguably many students achieve highly now—they just do so differently or in ways not easily quantified); (3) national and state standards are crucial in terms of successful US-corporate-global economic competition; (4) standards-based reform should occur with federal guidance yet be implemented under local control (thus keeping both big government liberals and New Federalist conservatives happy); and (5) “higher” standards/standardization will promote equal educational, thus economic and political, opportunity.

### Race, Class, Test Scores, and the Myth of the “Texas Miracle”

The primary justification for the imposition of standardized curricula and/or the seizure of local schools by the state/corporate alliances (such as occurred in Detroit) has been poor test scores and high drop out rates, even both are less a reflection of student ability or achievement than a measure of parental income. For example, Peter Sacks’ book Standardized Minds presents data showing that students taking the SAT can expect to score an extra thirty points for every \$10,000 in their parents’ yearly income. A study of the state testing program in Michigan (MEAP), conducted by the Detroit Free Press found that as the level of poverty goes up in school districts MEAP scores go down. In addition, the Free Press study found a number of other factors impacting MEAP scores: the percent of single parents in a district; the local unemployment rate; school funds per pupil; the percent of students who speak English as a second language; and the percent of households where no one is a high school graduate (see “Testing MEAP” available on-line: [http://www.freep.com/news/meap/main\\_test.htm](http://www.freep.com/news/meap/main_test.htm)).

Last year, Ohio became the 35th state to institute a system of classroom “accountability” based on student test scores. To determine who will move from fourth to fifth grade and who will graduate from high school, officials will use a single test score—a practice long condemned by testing experts and reiterated recently in a report by the National Research Council. Based solely on the Ohio Proficiency Test (OPT) scores of fourth-, sixth-, and eighth-graders, Ohio officials have concluded that 5% of the state’s school districts deserve top grades, while fully a third have been declared

in academic danger. A study of the OPT results by Randy L. Hoover, a professor at Youngstown State University, suggests that OPT scores are so significantly related to the social-economic living conditions and experiences of students that the test has no validity as a measure either of academic learning or teacher effectiveness. (Hoover’s study is available online at: <http://www.cc.yosu.edu/~rlhoover/ClassConnections/OPT/index.html>) As the Cleveland Plain Dealer opined, the OPT determines “whether state officials applaud an individual system, or prepare to invade it.”

George W. Bush and other standardistos (both Democrat and Republican) have claimed that introduction of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test in 1990-1991 produced a near miraculous turnaround in educational achievement in the Lone Star State, reducing dropouts, increasing student achievement and reducing the test score gaps among white, African American and Latino/a students. Recent studies by researchers at The University of Texas, Boston College, The Rand Corporation as well as Rice, Rutgers, and Harvard Universities, however, have raised serious questions about the validity the reported test score gains in Texas.

A study by Walt Haney, professor of education at Boston College and senior research associate in the Center for the Study of Testing, Evaluation, and Educational Policy, found that the TAAS actually contributes to retention in grade and dropping out. He reports only 50% of minority students in Texas have been progressing from grade 9 to high school graduation since in the



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initiation of the TAAS testing program (and evidence suggests that slightly less than 70% of all students in Texas actually graduated from high school in the 1990s). Across the past two decades, there has also been a steady rise in the rates at which African American and Latino/a students in Texas have been required to repeat grade 9; by the late 1990s nearly 30% were “failing” grade 9. Grade retention rates for African Americans and Latinos/as in Texas are nearly twice as high as for white students.

As test scores on the TAAS have soared, researchers have failed to find similar improvements in other, more reliable, measures of Texas students’ achievement (e.g., SAT scores and the National Assessment of Educational Progress or NAEP). Indeed, as measured by performance on the SAT, achievement of Texas high school students has not improved since the early 1990s; SAT-Math scores have deteriorated relative to students nationally, reports Haney. The Rand study found that the dramatic reading and math gains indicated by TAAS results were not reflected in the NAEP. Instead, NAEP results indicate only small increases, similar to those observed nationwide. Moreover, according to the NAEP the test score gap between whites and students of color in Texas is not only very large but also growing. There is an expanding consensus among researchers that the miracle test score increases on the TAAS are the result of intensive test-prep activities that undermine substantive teaching and learning. In Contradictions of School Reform: The Costs of Standardized Testing, Linda McNeil, a professor of education at Rice University in Houston, reports that many schools in Texas are devoting tremendous amounts of time to highly specific “skills” intended

to improve students’ scores on the TAAS. McNeil reports that after several years in classes where “reading” assignments were increasingly TAAS practice materials, children were unable to read a novel intended for students two years younger.

