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The extended essay I am submitting is my own work (apart from guidance allowed by the International Baccalaureate).

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conducted some impressive primary research. At first, his topic was entirely too broad so we narrowed it down to a case study. Very good watching his passionate zeal on the topic. He actually became involved in a local political campaign because of this issue. I was impressed with his ability to grasp difficult and complicated funding formulas. It was a joy to work with him.

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I spent hours with the candidate discussing the progress of the extended essay.

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Criteria	Achievement level					
	Examiner 1	maximum	Examiner 2	maximum	Examiner 3	
A research question	2	2		2		
B introduction	2	2		2		
C investigation	2	4		4		
D knowledge and understanding	2	4		4		
E reasoned argument	1	4		4		
F analysis and evaluation	1	4		4		
G use of subject language	1	4		4		
H conclusion	1	2		2		
I formal presentation	3	4		4		
J abstract	2	2		2		
K holistic judgment	2	4		4		
Total out of 36	19					

The Detrimental Effects of High-Stakes Testing on Education

Extended Essay
Submitted in partial fulfillment of
International Baccalaureate Diploma Requirements

3734 words

Abstract: The Detrimental Effects of High-Stakes Testing on Education

The purpose of this paper is to argue against the popularized use of standardized testing to assess student achievement and improvement, by focusing on the problems that it causes on a local school, North Central High School in Indianapolis, Indiana. This paper recounts the recent history of United States educational legislation in order to identify the development of standards-based education, and to understand why Congress passed “No Child Left Behind” to amend the “Elementary and Secondary Education Act,” which was originally intended to fight a “war on poverty.” This paper enters the widespread political debate of the implementation of standardized testing by criticizing “No Child Left Behind” and the high-stakes testing that it implements, and to understand the terrible consequences that develop when standardized tests are used to determine whether or not a school has achieved “Adequate Yearly Progress.” Proponents of “No Child Left Behind” have started to impose stronger laws that perpetuate the use of standardized tests, even to a point of tying teacher salaries directly to them, and this paper is purposed to challenge the legislation that these politicians pass. One successful Indiana politician, Glenda Ritz, achieved a monumental victory over the incumbent, Tony Bennett, for the position of State Superintendent of Public Instruction, with the support of teachers and students who were distraught from overuse and over dependence of standardized tests. Ms. Ritz hopes to oppose the tide of standardized tests, in order bring education away from teaching to a test. This paper will conclude by drawing suggestions for the future of education.

Table of Contents

Section	Page
Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
I. Introduction.....	1
II. Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965)	1
III. No Child Left Behind (2001)	3
IV. Adequate Yearly Progress.....	4
V. Indiana Under NCLB.....	5
VI. Private Schools and Charter Schools.....	8
VII. Flaws of Standardized Tests.....	9
VIII. NCLB Waiver.....	10
IX. Glenda Ritz and Educational Reform.....	11
X. Additional Solutions and Conclusion.....	12
XI. Bibliography.....	14

Introduction

A historic local victory in the U.S state of Indiana resulted after the November 6, 2012 election, when candidate Glenda Ritz won the title of State Superintendent of Public Instruction over the previous Superintendent, Dr. Tony Bennett. Her win was accredited to her strong support from teachers who spoke out against the previous leadership that failed to represent teachers and students by heavily focusing on standardized tests. In order to understand the reason why teachers supported Ms. Ritz, a specific, local high school shall display why many teachers were not in favor of Dr. Bennett's reforms. North Central High School is a Washington Township school; a public school district in Indianapolis, Indiana, USA. North Central, among other public schools in the country, has been facing undesirable standardized tests implemented by conservative leadership ranging from the local government to the federal government. The school has an International Baccalaureate program, sends top students to prestigious colleges around the world, and has received an 'A' grade in the section of College and Career Readiness from the state. However, North Central has been given an overall 'C' grade on an A to F scale by state standards, despite its high quality of education.¹ The purpose of this paper is to understand the effects of standardized testing on educational systems, to identify the problems caused by standardized testing by focusing on the local high school, North Central, and conclude by suggesting a solution to the problem caused by standardized tests.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965)

Under President Lyndon B. Johnson's "War Against Poverty," Congress passed The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 to set national standards for schooling

