- Mark your confusion.
- Purposefully annotate the article (1-2 mature, thoughtful responses per page to what the author is saying)
- Write a 1+ page response to the article.

Too Many Tests? More Parents Opt Out; Congress May Rewrite Law

by *McClatchy Washington Bureau, adapted by Newsela staff* 4/19/15

WASHINGTON — The debate over whether students take too many standardized tests is heating up.

Experts say testing is on the rise. Parents who want their children to skip the tests say more people are joining their cause. The Common Core, a set of tougher classroom standards in more than 40 states, has further angered the critics. It outlines what kids should know and be able to do in every grade.

Lawmakers say they're hearing loud and clear the message about too much unnecessary testing. New **legislation** might change the face of school testing.

Tests, And Consequences, May Change

This spring, Congress will discuss education as lawmakers attempt to rewrite No Child Left Behind. The 2002 law was intended to close educational gaps between rich and poor districts. It required annual testing to make sure that children were learning what they were supposed to learn. The law also established severe consequences for schools whose test scores didn't show enough progress.

An agreement in the Senate on updating the education bill might reduce the pressure on schools to test. It would give the states, not the government, the job of ensuring that schools are doing good work. It also would let states decide what to do about those that aren't.

The legislation "should produce fewer and more appropriate tests," according to Tennessee Republican Senator Lamar Alexander and Democratic Senator Patty Murray of Washington. Alexander is the chairman and Murray is the ranking member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee.

This is still some time away. Meanwhile, complaints this year about standardized testing have, if anything, grown greater. Some say that schools base their lessons on what students will be tested on — in other words, teach to test — and poor test-takers are at a disadvantage. Others complain that too much money is spent on testing. Bad test results can also lead to closed schools and lost jobs.

A Push For Fewer Tests, Better Results

"We need fewer, better and fairer assessments," said Susie Morrison, chief education officer and deputy superintendent at the Illinois State Board of Education. She spoke recently at a meeting of state school officials in Washington.

Morrison said that parents deserve to know how their children are doing. A large number of students graduate from high school but need remedial classes in math and reading before college because they didn't learn what they were supposed to learn. Testing clarifies what students know and do not know before they get to that point, she said.

But not all tests are equally valuable, Morrison said. "Some assessments used by local districts can and should go away, in our opinion."

Education Secretary Arne Duncan wants the federal government to still be in charge of testing to hold schools accountable for student progress. However, he has said that students, parents and teachers do have a real complaint that there's too much testing and too much time spent on preparing for the tests.

Under No Child Left Behind, schools had to show the students made progress each year or the school would face penalties. A badly performing school could be closed.

The Obama administration exempted some schools from the requirement. Instead, these schools had to assess teachers partly on their classes' test scores. In some places, even teachers' salary raises have been tied to better test scores.

“There’s always been a group of parents that don’t like testing,” said Michael Petrilli, president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, a conservative education research center. “I think the reason it’s been brought to a rapid boil lately is because of these teacher **evaluations**.”

North Carolina, Texas and Virginia have all reduced the number of state-required tests.

Testing Versus Learning

In Florida, Rosemarie Jensen is one of the leaders of the United Opt Out movement, which encourages parents to opt out of, or refuse, standardized testing for their children. She said she has been seeing a lot more parents across the country who are opting out, and in Florida, the number of opt-out groups has grown to 26.

A nationwide map by Jensen’s group shows parents across the country who report that their children do not take the tests.

“This is not a valid way to measure an entire child,” said Jensen, a former teacher with two children in high school. “None of this has anything to do with better education."

In her own family, Jensen said, her son, a ninth-grader, is a good student but a poor test-taker while her daughter, a high school senior, does well on them. She said the tests say more about the students than the teachers.

“Her test scores can mask some not-so-good teachers,” she said. “My son’s make his teachers look bad, and they work so hard with him. That’s not fair.”

Debbie Veney is the vice president of government affairs and communications at the Education Trust, an advocacy group that focuses on students of color and those from low-income families. She said too many tests were repetitive, not aligned to learning standards or just not useful.

“However, are tests necessary? Absolutely,” she said. “We believe it’s not enough to simply see what performance levels are. You’ve got to be able to do something when performance levels aren’t where they need to be.”

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