

Multiple measures: A modest proposal
Stephen Krashen

Many groups have suggested that we should use multiple measures rather than a single high stakes test in evaluating school achievement. I agree. How about using teacher evaluation?

Research by UC Berkeley scholars Saul Geiser and Maria Veronica Saltelices shows that contrary to popular opinion, high school grades in college preparatory courses are a better predictor of achievement in college and four-year graduation rates than are standardized tests (the SAT). Geiser and Saltelices found that adding SAT scores to grades did not provide much more information than grades alone, which suggests that we may not need standardized tests at all.

If this is true of high school, it may be true of elementary school as well. It may be that professional teachers' evaluations, repeated many times over many years, by different teachers, provide more accurate information about students than a single test constructed by distant strangers. They also have the desirable property of describing growth.

For those who argue that we need standardized tests in order to compare student achievement over time and to compare subgroups of students (e.g. SES) and geographical areas, we already have a good instrument for this, the NAEP. Unlike NCLB-inspired tests, NAEP is administered to small groups of children, who each take a portion of the test, every few years. Results are extrapolated to estimate how the entire population would score. No test prep is done, as the tests are zero stakes: There are no (or should be no) consequences for a school or district for low or high scores. If we are interested in a general picture of how children are doing, this is the way to do it. If we are interested in finding out about a patient's health, we only need to look at a small sample of their blood, not all of it. Note also that American children also participate in several international testing programs, such as PISA and PIRLS.

(Bracey (2006) has pointed out that the NAEP performance levels, such as "basic" and "proficient," are not based on anything solid, but the scores themselves are useful.)

In other words, we already have a good system of assessment: teacher evaluations plus NAEP, both already in place.

References

Bracey, G. 2006. Reading Educational Research: How to Avoid Getting Statistically Snookered. Portsmouth: Heinemann.

Geiser, S. and Santelices, M.V., 2007. Validity of high-school grades in predicting student success beyond the freshman year: High-school record vs. standardized tests as indicators of four-year college outcomes. Research and Occasional Papers Series: CSHE 6.07, University of California, Berkeley. <http://cshe.berkeley.edu>

Jan 17, 2008