

HOW MUCH TESTING?

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July 25, 2012

Posted on Diane Ravitch's blog: <http://dianeravitch.net/2012/07/25/stephen-krashen-how-much-testing/>

Posted on The Answer Sheet, Valerie Strauss' Washington Post blog:
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/>

At first glance, the assessments now being developed to accompany the common core standards do not appear to be much more than we already have, at least in terms of subject-matter covered and grade level. According to the organizations working on developing standards and tests (PARCC and SBEC), as is the case with NCLB there will be summative end-of-the-year tests in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school and these additions: Writing is added as a component of language arts, and voluntary interim testing will be offered through the academic year.

There is reason to suspect there will be a lot more. As Jim Crawford has stated, "With standards come tests; with more standards, more tests" (letter submitted to the New York Times, July 17, 2012). PARCC accepts this, urging the development of an accountability system that covers P-20 (pre-school through college), and "that supports the full implementation of the common standards" (PARCC: On the Road to Implementation: Achieving the Promise of the Common Core Standards, 2010, Achieve, Inc. p. 4).

More Subjects

There are clear signs that the tests will not be limited to language arts and math. US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, in his 2010 presentation "Beyond the Bubble Tests" states that "the study of science, history, foreign languages, civics and the arts" should be considered part of the "vital core" and deserve to be assessed. The Department of Education's current proposal to reauthorize the ESEA, he announced, would "allow states to include subjects other than math and English language arts in their accountability system ... the reauthorization blueprint includes millions for the research, development, and improvement of additional high-quality assessments--which could include science and foreign language tests."

The secretary pointed out that science is an area that should be tested, but development of science assessments has to wait until science standards are developed. These standards are being constructed now (<http://www.nextgenscience.org>).

Similar statements are made in the Blueprint for Reform (US Department of Education, 2010).

Test us too!

The professional educational organizations in a variety of subjects (I must emphasize, the professional organizations, not necessarily the teachers) have endorsed the idea of standards and tests in areas other than language arts and math.

Twenty-one educational organizations have asked for "standards, assessments, accountability systems, and public reporting of achievement" for science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, geography, health and physical education." (<http://www.ascd.org/public-policy/well-rounded-education.aspx>.) It was clear that they were not only asking for standards but for tests as well: Their request specifically mentions "standards, assessments, and accountability systems."

More Grade Levels

PARCC is constructing optional interim tests to be made available for grades K-2, but explicitly notes that the goal is K-12, with benchmarks starting at grade 3: "The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) is a consortium of states working together to develop a common set of K-12 assessments in English and math anchored in what it takes to be ready for college and careers. These new K-12 assessments will build a pathway to college and career readiness by the end of high school, mark students' progress toward this goal from 3rd grade up, and provide teachers with timely information to inform instruction and provide student support." (<http://www.parcconline.org/about-parcc>) (Note that as stated above, PARCC eventually expects assessments for P-20.)

Meanwhile, the US Department of Education has announced a Race to the Top grant competition, the "Early Learning Challenge," to "design and implement an integrated system of high-quality early learning programs and services" for "infants, toddlers, and preschoolers." (<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/index.html>).

This means more standards, and of course more testing: "This competition rewards States that will implement high-quality early learning and development standards and comprehensive systems of assessments aligned with these standards. The implementation of these standards and assessments will ensure that early childhood educators have the information they need to understand and support young children's growth and development across a broad range of domains so that significantly more young children enter kindergarten ready to succeed." (From: Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge Application for Initial Funding, CFDA Number: 84.412 , section C).

The Early Learning Challenge was termed "Race to the top for tots" by the New Brunswick Patch. I commented on this initiative here: http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/living-in-dialogue/2011/07/stephen_krashen_race_to_the_to.html

It also needs to be pointed out that others are eager to test small children: ACT has developed a test to determine if children are ready for kindergarten. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/02/career-test-for-kindergar_0_n_1644215.html. Diane Ravitch asked if this is “a sign of educational madness.” <http://dianeravitch.net/2012/07/04/a-sign-of-educational-madness/>.

Pre-tests?

The US Department of Education has announced its support of “value-added testing”, that is, the use of increases in standardized test scores as a measure.

Secretary Duncan supports the use of value-added measures to evaluate teachers, but maintains that they should not be the only factor in evaluating teachers. He also endorsed value-added measures as a means of rating the Schools of Education teachers attended:

“Let's do what the State of Louisiana is doing -- tracking student scores to teachers and teachers back to their colleges of education so we know who is doing a good job of preparing educators --.” (<http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/secretary-arne-duncans-remarks-statehouse-convention-center-little-rock-arkansas>)

Scathing criticism of the use of value-added measures in this way has not changed the Department of Education's position (1).

Diane Ravitch (personal communication) has pointed out that value-added measures could very well necessitate the use of pre-tests in the fall. Measuring growth from spring to spring does not take into account the effects of summer – it has been repeatedly documented that children of poverty fall behind during the summer. The loss in reading is due to the lack of access to books (Heyns, B. 1975. Summer Learning and the Effect of School. New York: Academic Press. Kim, J. 2003. “Summer reading and the ethnic achievement gap,” Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk 9, no. 2:169-188; Entwisle, D. E., Alexander, K. L. and Olson, Linda Steffel. 1997. Children, Schools and Inequality. Westview Press.)

Of course, pretesting in all subjects would vastly increase the amount of testing done.

SUMMARY

Current plans are to add a writing test, and to add interim testing to what is already required under NCLB.

There is every reason to suspect that we will soon have standardized testing in many different subjects, not just language arts and math.

There is every reason to suspect that standardized tests will be given to very young children, before grade 3, and there may be assessments to cover all of “P-20.”

There is every reason to suspect that there will be pre-tests in the fall.

Even if the new tests will not require more time in administration and preparation than the tests we have now, we may soon have more testing than ever seen on planet Earth.

Post-script.

Since this article was written, one of the agencies developing tests for the common core announced plans to develop a new battery of tests to determine if high school students are “college-ready,” all this apparently in addition to the SAT and ACT.

(<http://www.parcconline.org/postsecondary>; see also http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2012/11/final_college_readiness_defini.html for additional details).

Note 1: Teachers' value-added ratings based on previous years are weak predictors of test scores at the end of a year with new students. A teacher who succeeds in boosting scores with one group will not necessarily succeed with others (Sass, T. 2008. The stability of value-added measures of teacher quality and implications for teacher compensation policy. Washington DC: CALDER. (National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Educational Research.) Kane, T. and Staiger, D. 2009. Estimating Teacher Impacts on Student Achievement: An Experimental Evaluation. NBER Working Paper No. 14607 <http://www.nber.org/papers/w14607>).

Also, different tests result in different value-added scores for the same teacher (Papay, J. 2010. “Different tests, different answers: The stability of teacher value-added estimates across outcome measures.” American Educational Research Journal 47,2.).

In addition, there are ways of pumping up test scores without student learning, including teaching test-taking strategies and making sure weak students don't take the test. See also: <http://dianeravitch.net/2012/07/16/why-vam-is-junk-science/>