¹ Indianapolis Star. *Searchable Database: 2012 A to F School Grades for Indiana.*

to improve socioeconomic equality. The goal of the bill was to provide children of lower-income families with equal opportunities for education and to narrow the gap of achievement between the students of low and high income families.² The act was originally signed to last for fifteen years until 1970, and has been reauthorized every five years since. The bill had seven “titles” or sections that addressed various schooling standards, and how federal money would be spent to support struggling schools. Titles II through VII, dealt primarily with grant money to schools that desired to attempt various creative teaching strategies and enhanced gifted programs, physical education, the arts, and many other school programs that were designed to enhance and diversify learning; however, the most important title was Title I. This section of the ESEA addressed the financial needs of five million children of low-income families, and continued to assist low-income students with financial aid in order to receive a better education.³

Schools had to meet certain criteria and adhere to certain rules in the bill, in order to receive federal grants. Federal rules attempted to guarantee that the Title I funds would be allocated solely to students in need. Title I funds were originally intentioned towards being additional funds, and were not meant to replace existing local funds.⁴ It created a new method of school-wide assistance for schools consisting of a certain percentage of low-income students to use Title I funds for the entire school’s improvement, or for a specific individual’s improvement. In the 1980s, the ESEA went through a reform called The Education Consolidation and Improvement Act, in order to reduce federal constraints of the ESEA, and assure that federal money was not being wasted. In order to create monetary efficiencies, the bill chose to cut funding from students who were not showing improvement. Although standardized tests did exist throughout the nation, the flow of grant money was not affected by standardized tests.

² Nwazota, Krista. *The Federal Role in Education Before No Child Left Behind*

³ Farkas, George; Hall, L. Shane. "Can Title I Attain Its Goal?"

⁴ Puma, Michael J., and Darrel W. Drurey. "Part I: Title I in Perspective."

There was no major change to the bill until 1994, through the passage of the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) under President Bill Clinton. This act introduced high-stakes testing for the first time. High-stakes testing refers to testing that would have a direct effect upon the test taker based on their results. Prior to the bill, standardized tests existed as a method of gathering statistics and understanding progress. The purpose of the IASA was to address the problem of a large education gap between low and high income families that the ESEA had failed to resolve. After the legislation of the bill, standardized tests were assessed in certain grades determined by the state, and if a student failed to pass the test during that grade, they would fail to advance to the next grade. For example, in Indiana, a high-stakes version of the standardized test known as ISTEP (Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress) was assessed for grades three, six, eight, and ten, and if a student were to fail the ISTEP during one of those years, they would not be able to progress to the next grade. Similar to the ESEA, this act intended to fix the gap between social classes and their education, but failed to do so successfully.⁵

No Child Left Behind (2001)

In 2001, the ESEA was reauthorized once again by President George W. Bush, though this time the bill was amended under the name "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB). The primary difference between the original ESEA and its reauthorization as NCLB lies in their aims. The ESEA directly targeted students who were in need; however, NCLB placed an additional barrier to receiving funds through standardized testing. NCLB tied standardized tests directly to Title I funds, and have since increased the pressure of high-stakes testing. In Indiana, the ISTEP test that was given every year went from being a form of assessing how well students were

⁵ Nwazota, Krista.

progressing, to the ISTEP+, an annual high-stakes test, along with a new test called the End of Course Assessment or ECA for high schools to assess students' understanding of English, Algebra, and Biology. After the legislation of NCLB, schools were required to give annual standardized tests in order to assess Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). For better or for worse, NCLB increased the importance of testing and has fundamentally altered the path of education.

Adequate Yearly Progress

Under the IASA, states were required to set yearly performance targets for schools, but they were not enforced. The AYP standards were set to determine what score on standardized tests would be adequate, and create punishments for schools that failed to meet their goals. States were to follow parameters set by the federal standards to set performance targets for schools as a method to keep schools accountable for improving student performance, so that all students would score at a "proficient" level by the 2013-2014 school year.⁶ States were to (1) present a step-by-step analysis of how it would establish its accountability systems, (2) create an explanation of factors that would be implemented in the calculation of AYP, and (3) list performance targets for elementary, middle, and high schools. AYP standards were to develop statewide objectives for improved achievement by all students, specifically for groups such as economically disadvantaged students, students from major racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency.⁷

Every summer, schools receive an announcement regarding whether or not they made AYP. If a school fails to achieve AYP standards for two consecutive years, they are labeled as "in need of improvement," and must then develop a two-year improvement plan in order to

⁶ Dillon, Erin.; Rotherham, Andrew J. "States' Evidence: What It Means to Make 'Adequate Yearly Progress' Under NCLB."