The other way Texas schools have improved TAAS scores is by increasing the number of students excluded from taking the test. In 1999, Texas tested 48% of its special education students, down from 62% in 1998—that is an additional 37,751 students not taking the test. Those exemptions include 13% of Latino/a, 12% of African American, and only 5% of white students. The Haney study reports that a substantial portion of increases in TAAS pass rates in the 1990s is due to such exclusions and prompts him to conclude “the gains on TAAS and the unbelievable decreases in dropouts during the 1990s are more illusory than real. The Texas ‘miracle’ is more hat than cattle.”

### Regulating Education and the Economy

It is clear that scores on high-stakes standardized tests as well as dropout rates are directly related to poverty, and none of the powers demanding school standardization or seizure appears seriously prepared to address this condition. Paradoxically, though perhaps unsurprisingly, states instead have increasingly sought to punish low-scoring (read less wealthy) schools and districts by cutting funding that might help them raise their all-important test scores and become more “like” (via smaller classes, greater resources, increased staffing, modernized facilities) wealthier (read high-scoring) schools. Bush’s plan for US schools would use vouchers—tax money to reimburse families for tuition

at private, including religious, schools—as a punishment for “failing” schools.

Although the established pro-standardization position has been hit with at least some degree of criticism (notably both from the Right, which sees standards-based reform as imposing on local school district autonomy, and from the Left, which sees it as racist, sexist, and classist), one fascinating feature of the consensus view remains its willingness to take such criticism seriously yet still maintain that it can satisfactorily be accommodated by and/or assimilated within the prevailing framework. Thus while particular positions may differ marginally on the specifics (the devil is in the details), the demand for standards-based reform itself—the standardization imperative—goes unchallenged, at least among the alliance of conservative and liberal politicians, corporate elites, chief school officers, and teacher union leaders.

Ensnared within this alliance is an insidious move on the part of elite stakeholders toward the corporate/state regulation and administration of knowledge, a move that enables what Noam Chomsky calls “systems of unaccountable power” to make self-interested decisions ostensibly on behalf of the public when, in fact, most members of the public have no meaningful say in what or how decisions are made or in what can count as legitimate knowledge. This, of course, is purposeful and involves the coordinated control of such pedagogical processes as goal setting, curriculum development, testing, and teacher education/ evaluation, the management of which works to restrict not only what and who can claim the status of “real” knowledge, but also who ultimately has access to it.

Continued on next page

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Moreover, these consensus elites are among the same powerful few who make decisions about and promote such neoliberal policies and institutions as GATT, NAFTA, and the WTO as good for the American public. What exists here is an unambiguous, power-laden connection between the regulation of knowledge on the one hand and the regulation of the economy on the other, a joint effort by the politically, culturally, and economically powerful (nominally on behalf of the public) designed to stifle democracy while simultaneously enhancing the profits of multinational corporations and the ultra-rich. It is a reproductive and circular system, a power-knowledge-economics regime in which the financial gains of a few are reinforced by what can count as school (thus social) knowledge, and in which what can count as knowledge is determined so as to support the financial greed of corporations.

A conspicuous example is the social studies curriculum where, as John Marciano in Civic Illiteracy and Education argues, “students are ethically quarantined from the truth about what the U.S. has done in their name.” This is particularly true with regard to US perpetrated and sponsored aggression abroad, which is most often represented to students as unfortunate or accidental by-products of essentially humane policies that serve the “national interests,” while what constitutes the latter remains unexamined. Those who administer the economy in their own self-interests are those who regulate the production and dissemination of knowledge and vice versa, all the while working superficially in the public interest but intentionally excluding any authentic public

involvement.

Teachers and local school communities are left without the authority to bring their collective resources to bear on a matter as important as the education of their children. The people who know children best—families and teachers—must give way to tighter control over what happens in classrooms by people who are not in the classroom or even from the community. Despite rhetoric linking standards-based reform to benefits for all within the vast constituency of public schools, the cold fact is that those who regulate both knowledge (through standardization) and the economy are working for their own political and economic agendas, acting as though the public extended no farther than their privately secured office buildings and comfortably gated communities.

