

ISSUE STATEMENT Social – Education

teaching. Using high frequency test scores to determine funding for a school, retention and graduation of students results in numerous unintended consequences. Citizens for Quality Assessment of the Education Department of Southwestern University in Texas highlights many of these negative consequences including:

- Use of single (limited) rather than multiple (comprehensive) measures of assessment
- Excessive time devoted to narrow test preparation
- Negative, unnecessary and often lasting labeling of children
- De-enrichment of the curriculum
- False accountability
- Movement away from widely accepted standards of teaching principles of best practice as articulated by the national Council of Teachers of Mathematics, National Council of Teachers of English, National Science Teachers Association, National Association for the Education of Young Children, and American Education Research Association.
- Issues of equity and cultural bias
- Assessment practices contrary to recommendations of most professional organizations (these associations widely condemn the use of high-stakes testing) and even of the companies producing the tests
- Excessive use of financial resources for testing

The Nader campaign agrees with Citizens for Quality Assessment that federal policy needs to be transformed from one that uses punishments to control schools to one that supports teachers and students; from one that relies primarily on standardized tests to one that encourages high-quality assessments. Broader measures of student learning are needed that include reliance of classroom-based assessments along with testing. Also, broader curricula are needed to enrich students, including development of the civic skill of engagement in understanding the world around them.

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Equal Access to Education

Education is primarily the responsibility of state and local governments. The federal government has a critical supporting role to play in ensuring that all children, irrespective of the income of their parents or their race, are provided with rich learning environments and equal educational opportunities.

A recent study by Harvard's Civil Rights Project reports that schools in the United States are becoming increasingly segregated 50 years after *Brown vs. Board of Education*. Inner city public schools are in need of major repair and often replacement. These same schools are often short of the financial resources needed to attract and retain good teachers and to provide a quality learning environment for children. The Leave No Child Behind Act -- with its focus on high frequency, high-stakes, standardized testing -- is a counter-educational, a narrow gauge of assessment, and for tens of thousands of children, highly deleterious to their emotional and intellectual development.

The government has an important role to play in keeping negative or depleting influences out of the public schools -- among them, commercialism and private school tax-funded voucher programs. The federal government must not impose useless, costly and counterproductive mandates on schools. It should discourage, not demand, the use of misleading and narrow multiple choice standardized tests. And the government should encourage schools to infuse their curricula with a citizenship emphasis that teaches students both how to connect civic skills classroom learning to the outside world and how to practice democracy.

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The United States stands now as the overall richest nation in the history of the world. There is no excuse for not smartly investing sufficient resources in education.

Working with the states where appropriate, the federal government must:

- Immediately provide full funding for Head Start;
- Guarantee pre-school education for all children;
- Adequately fund nutrition programs in the schools;
- Ensure that the nation's crumbling schools are repaired within three years.

There is, as well, a critical positive role for the federal government to play, by promoting the vision, curricula, programs and projects for a K-12 civics education for democracy. In an era when children are overwhelmed with marketing images that reduce their attention spans and vocabulary, and orient them to an overweening focus on immediate gratification, low-grade sensuality and conspicuous consumption, an emphasis on civics for democracy promises instead to take students from instruction to learning to knowledge to application, until the highest educational goal is reached -- the sustained onset of educational self-renewal of, by and for the confident, motivated student.

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Education for Everyone

Education is primarily the responsibility of state and local governments. The federal government has a critical supporting role to play in ensuring that all children -- irrespective of the income of their parents, or their race -- are provided with rich learning environments, equal educational opportunities, and upgraded and repaired school buildings.

The government has an important role to play in keeping undermining influences out of the public schools -- among them, commercialism and private school voucher programs. The federal government must not impose an overemphasis on high-stakes standardized tests. Such testing has a negative impact on student learning, curriculum, and teaching by resulting in excessive time devoted to narrow test participation, de-enrichment of the curriculum, false accountability, equity and cultural bias, and excessive use of financial resources for testing, among other problems. Federal law should be transformed to one that supports teachers and students -- from one that relies primarily on standardized tests and punishment. The government should encourage schools to infuse their curriculum with civic experiences that teaches students both how to connect classroom learning to the outside world and how to practice democracy.

Education: Over-emphasis on standardized testing

The Nader campaign opposes the over-reliance on high stakes standardized tests included in federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, commonly known as "No Child Left Behind." High stakes standardized tests have a negative impact on student learning, curriculum, and