This date has been delayed indefinitely.

⁷ Linn, Robert L., Eva L. Baker, and Damian W. Betebenner. "Accountability Systems: Implications of Requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001."

improve the subject that is not being taught well. Students must also be offered the option to transfer to a better school within the school district if one exists. A third consecutive year requires schools to offer free tutoring to help struggling students. A fourth year of failure labels the school requiring “corrective action,” which may result in replacing staff, introducing new curriculum, or extending the amount of time for students to remain in class. Upon the fifth year of failure, the school must formulate a plan to restructure the entire school, and the plan will be executed if the AYP goal is not met for a sixth consecutive year.⁸ Common plans include turning the school into a charter school, hiring a private company to run the school, or asking the state office of education to run the school directly.⁹

Indiana Under NCLB

High schools in Indiana receive a letter grade that declares the school’s proficiency according to state standards. Parents may use these letter grades in order to determine the achievement of the school. The Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tony Bennett emphasized the importance of a school’s letter grade, and worked to strengthen the letter grade system.¹⁰ Indiana schools are assessed in four categories: Graduation Rate, College and Career Readiness (CCR), English Language Arts (ELA), and Math. Each category receives a subgrade based on percentages, where each percentage translates to a grade on a 4-point system, where an ‘A’=4 points, ‘B’=3 points, ‘C’=2 points, ‘D’=1 point, and ‘F’=0 points. Graduation Rate and CCR have only one score to report, but ELA and Math both report multiple scores pertaining of proficiency, improvement of grades 8-10, and improvement of grades 10-12.

The Graduation Rate score is based on the percent of students who graduate from the high school. A school must have a 90% or higher graduation rate in order to receive an ‘A’ in

⁸ No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. p. 476-490

⁹ Dillon, Erin; Rotherham, Andy.

¹⁰ Stokes, Kyle, and Elle Moxley. “Indiana’s 2012 A-F School Ratings Released: Find Your School’s Grade Here”

this category. For every 5 percentage points below 90%, 0.5 points are deducted from the 4-point total. North Central's graduation rate is 83.2%, so they received a 3.0 in this category. The score could potentially be more accurate if it also portrayed whether or not students continued their education by means such as college, technical school, or military training, etc.

The CCR score is based on the percentage of graduated students who have received some form of college or career credit, including credits from AP and IB tests, Dual credit, and Technical Education credits. A school must achieve a minimal percentage of 25% in order to receive an 'A'. North Central's CCR percentage is 57.2%, more than twice the percentage required to receive an A. North Central did an exceptional job at CCR because of the school's International Baccalaureate program and J. Everett Light Career Center. Although this is an exceptional score, it is not necessarily accurate in portraying the extensiveness of readiness. The score is based on the percentage of graduated students that received at least a single credit in the required field. The statistic fails to address how many credits students receive, and this is a problem because the school is not recognized for its greater success.

The ELA and Math score is based on three subcategories: proficiency, improvement 8-10, and improvement 10-12. The letter grade system is designed to give parents a simple way of determining how accomplished a school is, but the derivation of this letter grade is far from simple. Graduation Rate and CCR are not confusing scores, but the ELA and Math scores are bewildering. The grades are determined through a system of many complex internal tests that are delivered by each subject's department in the school. Every department has some form of testing that it uses, and the method of testing lies in the discretion of the department chair and principal. After all of the calculations are performed, North Central received an 82.1% in math proficiency, an 81.9 for grade 8 and 85.4 for grade 10, under "improvement 8-10", and a bonus of +0.5 points

for the improvement 10-12 category, resulting in a strong, 3.5 grade in the Math category. English has a similar complex system as math, and North Central has received a 72.4 in proficiency, an 83.4% for grade 8 and an 80.9% for grade 10 in the category if grade 8-10 improvement, and an 87.2% improvement for improvement 10-12. The final English grade was an unfortunate 2.0. When the 3.0 Graduation Rate, the 4.0 for CCR, the 3.5 for Math, and the 2.0 ELA grade were averaged with respective weights, North Central received a 2.95, which was just 0.05 points short of receiving a 'B,' but instead resulted in a 'C.'¹¹

North Central has a very diverse population, including many refugee and immigrant students.¹² The poor ELA score is accredited to this act of charity and governmental obligation. AYP standards must address all categories of students, including those who are not proficient in English and major minority populations. As a public school, North Central must accept all students who live within the school district.¹³ The refugees and immigrants deserve an education, so the school provides one; however, this good deed reduces test scores, the school's grade, and therefore the school's funding. While the original purpose of the ESEA was to help those in need, NCLB has done an effective job at cutting funding from those in need.