From a progressive perspective standards-based reforms fail on a number of related levels. Inherently anti-democratic, such efforts oppose, for example, John Dewey’s two “democratic criteria,” exemplified in Democracy and Education, of “more numerous and more varied points of shared common interest” and “freer interaction between social groups,” both of which weigh heavily on the origins and evolution of US public schooling. Further, standards-based education reforms are oppressive, illustrating in practice not only the late radical educator Paulo Freire’s widely read and influential concepts of “banking education” and “prescription,” but also contemporary political theorist Iris Marion Young’s notion of the “five faces of oppression” (namely exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence). In sum, standards-based reform privileges certain images of education (for instance, those media

critiques of schooling based upon test scores, which David Berliner and Bruce Biddle so effectively debunk in The Manufactured Crisis) over the authentic experiences of everyday classroom life. Too frequently such images themselves end up promoting the “corporate good” at the expense of any reasonable understanding of the “collective good,” particularly problematic since the extension of the collective good is why we have public schools in the first place.

By not vigorously resisting standards-based reform concerned citizens simply capitulate to the government-sponsored corporatization of public knowledge. Still, one might be optimistic given that in many states and school districts students and teachers themselves have spearheaded the opposition. Student-led and teacher-supported protests in Michigan, Massachusetts, California, and Illinois, for example, involving organized boycotts, walkouts, refusals to take tests, faking and accepting intentionally low scores have demonstrated the potential effectiveness of subverting the demands of the powerful in favor of those of the apparently powerless. The standardization craze in education is a cause for either optimism or pessimism, depending, of course, upon how we ultimately make sense of the potential for concerted public action. We are optimistic.

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## Tell Them You Are From the Rouge Forum

principles of the Whole Schooling Consortium. If you are here in Michigan you are invited to participate in organizing the demonstration. Times and dates of meetings may be found at the following website <http://www.coe.wayne.edu/CommunityBuilding/WSC.html> So far we have made a variety of flyers to distribute which was our main goal at the MCSS conference.

At the MCSS conference, we placed flyers throughout the conference center. I have never really participated in such an activity and the heart was pounding. After a while, it was fun especially when we watched people walk past the flyers, stop, and go back to get one. By the end of the conference, people were coming up to us asking for flyers. It was great. I really got a kick out what happened next.

The MEAP department was originally in the Michigan Department of Education but once the state start bribing the rebellious wealthier districts with a cash reward for passing the MEAP, it was moved to the Treasury Department. The executive director of the department is a thirty-year ex-employee from Ford Motor Company who at a debate said the MEAP was not about politics or power. The coordinators in Michigan for the Social Studies portion of the MEAP are Bruce Brousseau and Karen Todorov (the latter is still located in the Michigan Department of Education). For the past few years, these two have held joint session to "educate" teachers in regards to the MEAP. Each year, I have asked Bruce Brousseau questions concerning the MEAP and each year he has attacked the criticism and the criticizer. In my estimation he is extremely arrogant, an

authoritarian and by now has become fed up with the Rouge Forum. At the National Council for the Social Studies, he attempted to disrupt a session held by members of the Rouge Forum and he was easily quieted. Some of us decided to attend a session held by Bruce and Karen titled "Scoring the MEAP."

The goal of the session was to inform teachers on how to score the writing portions of the Social Studies MEAP which is only about 10% of the whole test because most of the test is multiple choice. We sat in the front row where Bruce was speaking. Although I do not disagree with some of the suggestion he was making to help kids become better writers, I find the grading of these things such a 'gotcha' mentality. Funding can be based on these methods of assessment. While he was speaking I was writing the following:

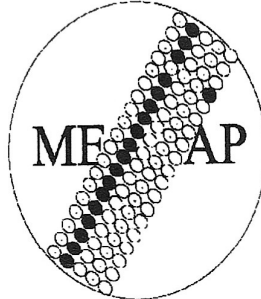
"It, the MEAP, is a vocabulary word that goes against the common good. It is important to remember that the patriots of the American Revolution, first union organizers and the Civil Rights Movement violated the rule of law. I am a high school teacher who thinks the MEAP is a public policy issue that needs to be stopped and as we saw in Dubya's speech, the anti-testing crowd is gaining ground. We invite you to engage in democracy and join a demonstration against the MEAP on May 5<sup>th</sup>, as Wayne State University."

