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## Can We Overcome Our Testing Addiction?

By [Noah Zeichner](#) on December 19, 2013 9:24 AM



Noah Zeichner

When the [PISA 2012 results](#) were released on Dec. 3, renewed calls for reforming our public [schools flooded the airwaves](#). U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan called the scores a "[wake-up call](#)" in his remarks at the official PISA release event. (He made the [same comment](#) three years ago about PISA 2009 results).

What can we as a nation do to avoid yet another wakeup call three years from now when PISA 2015 results are released? One answer may be simpler than you think: fewer standardized tests.

There is no question that children in U.S. public schools are over-tested. My daughter, who is in kindergarten, is expected to take a computer-based standardized reading test this spring. She can barely operate a mouse. No Child Left Behind currently requires testing in multiple subjects almost every year of a child's education. As members of Congress debate [proposals](#) for a reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2014, they have an opportunity to "wake up" and shift the current test-based accountability paradigm.

Our overreliance on multiple-choice tests might make sense from an efficiency standpoint. They are easy to score and much cheaper than more meaningful assessments, such as student portfolios or teacher-scored performance tasks. But the costs to both teacher quality and student learning are high.

As Marc Tucker wrote in a [blog post](#) last week, an [analysis](#) of the 2012 PISA results by the OECD, which administers the test, revealed that "countries that grant schools autonomy over curricula and assessments tend to perform better in mathematics." To me, the message is clear: We need to reduce the quantity of standardized tests and allow teachers to design and grade more classroom-based assessments, especially ones that measure the 21st-century skills that PISA exam items demand. And look out: OECD plans to include [collaborative problem solving](#) as a component on the 2015 PISA exam. I challenge all readers to find a standardized test in the United [States](#) that currently measures collaborative problem solving.

In early October, I traveled to Singapore to attend a meeting of the Asia Society's [Global Cities Education Network](#) with representatives from five North American school systems and five cities in Asia and Australia. Many of our discussions focused on assessment. I learned that Hong Kong recently eliminated a major test that occurred at the end of primary school to encourage a more holistic curriculum. In fact, many nations that outperform the United States on PISA test their students just two or three times during a child's education.

A serious reduction in testing will require tremendous political will and significantly more trust in teachers as professionals than currently exists. Is the wakeup call signaled by PISA 2012 loud enough for Congress and policymakers to change course? What do you think?

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