Private Schools and Charter Schools

Private schools are not controlled by the government and therefore are not restricted to the same rules as public schools. There are two common types of private schools, religious and secular. Neither adheres to rules that public schools must adhere to, thus are selective and charge their students tuition. Secular private schools are generally able to have prestigious faculty and facilities due to their expensive tuition. Religious private schools exist to allow faith-based

¹¹ "A-F Detailed Results". IDoe. "A-F Accountability."

¹² *GreatSchools*. "North Central High School."

¹³ "Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)." *Refugees Organization*.

education in their schools because public schools are not allowed integrate religion with studies due to the First Amendment of the Constitution. Charter schools are similar to private schools, but are funded by the government, however they may be owned by private organizations. They are assessed by standardized tests, but do not adhere to the same standards as public schools. Both private and charter schools may hire teachers as they please, regardless of educational background, and may choose to accept and deny students. Teachers in private or charter schools do not necessarily need a college degree for teaching as do public school teachers, and the school curriculum is not regulated by the government.¹⁴ The ability to select students creates an enormous advantage for private and charter schools.

There has been a recent popularity for schools to develop strategies that model business strategies.¹⁵ It is as if they exist to manufacture students to achieve good test scores. Selectivity allows schools to remove students with lower test scores, so private and charter schools that take standardized tests receive better results because they are selective, and many prestigious private schools do not take standardized tests because they do not require the government funding. When a 'failing' student is removed from a private or charter school, they will generally be moved to a public school because education is mandatory, and public schools are the only schools that must accept everyone in the district. The public school that receives a 'failing' student is likely to receive many more 'failing' students, who lose motivation to study because they are labeled as 'failing,' and eventually make the school they were transferred to, fail. The AYP standards call for a reduction in a school's funding, eventually causing an inevitable cycle of less resources and lower test scores. Once the school fails for six consecutive years, the staff

¹⁴ The Economist. "The Trouble with Private Schools."

¹⁵ "Why a School System Should Not Be Run Like a Business." Economics Online Tutor.

will be reappointed and the school is likely to become controlled by a private institution, which defeats the original purpose of the ESEA to fight against the inequalities created by poverty.

Flaws of Standardized Tests

Public schools must focus on having their students pass standardized tests if they wish to remain in session, so they develop strategies by forcing teachers to attend regular meetings and face stressful work schedules. Teachers begin to lose interest in creativity and begin to design cookie-cutter lesson plans that are designed to teach students to pass standardized tests.

One major reason that politicians continue standards-based education is because statistics show that schools have been improving.¹⁶ Schools are, in fact, producing students that seem to be more educated than the students of the years prior. This is a hopeful statistic, but it is also flawed because the tests are flawed. Schools are merely becoming more efficient at teaching to the test and are not actually producing smarter students. The tests are fundamentally flawed because they only test rudimentary knowledge. This applies to most standardized tests that students must take in order to determine whether or not they met standards. To begin with, standards show a minimum. Most of these standardized tests only assess basic skills in math and English and do not actually show whether or not a student understands the subject. Schools may have made progress, but standards based education is not how America should distinguish itself from the world. The US is highly regarded as a land of opportunity because it produces the greatest scholars and businesses in the world. Moving education in a standardized direction will not suffice in creating a better future.

NCLB Waiver

Authorities have further developed NCLB in recent years so that it may be more applicable to schools. The federal government offered states a waiver from NCLB if they were

¹⁶ "Standards Based Education." *EdSource*

able to propose a method that may be more successful in improving education.¹⁷ This waiver brought about two educational philosophies. The first philosophy recognizes that it is impossible to accurately judge students based on a pass/fail system, and removes the emphasis of standards based education. The second philosophy actually increases the importance of standardized tests and, places even higher stakes on standardized tests.¹⁸ Indiana applied for a waiver to place higher stakes on standardized tests, and has tied teacher salaries directly to student test scores. This method creates high stress for teachers to have their students do well on tests; so many teachers will adapt their teaching styles in order to account solely for having their students do well on standardized tests. Not only has this caused teachers to suffer, but the occupation of teacher has become undesirable.¹⁹ This legislation reduces quality teachers and causes potential teachers to avoid the occupation entirely.