For those Michiganders reading this, you will recognize a lot of the lingo that these MEAP heads use. For some reason, Bruce likes to use the rule of law as an example. During the last five minutes of their session, I raised my hand and waited for permission to

speak. When he called on me, I stood and read the above quote. The moment I started to read the quote, he was literally shouting in my ear that I should tell the participants that I was from the Rouge Forum. He was saying, "TELL THEM! TELL THEM YOU ARE FROM THE ROUGE FORUM. TELL THEM." I calmly continued to read the above quote and walked out of the room. As people walked out, I handed them flyers and there were many folks wanting them. One person was just appalled at how arrogant Bruce was. He really made a fool of himself and revealed that those running this MEAP hokey are real authoritarians. For each of their following sessions, we handed flyers to individuals going in and out of their sessions.

Many folks were pleased to see that someone is organizing an opposition to the standardized testing cracks and calling for more meaningful educational changes.

**Am I to be a Good Employee  
or a Good Teacher?**



**Join the Demonstration  
Against the MEAP  
and All Standardized High Stakes Tests**

Day: Saturday, May 5, 2001  
Time: 11:00-1:00 Demonstration: Mall Outside the Undergraduate Library,  
Wayne State University  
1:00-3:00 Refreshments and Reflection: 3rd Floor Community Room,  
Undergraduate Library, Wayne State University

# DEVELOPING A LEADERSHIP NETWORK FOR INCLUSIVE SCHOOLING IN MICHIGAN

Michael Peterson  
March 2, 2001

For the last three years, university faculty associated with the Whole Schooling Consortium have been working in several schools around Michigan as researchers and critical friends for supporting positive change. Each of these schools has made a commitment to including children with disabilities in general education classes and moving away from segregation and exclusion. These schools are also, simultaneously, struggling to honor diversity, operate democratically, partner with parents and the community, and build a sense of care and community in the school. We've been learning a lot. Out of conversations, we have become aware of the interest and need for teachers and principals and parents to network with other schools to learn from one another. Several of these schools also want to provide leadership for inclusive teaching and schooling practices in the state.

Two key principals: Jan Colliton from Hillside Elementary in Farmington and Barbara Mick from Ausable Primary in Grayling, collaborated with university faculty to plan a meeting held on February 28, 2001 where staff from 7 schools formed a "MICHIGAN LEADERSHIP NETWORK FOR INCLUSIVE SCHOOLING." We thought this would be a good and valuable meeting. However, we weren't

prepared for the unleashing of energy, creativity and commitment and sharing of stories that made many of us cry.

Some 40 people attended, representing 7 schools and 4 school districts. Dr. Michael Peterson, Co-Director of the Whole Schooling Consortium, began with an overview of the Five Principles of Whole Schooling emphasizing the practical ways these principles play out in schools. (See <http://www.coe.wayne.edu/CommunityBuilding/WSC.html>). School staff then shared where they were. The intellectual and emotional impact of the experiences of people sharing about their growing journey towards inclusive schooling was like a wave of hope, joy, and courage all rolled into one — struggles with bureaucracy, personal learning and growth, collaboration of teachers and stories of specific children. By lunch, several people were choked up and almost crying. The sense of commitment and care and courage in the room was awesome. It is amazing to know that advocates and parents who struggle with cruel schools and teachers exist and are driving their schools and teaching, bit by bit, to include all children in learning together. As one teacher said, "This morning gives me hope."

In the afternoon, we divided into heterogeneous groups made up of representatives of the different schools and each group discussed what a

statewide network would do, would look like. We came back together and shared, developed next steps, established a steering committee to synthesize the ideas and we set another meeting date in late May. One group of teachers set a date to meet at a local restaurant to continue sharing.

This meeting represents many important activities building on now years of work and relationship building within schools, between university faculty and teachers.

For the first time in Michigan schools are providing leadership for inclusive schooling rather than advocacy groups desperately wishing that schools would respond.

The network links schools in Detroit, two suburbs, and a very rural schools district, illustrating the power and potential of work across the dividing lines of race and socio-economic status.

Teachers have begun to reach out across schools to one another.

All there were astounded by the power of action and commitment for children collectively represented.

We expect this network to grow and develop. But for now, the coming together of real leaders willing to risk, be creative, and step out of their boxes on behalf of children was simply a strong gust of fresh air.



# WHOLE SCHOOLING

Whole Schooling is based on the following FIVE PRINCIPLES (Peterson, Beloin & Gibson, 1997). The Five Principles of Whole Schooling look ever so 'nice' and 'easy' when you first look at them.

"After all, isn't everyone doing that?" I am sometimes asked. The answer of course is, "No, hardly anyone is doing them."

