

The Lowest Common Denominator:

Efforts to modify the PSSA's purported flawed areas have taken place over a span of the past ten years. Aspects in the context of what the test purports to measure, subjectivity, the political usage of the test itself, and the ability of the test's cut scores being structured in such a way to make school districts appear better or worse, public reporting of erroneous data and results, mislabeling of students, are all legitimate and valid aspects which warrant further investigation and continual refinements to the assessment system.

Not everyone is equally talented academically. Given a fixed amount of time, some individuals will achieve more than others. As a result, some critics have charged that Standards testing have reduced classroom academics to the lowest common denominator of what the least prepared students are able to learn. The NCLB Act will require all students to kick a field goal with 100% proficiency by 2014. Will it happen? Will states and schools which soon find themselves under fire for failing to meet AYP begin lowering the bar or aka the standards to allow ALL STUDENTS to achieve 100% proficiency?

Other educators argue without meaningful standards for judging achievement and measuring accountability, some students might just exist in schools without getting the attention and help they so desperately need and deserve. These educators argue that other internal and external variables play a key role in the determination of a student's learning process, of which they often times have no control over. These same educators and parents believe that PSSA testing is a snapshot in time on any given day and should not be the sole indicator of student growth which endures a twelve year academic career.

To put this complex and diverse issue into some perspective, one must remember that it is not the test that is high stakes, but the decisions that are made based on the test. These decisions will be made regardless if there is a test given or not. In general, the more data gleaned and utilized by a decision maker when making a decision, the better the decision. Despite ten years of battling with the State, the grassroots efforts have successfully influenced and achieved some refinements to the current state assessment system. However, not all the refinements hoped for and deemed necessary have been realized. That aside, even if the test is seriously flawed as some know it to be, the failure to pass the test still tells something. Regardless policymakers need to continue to aspire in modifying the PSSA system to be knowledge based, academic, objectively tested, and absolute. Our students and schools deserve no less.

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