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Accountability Report Urges Fewer Tests, More Peer Review

By [Stephen Sawchuk](#) on August 21, 2014 11:05 AM

Accountability for the public schools should be far less test-driven and more the product of teachers holding one another to high professional standards, the National Center on Education and the Economy proposes in [a report](#) issued Thursday.

More folks seem to be pushing the less-is-more approach to testing: A group of advocates [held a forum](#) on that topic earlier this summer, and the American Federation of Teachers [passed a resolution](#) at its July convention urging a dramatic scaling-back in the number of exams students must take.

There's one major sticking point to the idea, though: The renewal of the No Child Left Behind Act, the federal education law requiring annual testing of public school students, has been hopelessly stuck for years. The U.S. Department of Education has granted nearly every state waivers from certain of the law's requirements, but it's held fast to the annual-testing one so far. Still, the time to build a push for fewer tests is now, NCEE President Marc Tucker said.

"We aren't going to get a successor to No Child Left Behind unless there is consensus on a larger reform in American education, and there is no consensus," he said in an interview. "I don't think it's a moment too soon to start building one."

Many of the report's recommendations are familiar if you've followed Tucker's [previous analyses](#) of international practices or have read his [edweek.org blog](#).

Essentially, the NCEE calls on the U.S. to administer tests only in 4th, 8th, and 10th grades, and to use tests that focus largely on performance tasks. In other grades, tests would be taken by random samples of students. To ensure coverage of the full curriculum, these tests would gradually test science and other subjects in addition to English and math. If the results of these exams suggested that a school was falling behind the state curriculum or not sufficiently educating vulnerable students, they could trigger school inspections.

The report also urges states to help set up "career ladders" in which experienced teachers would take on roles mentoring colleagues and refining teaching practices; teachers would be held to high standards by their peers.

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