



PAA on Testing and ESEA

January 15, 2015

Parents Across America calls on Congress to support the proposed shift from annual to grade span testing outlined in Senator Lamar Alexander's proposed Option 1 for ESEA reauthorization. We also support Option 1's flexibility regarding measurement of student achievement.

A return to grade span testing would help restore standardized testing to its appropriate use in education: as a snapshot that can highlight problems, such as racial achievement gaps, that need to be investigated and addressed at school, district and/or state levels.

In contrast, the high-stakes annual testing required in No Child Left Behind has had profoundly negative effects on American public schools, sparking a test-prep-focused culture that has diverted time and resources from actual teaching and learning, narrowed the curriculum, robbed children of their love of learning, and driven excellent teachers out of the profession.

Especially disturbing have been the negative effects this testing regime has had on low-income students, students of color, English-language learners and students with special educational needs. Numerous studies have documented the role played by high-stakes testing in high dropout rates, the school-to-prison-pipeline, widespread cheating scandals, and the closing of under-resourced public schools that have anchored neighborhoods for generations, while failing to provide stable or improved alternatives.

While we appreciate the need for strong accountability, we believe this can be done using assessments that more accurately diagnose learning needs. A switch from high-stakes testing to systematic review of actual student work would provide superior evidence of academic progress while also enriching classroom experiences.

We believe the federal government has an important role to play in education. But this role should be focused on helping schools implement proven programs such as universal preschool, small classes, and genuine parent involvement, particularly in communities with limited resources.

Test-and-punish has enriched testing companies while failing this country and its children. It is long past time to move on.