Glenda Ritz and Education Reform

The recent policies created an insurgence amongst teachers. Prior to the 2012 election, teachers would spend time outside of school campaigning for candidate, Glenda Ritz. The incumbent, Dr. Bennett, chose to run for another term, and outspent Ritz by receiving campaign finances from outside corporations and donors such as Wal-Mart and New York City Mayor, Michael Bloomberg.²⁰ With the dedication of teachers, Ritz won 52% of the Indiana vote, giving her an opportunity to implement her reforms and fix the crumbling structure. As a proponent for teachers, Ritz emphasized the importance of actual learning and student development over

¹⁷ "ESEA Flexibility." *U.S. Department of Education*

¹⁸ Ayers, Jeremy. "No Child Left Behind Waivers."

¹⁹ Guisbond, Lisa. "Revolt against High-stakes Standardized Testing Spreads."

²⁰ Janssen, Sarah. "Ritz Challenges Bennett in Local Debate."

standardized tests. The standardized tests in Indiana work on a pass/fail system. This means that tests do not have a graduated system of development, but only determines whether or not a student has failed. Ritz argued that the pass/fail system only shows how many more students passed one year compared to the previous year. The scores from year to year do not reflect an individual's development throughout their schooling. A student who fails by a few points fails at an equal level as a student who fails by many points. Since the standardized tests are high-stakes tests, any form of failure means that the student cannot advance to the next grade. It is counter-productive method, and it does not address the actual problem.²¹ The biggest problem in Indiana lies in English and Reading because students who never attended kindergarten are placed in the same classes as those who had received an early education. These students start out behind the other students, and are unable progress at the same rate, causing the problem to accelerate throughout the remainder of their education. Ritz promised to fight for a future where students receive a pre-elementary school education so that learning may begin immediately in elementary school. She also hoped to create a system that adjusts to help and develop low-achieving students instead of labeling them as failures and crushing them.

Additional Solutions and Conclusion

Ms. Ritz's proposals provide solutions to undo harmful legislation, but it is also important to move in the positive direction. Government is a tool to be used by the people in order to achieve the people's goals, so in order to create a more educated society; the desired ends must be established. It is important to have students who grow up to create new technologies and compete in the global market. These students should be well-rounded and have a respect for the arts and be involved in sports. It is also important to remember the original goal of giving all students an equal opportunity for education. Equal opportunity does not mean to

²¹ Ritz, Glenda. "Testimony to the Legislative Select Commission on Education Teacher Evaluation and Licensing".

make sure that all students achieve at an equal rate, but instead it means that students with disadvantages may receive an equal education to one with many advantages. A greater emphasis for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) classes will create a student body that is ready to succeed in the technological world. Although the STEM classes may be important for technological developments, arts and sports form culture. When students become culturally active as they please, society will be stimulated, and different approaches of thinking will be accepted. It is not about merely teaching students what to think, but it is most important to teach students how to think and how to love learning. This is why teachers are the most valuable resource for teaching; only a good teacher can teach a student to love learning. It is seldom possible to teach a student to love learning when the teacher spends their time forcing students to memorize facts in order to pass the next standardized exam. Once the high stakes from standardized tests are removed, good teachers have an opportunity to actually teach their students how to learn.

Higher educational systems must produce teachers who understand how to motivate their students, and not just teach them facts. Highly qualified and motivated teachers will produce better students, and will lead to a greater demand for higher education. Higher education is extremely expensive and often times leave students in debt. In order to avoid monetary problems, the government must fulfill its job as a tool of the people to provide money for education instead of war and other inefficient projects. Money should never be a problem for funding schools. The federal budget in 2012 spent only 4% of its money on education, while it designated 19% towards upholding the largest military power in the world.²² Informed citizens are more likely to secure the future of the nation more so than an oversized military. A more educated populace will have the ability to fix the problems of tomorrow and will create a sustainable, bright future.

²² "Federal Budget in Pictures." *More than Half of All Federal Spending Will Be on Entitlement Programs in 2012.*

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