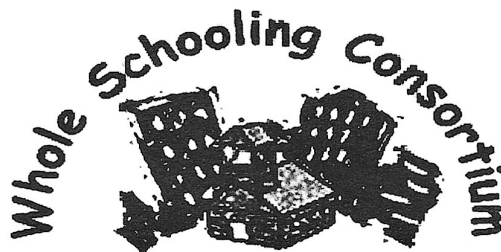
While each of the principles and associated practices is as old as John Dewey, together the Principles of Whole Schooling pull together ideas and practices in a package that defines a child, family, and community-centered school in ways that has never happened before. In a very real sense, they redefine our notion of 'standards' from impossible expectations of children and the ranking of schools, to building a culture of care where ALL CHILDREN LEARN WELL TOGETHER, where the aim of learning is to DEVELOP DEMOCRATIC, EMPOWERED HUMAN BEINGS. These are ideas and practices seen as dangerous to those whose primary goal for learning is to create children who have high technical skills and who will simply do as they are told and ask few questions about their/our social situation.

Since 1997, numerous schools have selected these Five Principles as reflective of the type of school they would like to be. We've formed the Whole Schooling Consortium, a network of individuals (teachers, parents, university faculty, and others) and schools who have adopted these principles. We've held two national conferences, made presentations, organized local action and study groups of teachers and parents, and have worked with some schools who desired to use these principles as they organize for school improvement and renewal.

The members of the Whole Schooling Consortium are in the process of building on our work to date to expand these efforts. We invite other schools and individuals to join us who are interested in building this effort as a movement and as a way to shape the way schools do their business. Contact us at [wholeschool@mediaone.net](mailto:wholeschool@mediaone.net) and visit our website at <http://www.coe.wayne.edu/CommunityBuilding/WSC.html>.

## THE FIVE PRINCIPLES OF WHOLE SCHOOLING

1. **Empowerment of citizens in a democracy:** The goal of education is to help students learn to function as effective citizens in a democracy.
2. **Inclusion of all:** All children learn together across culture, ethnicity, language, ability, gender, and age.
3. **Authentic, multi-level teaching:** Teachers design instruction for diverse learners that engages them in active learning in meaningful, real-world activities at multiple levels of ability, providing scaffolds and adaptations as needed.
4. **Building community & supporting learning:** The school uses specialized school and community resources (special education, Title I, gifted education) to build support for students, parents, and teachers; to build community and mutual support within the classroom and school; and to provide proactive supports for students with behavioral challenges.
5. **Partnership:** Educators build genuine collaboration within the school and with families and the community. They engage the school in strengthening the community; and provide guidance to engage students, parents, teachers, and others in decision-making and setting the direction of learning and school activities.



I Participate. You Participate. He, She, or They Participate. We All Participate.

They Profit. But Things Change! Join Us.

## The Rouge Forum



**The Rouge Forum  
is interested in teaching  
and learning for a  
democratic society. You  
are invited to join us.**

The *Rouge Forum* is a group of educators, students, and parents seeking a democratic society. We are concerned about questions like these: How can we teach against racism, national chauvinism and sexism in an increasingly authoritarian and undemocratic society? How can we gain enough real power to keep our ideals and still teach—or learn? Whose interests shall school serve in a society that is ever more unequal? We are both research and action oriented. We want to learn about equality, democracy and social justice as we simultaneously struggle to bring into practice our present understanding of what that is. We seek to build a caring inclusive community which understands that an injury to one is an injury to all. At the same time, our caring community is going to need to deal decisively with an opposition that is sometimes ruthless

We hope to demonstrate that the power necessary to win greater democracy will likely rise out of an organization that unites people in new ways—across union boundaries, across community lines, across the fences of race and sex/gender. We believe that good humor and friendships are a vital part of building this kind of organization, as important as theoretical clarity. Friendships allow us to understand that action always reveals errors—the key way we learn. We chose Brer Rabbit as a symbol to underline the good cheer that rightfully guides the struggle for justice. Every part of the world is our briar patch.

We are actively pushing back against and have had some successes in defeating the standardized test, the MEAP, in Michigan. We work in faculty organizations and unions to deal with the racism and sexism in academia. We try to press forward questions of class size, curricular freedom, anti-racist pedagogy, real inclusion, and a just tax system. As part of the *Whole Schooling Consortium*, we have sponsored forums in the U.S., uniting hundreds of people for democracy and equality.

There are no dues to join the Rouge Forum. Just email [elthinker@yahoo.com](mailto:elthinker@yahoo.com)

Visit [http://www.pipeline.com/~rgibson/rouge\\_forum/](http://www.pipeline.com/~rgibson/rouge_forum/) for updates