

Members of the Senate Education Committee,

I have written to and spoken to this Committee as well as the House Education Committee repeatedly over the course of the past decade about standardized testing and the detrimental effects it has had on students in our public schools, most specifically on elementary and middle school students, where I spent 30 years in the classroom.

Over the past two decades, as more and more time and emphasis has been placed on standardized test scores in English Language Arts and Math, we've ignored the needs of students in favor of the need to raise test scores to avoid punitive consequences. Even though many punitive consequences were removed with the end of No Child Left Behind, this focus on test scores is now, sadly, engrained in our system.

We seem to have forgotten the concept of self-fulfilling prophecy, the socio-psychological phenomenon that if a person believes something is true, their behaviors will align with that belief. Children believe what we tell them; they learn what they live. When we tell them year after year that they are inadequate and "do not meet standard" they begin to believe us. They often stop trying. Never mind that they may not be "meeting standard" on an English Language Arts test because English is their second language and they have not yet had time to reach academic language proficiency, or because they do not have the background knowledge to comprehend a specific reading passage or are from a different cultural background than the test makers (think of an immigrant child from a rural area in another country reading a passage about a family road trip across the US) or because they may have a communication disorder, or a reading disability. They internalize the words "does not meet" as failure, and the tests give them no feedback as to how to improve. All they get is the message that they failed, often over and over, year after year, from the age of 8 to the age of 14, the years of annual required standardized testing.

That doesn't even touch on the message of failure we send to children who are not reading at an arbitrarily selected level, and often in English only, as early as entering kindergarten. This is wrong and it is causing psychological harm to many individual students, many of whom would be perfectly fine if we just let them alone. They don't need "interventions" which offer further the false narrative of their failure. There is no evidence that early readers are better readers, and yet we continue putting even the youngest children into these "interventions", again sending them a message of failure and inadequacy on their part.

From February through June, standardized testing schedules dominate everything in elementary schools and no matter how much we try to build students up all the rest of the year by showing them what great progress they've made, when they get to that Great Big Test, they feel that if they don't do well, none of their progress means anything.

It's not that there are not ranges during which children should reach developmental benchmarks, and we should be aware of these and concerned if children do not meet them. The problem is, with standardized scores driving everything, we have arbitrarily designated very narrow and specific academic accomplishments that children must achieve at very specific times, during a period of their lives when their brains and bodies are developing at very different rates and in very different ways. There's a concept called "Goodhart's Law" which states that, "When a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure". This is where we are with scores on standardized tests. When children hate school in kindergarten, something is definitely not right.

It is long past time to examine the place of standardized testing in our education system. We can neither innovate nor individualize instruction when we place such an emphasis on standardized outcomes at prescribed intervals. Please pass SB 606.