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It's Not Just About Tests, It's About Valuing Children

By [Kenneth S. Goodman](#) and [Yetta M. Goodman](#) on November 13, 2015 2:34 PM

Editor's Note: Education Week Commentary editors asked seven education practitioners and leaders to respond to the White House's "Testing Action Plan" and a coinciding Council of the Great City Schools study on mandatory testing. Read what [each contributor](#) had to say.

The courts say we cannot discriminate by race, class, or gender so tests are constructed to discriminate by test scores. And tests create a hierarchy of educability based on test performance. Tests justify the low value our decision makers have for our young, for their teachers, for the potential of free, compulsory public education, and for a democratic society education can help make possible.



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National decisionmakers do not value children or those who teach them. Children vary in size, cultures, ambitions, and the socioeconomic conditions into which they are born. But they have common strengths: They share a remarkable ability to learn and particularly to learn language—not just one, but as many as needed to participate in their families and communities.

Instead of valuing their ability to learn and what they have learned, they are compared to arbitrary "standards" built into tests and treated as deficient. Difference is equated with deficiency.

In a country with the wealth of the United States, children who are growing up without adequate health care and nutrition go to decaying schools with inadequate support and mandated inappropriate curricula. Dedicated teachers in these schools are judged by their students' test scores and driven out of teaching.



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In sweatshop kindergartens, children barely 5 sit at desks all day doing work sheets with no play, recess, or nap time. Children are denied their childhood and taught they are failures. After kindergarten comes an impoverished primary curriculum.

Teaching is so focused on the "skills" of reading, writing, and arithmetic, there is no social studies, science, physical education, or the arts. Ironically, students are so busy learning decontextualized skills there is no time for real reading, purposeful writing, or functional math.

Our society must revalue our children. Each deserves a happy, healthy childhood. They deserve welcoming schools and professional teachers who value every child, build on strengths, and are not constrained by misguided laws.

Our society must revalue teachers. No profession is more important than teaching, yet our political decisionmakers show no respect for teachers, writing into law curriculum and methodology that make it impossible for teachers to use what they know. Teachers are so poorly paid that retiring baby boom teachers are using their retirement checks to pay off their student loans.

Disguising their aims as reform, our political decisionmakers have marginalized teachers, teacher educators, and researchers to the point that those with real insights and knowledge are blamed for the failures they might have avoided.

The bottom line: Tests are being used to devalue children, teachers, and public education. Let us once again become a nation that assigns the highest priority to the health, welfare, and education of all our young people.

And let us also revalue the wisdom of those professionals who have devoted their lives to educating our nation's children.

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